

Portraits in grey



A pencil in tow One of the portraits made by Priyanka

▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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As a five-year-old, Priyanka Kumaravel from Chengalpet near Chennai was thrilled one day when she received praise at school for her homework – the sketch of a crow. She trotted back home with a purpose that day. To learn the tricks of the trade from the master who drew the crow – her father.

Fifteen years later, Priyanka, 20, who is an undergraduate Chemistry student in Madras Christian College, gives her earnings from selling pencil commissioned portraits to her mother. She narrates how she picked up the art: “When I was in fifth grade, there was a drawing competition at school where we had to draw a house. My father made me memorise the measurements using a ruler for the house. And I won ₹1,700 that day.”

Her father, Kumaravel, a bus driver used the prize mo-

ney to buy her dresses.

Using pencils, a blender and paintbrush, she has been making pencil portraits since 2018. While her A4 portraits are priced at ₹500, A3 are priced at ₹1,000, along with the frame. Priyanka gets around four orders every month via her Instagram handle (@sharp_pencilportrait). She makes ₹2,000 to ₹2,500 every month, which is used for daily expenses; the rest of which is saved in a piggy bank.

She starts out by measuring facial features from the reference photograph using a tiny pencil – from mouth to nose, nose to eyes and so on. She cuts her erasers using a blade, to carry out minute corrections.

The lockdown has given her time and energy to hone her art. “I watched tutorial videos online, and improved my shading technique.” She now receives upto 10 orders a month.