

weekend

WEEKEND



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STORIES IN ART

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Samantha (right) on the sidelines of the Chennai Open pickleball tournament held recently at Sathyabama University. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Samantha, who owns the city's pickleball team Chennai Super Champs, explains why she bets big on the sport and how a life-changing diagnosis pushed her towards wellness

Courtside with Samantha

Srinivasa Ramanujam

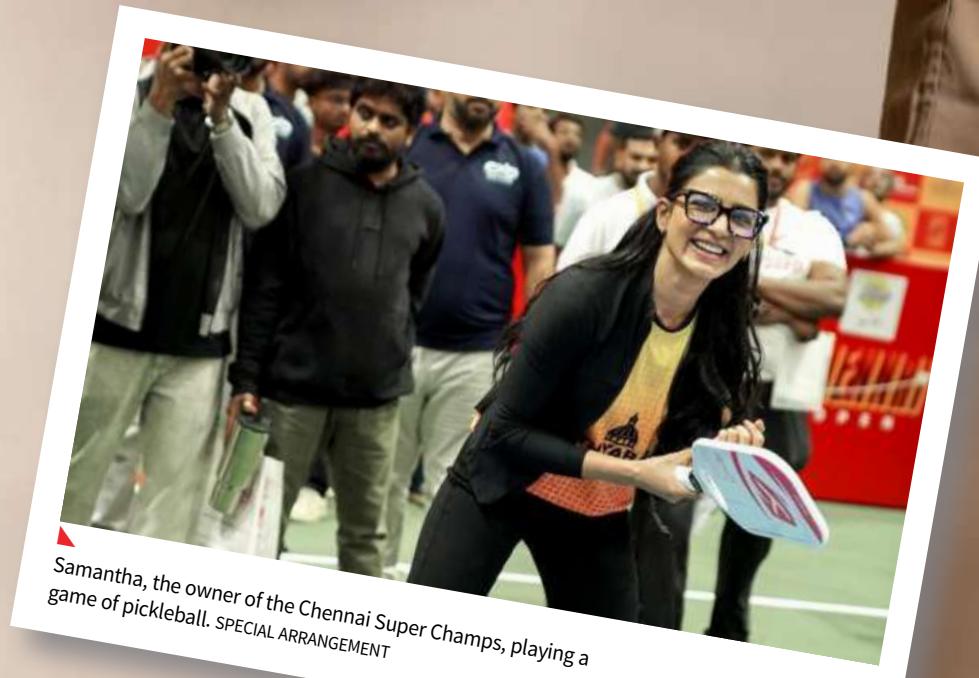
srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Samantha Ruth Prabhu lets out a loud hurrah on pickleball court no. 5 at Chennai's Sathyabama University – she has just hit a winning shot. At The Arena inside this campus, where the Chennai Open was recently played, you would hardly think of pickleball as a nascent sport. With more than 500 registrations across 40-plus categories, players battled for on-court glory and a prize pool of ₹25 lakh in a sport that blends badminton, tennis and table tennis – earning it the catchphrase: "the game anyone can play".

In the middle of the action is actress Samantha, whom many of us know as the leading lady of superhit films like *Theri* and *Rangasthalam*. As the owner of Chennai Super Champs, which will compete at the World Pickleball League Season 2 beginning January 2026, the actor is determined to use her star power to draw attention to the sport.

"My biggest dream has been to see India go from being a sports-watching nation to a sports-playing one," she states, "Pickleball will take us there... because it is the most non-intimidating sport. It can build communities."

In Chennai alone, the number of courts has increased dramatically over the past year or so, with players migrating from other racquet sports to pickleball. It is the case in many other Indian cities as well. In the recently-concluded Chennai Open, the organisers had to close lines because "the demand was crazy". Samantha admits she did not expect this momentum. "When we signed the deal [with Chennai Super Champs] one and a half years ago, I had no idea that the



Samantha, the owner of the Chennai Super Champs, playing a game of pickleball. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sport was going to grow so massively."

That signing remains special to her because Samantha – who hails from Pallavaram in the city – was determined to bag the Chennai team. "I remember Gaurav [Gaurav Natekar, CEO, World Pickleball League] was not ready to give the Chennai team. I told him, 'If I'm not getting Chennai, I'm not doing this.' It's important that whatever I do has to tie with home and where I come from. Today, I might be up and about in many places but everything returns home."

Health matters

The actor's fascination for pickleball also ties in neatly with her interest in health and fitness – the theme of her popular podcast called Take 20. Her interest intensified, she says, because of her own health complications. (In 2022, Samantha was diagnosed with myositis, a rare autoimmune condition that causes muscle weakness and fatigue.)



