



Carnival on canvas *Unbound* — representing the concept of free spirit, by Nirali Kumar, a student of Shiv Nadar School

Let freedom ring!

In a new normal, classroom chatter makes way for virtual huddling over arts

The ticking of the clock. The crinkling of the pages of a calendar. Seconds, minutes, hours, days and months pass by. And yet, it feels like a long dream, an elongated break from our 'normal' life. But, then, this is the 'new normal'.

The new normal is about being confined within four walls. No more laughter, pointless arguments or chit-chats between classes. This isolation has given room to endless thoughts and incomprehensible feelings along with a desire to express them to the world. There are a thousand words running through the mind, and yet nothing seems to do justice to the endless barrage of emotions flooding the heart.

In times like these, we turn to the arts. Art is boundless. It goes past the periphery of words and language, and travels down the rabbit hole into a world of its own. It is a world where each and every creation is unique and unparalleled.

Personally, for me, the arts act as an outlet that allows me to bring my imagination to life. While the lockdown first felt like a breather, allowing me to spend time at home with my family, I did not expect that the few days would turn into months with zero social activity. I felt confused and lost. As we began attending online classes, everyone expressed similar emotions.

Thankfully, the virtual world allowed the arts to prosper and provided us with a place for expression. A lot of my friends started to share their creations online; from self-composed songs, art pieces, monologues, poetry and photography, we took to this medium to express ourselves like never before. This didn't just calm us, but brought us great joy as well.

Online mass sharing platforms have allowed voices to reach across the world. Swaying symphonies, vivid paintings, sensational dramas... the ways to express oneself are endless. The virtual world connects the whole globe in just a matter of seconds, an intricate tapestry of connections bringing together people around the world. It allows us to meet new people from the other end of the world and gives exposure to new thoughts, which enable us to build relationships and make friends.

Seeing other creative displays have inspired me to express myself in different ways. I try writing in different forms, or create and share musical pieces on the piano. I incorporate forms I have encountered online — such as flash fiction, or micro-short stories. And all this encourages me to express a thought in a contained form, sharpening my craft in the process.

We tried to do the same in our school, which always helps us to look beyond our limitations. This is exactly why we were motivated to virtually organise our annual fest, Kaafila: The Integrated Arts Fest, which celebrates the various genres of arts. In the realm of physical confinement, we must seek for freedom in the tiniest of things, and hence we chose 'Freedom: An Artistic Quest' as the theme for the festival held in October.

We conducted competitions, webinars, workshops, performances and hosted exhibitions related to the different fields of art. This inter-school event had students and facilitators participating from different parts of the

world, collaborating and creating masterpieces, such as in a tessellations workshop, where students learned to create origami pieces representing Islamic architectural patterns from an artist based in Mexico — picking up a number of mathematical concepts in the process.

For our exhibition *Let Freedom Ring!*, students produced paint-based, digital, mixed media and video works exploring notions of what freedom means to them, looking at a plethora of issues from gender and class divisions to artificial intelligence. In one of the competitions, students used painting as a medium to explore the theme of freedom. Each artwork came with its own concept note. In the performing arts, the theme of freedom was explored through songs and plays. The result was truly a mesmerising potpourri of ideas expressed through the arts. Amidst a global pandemic, we opened the door to a paradise of possibilities.

Not only does the online space allow us to express ourselves, but it also brings with it countless learning opportunities, whether it is simply talking to someone across the world and gaining knowledge from them on different issues, or signing up for a course that takes you through a new hobby. Art breaks physical boundaries and opens new doors. It turns our constraints into new possibilities. The virtual world paves the way for the arts to prevail.

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