

Modernizing 'Icons'

Warren artist gives ancient Hindu deities a makeover

By **RALPH J. BELLANTONI**
Correspondent

Warren artist Tania Sen presents vibrant depictions of Hindu deities in the exhibit "Icons" at the Somerset Art Association. Through more than 20 potent, richly colored canvases, Sen unveils her personal, contemporary encounters with the traditional mythical symbols of her religious tradition.

Employing saturated hues of oranges, blues and reds, Sen's paintings reverberate with a mystical power emanating from imagery steeped in untold millennia of spiritual experience. Yet the artist also infuses her portrayals with a distinctly modern vitality, renewing the relevance of ancient cultural customs.

Several of Sen's works feature the fierce and protective warrior goddess Durga, an archetype of female power. In "Dilemma of Durga" the three-eyed, 10-armed, invincible deity displays many of her traditional attributes, including a trident,

the spiritual hand-gestures called mudras, and a lotus flower. Her form flows and unfurls from cascading bands of red and blue.

"The painting 'Dilemma of Durga' is a take on the popular image of Durga with a twist, where she is also vulnerable of her own desire while she delivers from her core strength," explains Sen.

In her depictions of the zoomorphic deity Ganesh, Sen again employs a unique, contemporary perspective on traditional iconography. Generally portrayed with an elephantine countenance, Ganesh holds a popular place in Hindu worship as the destroyer of obstacles and lord of success. In the painting "Gingham Ganesh," in which patterned fabric suggests a plush infant's toy, Sen creates a suggestive tension between childish playthings and the revered deity's spiritual essence.

Sen's passion for art began at 4, when she endured an enforced confinement in an Indian hospital after being misdiag-

nosed with diphtheria. Her father gave her a drawing book and crayons to ease the long hours, and her first colorful experiments ignited a lasting devotion. She studied fine arts at the Birla Academy in Calcutta, where she received the prestigious Kala Sangam for academic excellence. The critical recognition Sen gained in her senior year earned her a grant that allowed her to come to the United States for further education in the arts.

Sen worked in the advertising and design industry for 15 years. Today, she pursues a career in the fine arts, with a focus on custom paintings for the performing arts and murals for commercial spaces.

ICONS a solo show of paintings by Tania Sen

through May 31

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■ Tania Sen's paintings, "Shiv Durga," above, and "Dilemma of Durga" below, epitomize the mother/woman figure, the nurturer and giver Durga, who is the conventional Hindu archetype of strength and virtue.



Printing imperfections present during scanning