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My biggest dream has been to see India go from being a sports-watching nation to a sports-playing one. Pickleball will take us there

SAMANTHA

"Even though I had the luxury of having access to the best doctors and medical treatment, I felt an immense sense of helplessness as I did not have the education to handle what I was going through," she recalls, "I remember thinking that no one should feel this helpless. Although people follow me for films, they are also consuming these health tips that might come in handy someday. People have multiple life problems, but when they have a health issue, that becomes the only issue."

Months of hospital visits and constant medication also meant that Samantha had to apply the brakes on her thriving film career. "As actors, we have this ego that we are invincible and film projects will keep coming. You don't ever think that all this will suddenly stop. When I was diagnosed with myositis, life just came to a halt."

This forced break led to new

ideas, including perfume brand, Secret Alchemist, and a fashion venture, Truly SMA. "I'm thriving now, with the most work I have ever had. Everything that you see about me is a result of what I envisioned during those dark times. I'm living everything that I dreamt of," she smiles.

She is also excited about returning to films in a bigger way. "I'm currently producing and starring in *Maa Inti Bangaram*. It is extremely exciting and fun. It feels so good to be back on a film set."

For the moment, though, she is happy playing pickleball games with her team.

Full-time actress or part-time player? She laughs. "I'm average. But I've improved a lot because I make it a point to play three times a week," she says. Then, she challenges us to a game – and we accept.



Game on

For World Pickleball League (WPBL) founder **Gaurav Natekar**, sport has been a way of life. An Arjuna awardee, Gaurav has been associated with tennis for a long time. His wife, **Arati Ponnappa**, was also a national-level tennis player. Gaurav's father, Nandu Natekar, was among the top badminton players of his time. "Sport has always been in our blood," says Gaurav, "Pickleball was an opportunity we saw a couple of years ago. We are happy that the game is growing fast in popularity. Samantha has been a fabulous ambassador for the sport and has been personally involved with the growth of the game."



Stills from I Medici, the Renaissance-inspired fashion showcase by designer Rohan Pariyar, staged at the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Florence meets the City of Joy

Shreya Banerjee

The 16-foot Angel of Victory atop Kolkata's Victoria Memorial, a wind vane and lightning arrester, turns with the might of the breeze. But on November 17, she seemed to swivel with intention. As if summoning the winds of Renaissance Florence, the angel presided over an evening where Italian art, music, and dance drifted seamlessly into contemporary Indian aesthetics in the Eastern Quadrangle of the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata.

In collaboration with the Consulate-General of Italy and the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the evening brought to the fore designer Rohan Pariyar's interpretations of 15th and 16th-Century aesthetics from the Italian Renaissance, with a particular nod to the couture worn by the women of Florence's influential Medici family. Titled I Medici, the 45-minute showcase presented 35 ensembles, each crafted in Rohan's Kolkata atelier and meticulously embroidered with over 2,000 hours of zardozi and cutdama work by a design team from the city.

Rohan explains, "The 35 handcrafted ensembles pay homage to the influential women of the Medici dynasty – Lucrezia, Contessina, Clarice, Caterina, Bianca, Maria and others. The garments trace a woman's life: from marriage and early adulthood to old age, and even to the rituals of death. Botticelli and Da Vinci's paintings have also inspired me deeply."

Directed by Rohan, and Kuntanil Das, choreographed by Pinky Kenworthy and Sudarshan Chakraborty, and styled by Abhijit Chanda, the performance used the

Quadrangle's archways and colonnades as its primary set. Members of the Calcutta School of Music's string orchestra played compositions by iconic Italian composers Arcangelo Corelli, Domenico Scarlatti and Antonio Vivaldi. As the music wafted through the air, Sapphire Dance Company's performance created a dialogue between sound and structure.



But the evening ultimately belonged to its setting. Victoria Memorial's Indo-Saracenic architecture, its soaring dome, chhatris, arches, long colonnades, intricate jali work, Italian statues and Gothic-inspired porticos were emblematic of the night's intent: a seamless blend of Indian



and European aesthetics – Italian in particular. The staging allowed the monument to hold the narrative, with the clothing giving textural accents.

After the performance, guests were ushered into Burdwan Palace in Alipore for a Renaissance-themed reception curated by Taj Bengal in association with Gormei, a culinary curation platform known for creating gastronomic experiences by collaborating with chefs and restaurants. The menu drew from Bartolomeo Scappi's *L'Opera* (1570),

recognised as the first illustrated cookbook from the Renaissance era.

Guests moved through live counters where chefs prepared hot plates of gnocchi and handmade pasta. Glasses of white and red wine from the bar were paired with sweet marzipan morsels, chicken cacciatora, rosemary prawns, pumpkin and spinach tarts, saffron parmesan arrancini and herb-crusted fish. Dessert was a spread of Gelo d'Arancia – a soft orange pudding and the classic zuppa inglese – sponge cake topped with creamy custard and Italian liquor. The menu carried forward the Renaissance inspired flavours of the evening.

The night, however, was as much about diplomacy as it was about design. Italian Consul-General Riccardo Dalla Costa said that the event upheld Italy's artistic and cultural renaissance, which has defined the shared legacy of India and Italy.

Be it the compelling glow of soft gold on Victoria's Makrana marble or the ballroom between the stucco columns of the Burdwan Palace, the designs shimmered in the timeless afterglow of a civilisation's dream that had for one evening slipped into the dreamscape of the City of Joy.



(Clockwise from left) Raj and DK with Suman Kumar and actor Manoj Bajpayee; and a still from Farzi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Sudhish Kamath

"Until five months back, I was telling DK (of Raj and DK, the creators of *The Family Man*) that people will like it," writer and director Suman Kumar recalls, a day before the show is out. But now, anxiety is kicking in.

"Can we not do the writers' room today?" he asked DK. DK calls him to check what happened. "What do you mean what happened? The show is dropping. I'm nervous," he admits.

Suman Kumar, who has written the much-acclaimed and loved show from the first season, turned director this season along with Tusshar Seyth (a long-term associate of Raj and DK who has also worked on the show since Season 1) and also hired two screenplay writers – Nikhil Gonsalves and this writer – to divide the load.

"It just makes it quicker. The story beats, tone and treatment are already fleshed out in the *Bible* and you guys have already seen the show, so you kind of know," Suman explains the decision.

I try to get him to open up about that season cliffhanger with a "What have you done?" – the question most likely on people's minds. He laughs. He has anticipated this moment for a while.

Did he always know this was going to happen? "I always knew that in one of the seasons, he will go rogue and instead of high-end

End of the road?

Award-winning writer and director Suman Kumar talks about the new seasons of *The Family Man*, *Farzi* and more



technology he will have to rely on human intelligence," he says.

Not that he had always planned it season-wise, but Suman believes it is probably a four-season show. "It's not official, but it will be good to have a Season 4. When I write, internally we always discuss what happens next season."

Is he worried about spoilers in the age of social media? "It's the nature of the beast. There are shows that drop one episode a week like *Slow Horses* and there's *The Family Man* or *Farzi* where we drop all episodes together and people watch it all in one go and decide to tweet. We can only expect that fans don't ruin it for others and have a self-imposed

moratorium."

Three weeks, he considers, before settling for 10 days, maybe. "These days people text on the phone even while watching the movie, I find it abhorrent," says Suman, adding that it is impossible to regulate

A screenplay is not just a literary pursuit. It's a technical document that informs the whole team what is happening. As someone said, it's an invitation for a performance

SUMAN KUMAR

spoilers today.

The writing room for this season generates 10 drafts of each episode – the first few drafts by screenwriters are rewritten by the room and the showrunners, and finally there is a production docket with additional details that need to be in frame.

"Of course, the last draft is the editing. A screenplay is not just a literary pursuit. It's a technical document that informs the whole team what is happening. As someone said, it's an invitation for a performance."

One of his favourite moments this year, he says, was writing the father-daughter scene in the later episodes. Being a director, he also got to shoot the scene too.

Does he find writing for his solo projects different from collaborative writing with Raj and DK? "It's always a collaborative process whether you like it or not," says Suman.

Even for *Raghu Thatha*, he says he had taken the help of local writers, and he is used to working with writers on different projects. For *Farzi*, he teams up with Raj, DK and Sita Menon. And then there is Sumit Arora who does dialogues. "Even my Hindi has gotten better in the last few years," he laughs.

Coming up next for him is *Farzi* Season 2. The writers' room is buzzing again.

Sudhish Kamath wrote the screenplay for episodes 3 and 4 of The Family Man Season 3. The show is airing on Prime Video.

Flavour gains fame

A collaboration between two chefs at the Park Hyatt turns a multi-course dinner into a slow-burn spectacle

Sangita Rajan

sangitarajan.ph@thehindu.co.in

Multi-course menus often ask for more patience than appetite. But at the Masters of Food & Wine dinner at Park Hyatt Chennai, the rhythm feels different. Chefs Balaji Natarajan, Executive Chef Park Hyatt Chennai, and Ashley Nunes, Executive Chef Park Hyatt Hyderabad, think about energy – how a plate lands, and how quickly it disappears. The result is a seven-course dinner that does not behave like a marathon.

"We knew the menu had to keep building tempo with every course," Ashley said. With Ashley rooted in European technique and Balaji grounded in South Indian flavour, they realised early on that their defaults did not naturally overlap. They needed a meeting point, and Japanese cuisine became that anchor.

The evening opens with an amuse-bouche of warm bread and three compound butters – miso, chive, and a South Indian podi. Then begins the sequence of courses, each paired with wine. The first course by Ashley features pumpkin-mascarpone nori tart and a cheese-croquette nigiri with guero chilli; for non-vegetarians, a steak tartare and otoro nigiri served over the same croquette. It is paired with a bubbly Prosecco.

Balaji took over with a crisp dosa okonomiyaki made from fermented koji rice, filled with peppered raw jackfruit or lamb. The coconut, tonkatsu and tamarind sauces pull it



together without overwhelming the plate, and a bold red from Maipo Valley, Chile, keeps the pace steady.

For the third course, Ashley shifts the meal into European comfort with his pizza ortolana – reimagined as a bite-size cracker topped with tomato, cheese, smoked aubergine and balsamic glaze. It pairs neatly with a Pinotage from South Africa.

The meal finds its peak in the fourth course: a coriander edamame or chicken gyoza paired with a mango-wasabi puliserry. It lands so well that another portion is ordered while sipping on a Cabernet Sauvignon, also from Maipo Valley.

The fifth course splits in two directions: a portobello mushroom glazed in teriyaki over truffled celeriac for vegetarians, and a miso-marinated black cod finished with a kaffir lime-coconut emulsion for non-vegetarians. Both dishes are paired with a crisp Clarendelle Blanc.

For the sixth course, Balaji sears white asparagus with a chilli-garlic podi and serves it with a golden curry and tempered sticky black rice.

Dessert is Ashley's fennel-white chocolate mousse with green apple granita leaned cool and bright; Balaji's flamed yuzu tender coconut, warm and aromatic. A pour of sake ties the two endings together.

At The Flying Elephant, Park Hyatt Chennai on November 22 and 23, 7pm to 11pm. The meal with wine is priced at ₹5,500. For reservations, call 8939871109.

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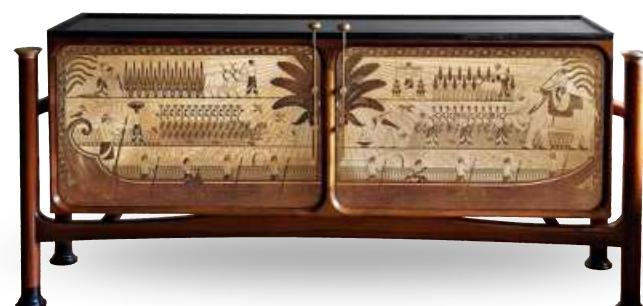
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Artist collabs @ Chacko

At this Mumbai-based furniture and design studio founded by Vipin Joe, the team will showcase a series of collaborative works created with artists and craft studios. "This format excites us deeply and is something we plan to build upon in the coming months," says Vipin. He has worked with artist Nikunj Patel of Studio Moebius to create The Native Console and The Divine Light Cabinet – featuring brass-etched doors and ornamental detailing – that he will showcase at the event. "We are also debuting our Art Deco wall mirror titled King of Spades, created in collaboration with Ashwin Mallya, along with a wall-hung precious cabinet developed with Italian artist Gaia Cairo and marquetry by Sampigé & Co. in Mysore," says the designer whose upcoming collection will include a three-sided wall mirror, a wall-hung cabinet with intricate marquetry, two brass-etched pieces, all crafted in reclaimed teak.

Threads meet metal @ Prayaan

Artists Rahul Jain and Gunjan Arora of the Delhi-based brand will present a range of sculptural collectibles such as screens/partitions, lighting installations, spatial lights, vases, and planters. Gunjan says highlights include "a brass lighting installation, Avaia, that has been hand-tempered to shape and also has hand carved glass lighting fixtures; a cluster lighting installation called Amod; and Yamal, a set of stainless steel planters".



Robotics meets design @ Lux Temporis

Pia Pijselman brings her love for the sciences, mechanical physics and robotics together at her French design house. "I bring these seemingly opposing worlds into dialogue to create a form of technological poetry that sets matter into motion by designing bio-inspired kinetic light sculptures that bring a sense of life into our interiors," she says.

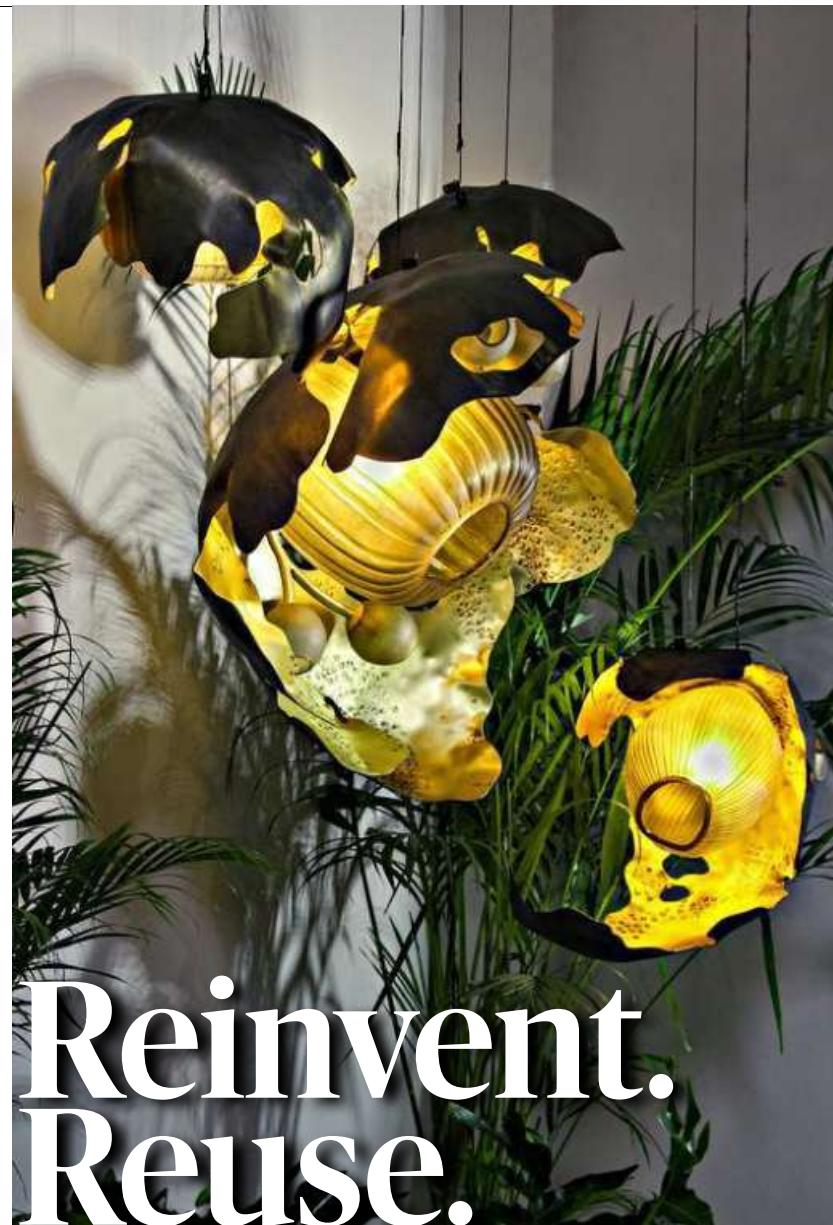
Signature pieces at the event will include their three signature kinetic lighting modules: Aves, that evokes the graceful flight of a bird; NYCTI, inspired by the opening of a flower; and Sabelli, based on a sea anemone. "We will also exhibit two of our signature pieces: NYCTI Louvre, a solid-wood piece, and Sabelli Reef Jalaja crafted with 25 metres of ostrich feathers and ostrich leather sourced from Maison Hermès."



Recycled core @ Placyle Sustainable Studio

At this design-led initiative from Nashik, co-founder Aliasgar Aboojiwala has been at the helm of transforming post-consumer and industrial plastic waste into outdoor furniture, home décor, and lighting.

At the event, he will present The Torii Bench that is crafted with layered recycled plastic lumbers; The Shark Fin Sling Chair shaped after the silhouette of a shark's fin; and a sofa, centre table designed using recycled plastic sheets. "The collection is complemented by the Portal Arc Lighting Series: a table lamp and a four-foot floor lamp," says Aliasgar.



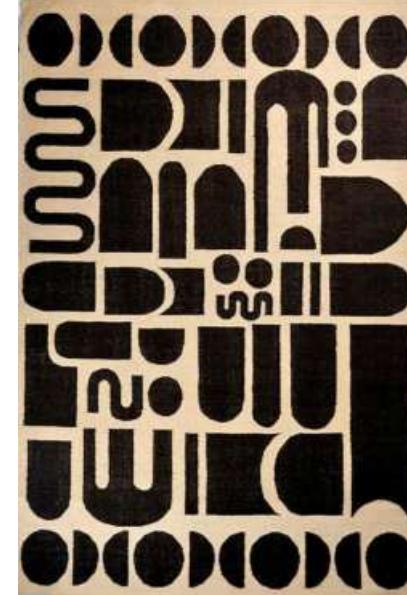
Reinvent. Reuse. Reveal.

From kinetic lighting inspired by robotics and mycelium-based biomaterials, Design Mumbai 2025 brings together Indian and international studios pushing the boundaries of material storytelling

Rugs from PET yarn @ Venjara Carpets

A capsule featuring rugs crafted with the brand's signature hand-tufting process and materials such as wool, bamboo silk will be the highlight of the Mumbai-based brand's showcase at the event. "What sets this collection apart is the sculptural finishing. Every rug is hand-carved, featuring curved edges, high and low piles, embossed patterns, and architectural carving," says Aishaa Nensey, the fourth generation owner of the legacy brand. "It is a deeply personal chapter that captures what I envision for our 1961 brand in the years ahead: a fusion of heritage with a creative twist."

Also on display will be the recently-launched Bahya Collection that features rugs from PET yarn that has been created with recycled plastic bottles. "Engineered for the elements, these rugs can withstand sun, rain, and everyday wear. They are lightweight, durable, and versatile."



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Nidhi Adlakha
nidhi.adlakha@thehindu.co.in

The process of creating art is spontaneous, flexible, creative – all at once. A part of this process involves designers experimenting with new materials and innovative solutions, and bringing to the fore such creators is Design Mumbai. The upcoming second edition of the design event – founded in 2024 by Ian Rudge (co-founder of UK's design event, 100% Design), Michael Dynan (co-founder, Design Shanghai), and designer Piyush Suri – will bring together architects and design experts from India and abroad.

Piyush explains how India has always had "this incredible depth of craft, materiality, and storytelling in design, but what we've needed is a global platform where all of that creativity can meet the work that's happening on an international level". Here are our picks of Indian and international debutants at Design Mumbai 2025:

November 26-29 at Jio World Garden, Mumbai

3D printed @ Nuflow Design

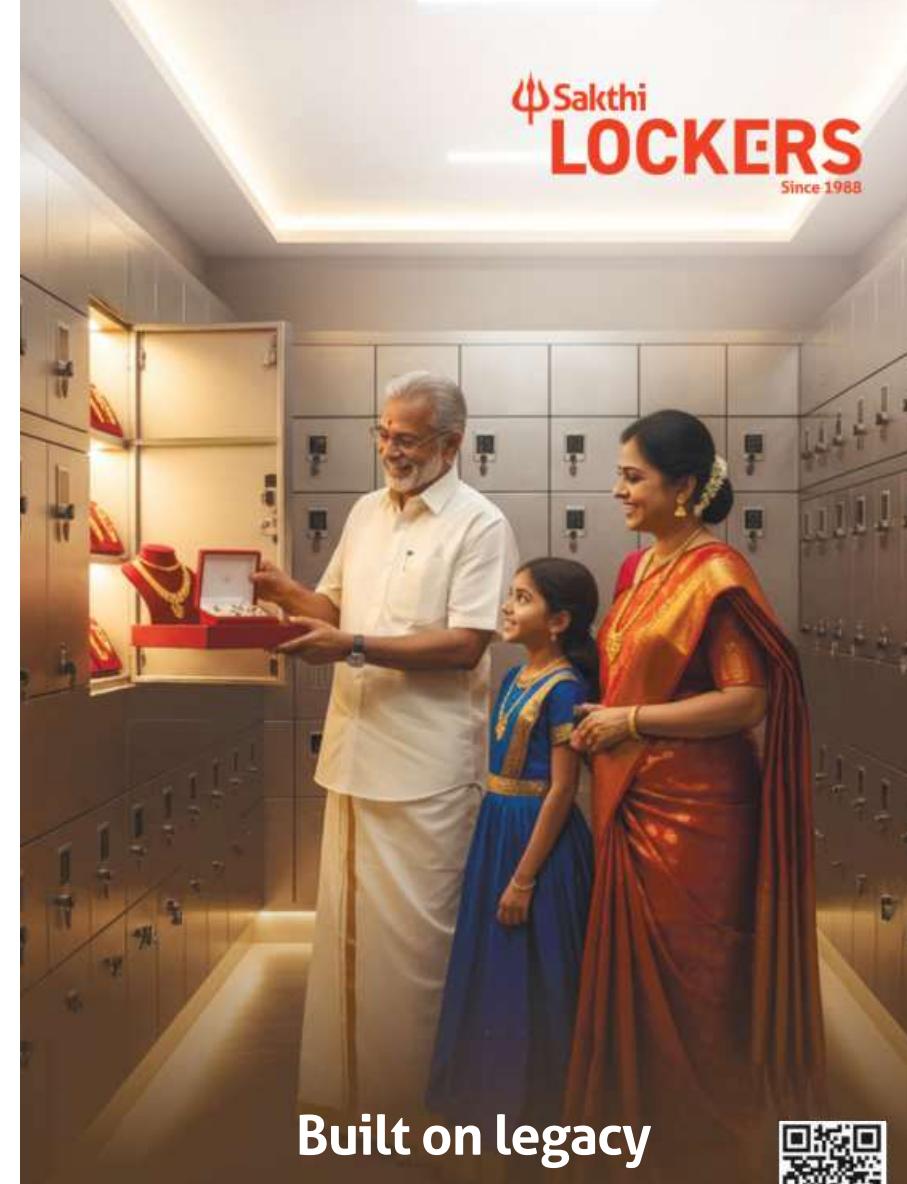
"Many of our designs are inspired by natural, sculptural forms," says Alex James-Saleh, owner-director of the UK-based brand that was launched to "push the boundaries of 3D design". Their 3D printer was built in-house by Alex's brother Chris James-Saleh over a year ago.

They will exhibit a 3D printed dining table inspired by coral, a wood-finished coral coffee table, and their Wave lamp. "The latter is made from a plastic called PET-G and is sourced from 100% post-industrial waste. We processed it further to give it a clear finish. The coral table is made from the same plastic and takes 18 hours to print," says Alex.





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All Are Welcome

Kannada

An uneven reincarnation drama



Vivek MV

vivek.mv@thehindu.co.in

Not long ago, director Simple Suni faced the criticism of making dialogue-heavy movies. While the words had wit, the stories lacked depth. From his previous movie, *Ondu Sarala Prema Kathe* (2024), Suni seemed to have shed his style. That movie and his latest, *Gatha Vaibhava*, have a semblance of story. However, both movies are let down by writing, despite interesting premises.

Gatha Vaibhava is a reincarnation story. In Indian cinema, the genre has a set template, with its most prominent aspect being lovers meeting a fatal end. Suni's film is no different, except that it spans across four lifetimes instead of just two. The director's ambition lies in setting his plot in multiple worlds, but not investing enough to make each portion engaging.

Ashika Ranganath plays Adhunika, meaning modern, but she is drawn towards history. Dushyanth is Purathan, meaning ancient, but he is interested in modern-day technology, like VFX. These ironies don't add anything to the overall script. Suni is content with teasing us with such wasteful sarcasm.

Expectedly, opposites attract, and Adhunika tells

Gatha Vaibhava

Director: Simple Suni

Cast: Dushyanth, Ashika Ranganath, Krishna Hebbale, Sudha Belavadi

Storyline: When Purathan and Adhunika meet in the present, they embark on a mystical journey through their past lives. Will love endure across lifetimes?

The second half, which reveals the third flashback, is somewhat watchable because it unfolds like a story, and not like elongated scenes seen in the first two flashbacks. Suni seems to be in control of the proceedings, with better staging and the actors complementing his narrative. While Ashika is at ease in all the characters, debutant Dushyanth, though a tad raw, plunges confidently into the complex challenge of handling roles of different natures.

Set in Mangaluru, the tender love story, built on affectionate letters, reminds you of Malayalam's hit *Ennu Ninte Moideen* (2015). Again, the predictability of the outcome disturbs the viewing experience. I wonder why the director didn't go back and forth with his screenplay. A bit of intercutting to the present from the past would have reduced the overall dullness of the story.

You see a clever take on science, reality, and the notion of past life in the final twenty minutes of *Gatha Vaibhava*. However, Suni leaves it too late to join the dots, and his reliance on mere coincidences and not organic twists results in an underwhelming experience.

Gatha Vaibhava is currently running in theatres



A film with flashes of brilliance

Director Selvamani Selvaraj's period thriller grips when it explores psychology and the overlap between art and reality

Telugu

Sangeetha Devi Dundoo
sangeethadevi.k@thehindu.co.in

Should an artist refine his craft for art's sake, or can he adapt it to suit audiences who respond with applause and make the work commercially viable? And what happens when that applause begins to blunt the craft itself? *Kaantha*, the Tamil film written and directed by Selvamani Selvaraj and produced by Dulquer Salmaan and Rana Daggubati, poses these questions through a narrative that moves from psychological drama to whodunit, while consistently acknowledging the art of cinema.

After a brief prologue signalling what lies ahead, *Kaantha* opens like a love letter to filmmaking. It unfolds in Madras of the 1940s and 1950s, following the making of a film within a film. Dulquer Salmaan's presence may momentarily recall *Mahanati*, in which he played Gemini Ganesan. Cinematographer Dani Sánchez López and costume designer Archana Rao, both part of that National Award-winning production, return here as well.

Kaantha is a different beast from *Mahanati*, the web series *Jubilee* or any other drama that tapped into the early decades of Indian cinema. The early portions acknowledge the legends of early Tamil and Telugu cinema but the story sets out to do more than just celebrate cinema. It probes into the addictive nature of fame and how it dictates power dynamics.

TK Mahadevan (Dulquer) is a superstar with consecutive blockbusters and a rags to riches story. His relationship with his mentor, referred to as *ayya* or sir (played by Samuthirakani) has soured to the extent that the two cannot have a face-to-face conversation on set even when they are compelled to collaborate. Studio owner Martin (Ravindra Vijay) has

Kaantha

Director: Selvamani Selvaraj

Cast: Dulquer Salmaan, Bhagyashri Borse, Samuthirakani, Rana Daggubati

Storyline: When an aspiring female actor is caught in the tussle between a star and his mentor, things take a murky turn.

to recover his fortunes and the master director and his protege have no choice but work together.

Selvamani builds the tension gradually in an early sequence that shows the soured relation between the mentor and his star protege. Within that broad contour is the ever-relevant mirroring of how stardom dictates the script. What was once supposed to be the story of a woman now gets a different title and the hero wants a new climax. He doesn't hesitate to ghost direct the film. Caught in this tussle between two established film personalities is a first-time leading lady, Kumari (Bhagyashri Borse). And, she is not a meek spectator.

If Mahadevan is sketched as a narcissist with shades of grey, *Kaantha* gradually peels back the layers of *ayya*, giving the drama a tougher edge. Dani Sánchez López's visuals shift between colour for the contemporary era, black-and-white for the past, and a different black-and-white aspect ratio for the film-within-the-film. These transitions in palette, texture and framing become seamless as the story settles. The mood lighting and shadows in the black-and-white portions heighten the psychological tension, leaving room for mystery. Jakes Bejoy's background score and Jhanu Chanthar's music support the shifting tone, while Ramalingam's art direction recreates the studio world. Costumes by Poojita Tadikonda, Archana Rao and Harman Kaur evoke both 1950s cinema and the fashion of the time.

Kaantha builds its world and its characters without hurry, allowing the central trio to take shape. Dulquer Salmaan moves between a more theatrical, lyrical performance on the film set and the controlled charm of a star who knows how to tilt a narrative in his favour with tact. Samuthirakani's restrained mentor contrasts with Bhagyashri Borse's wide-eyed aspiring actor, who plays her part with clarity and restraint. She is the surprise of the film, utilising the opportunity to showcase her potential.

The strongest sections unfold between

these three characters as the film examines stardom and the inner workings of a studio. The latter half shifts into neo-noir territory. There was room here for a tighter whodunit, even as the film explored the clash between a mentor who believes cinema must endure and a protégé trapped in the bubble of fame.

There are sharp moments when a police officer known as Phoenix (Rana Daggubati), famed for his bravado, takes charge of an investigation with a casual irreverence. In one scene, when a character calls Mahadevan a *nadippu chakravarthy* (king of acting) and notes he played 16 roles in a film, Phoenix quips: "Were other actors not available?" The remark mirrors how a cynical outsider might view cinema, in contrast to artistes who push themselves to make an impression.

It is in the third act that *Kaantha* begins to lose momentum. Although suspicion falls on several members of the film crew, the culprit is not difficult to identify. Rana Daggubati clearly enjoys playing his laid-back police officer, yet the character occasionally feels at odds with the period setting.

The film regains its footing in the final stretch, where it sharply contrasts art and reality. For a moment, it even recalls *Om Shanti Om*. Mirrors appear at crucial points, allowing the star to bask in his own image and, later, recoil as uncomfortable truths stare back at him. Dulquer handles these shifts with precision, delivering some of his most assured work.

The supporting characters, however, are given limited space. The dynamics between Mahadevan and his wife, for example, could have added depth. A media baron, a loyal driver, an assistant director and Kumari's friend – a fellow refugee from Burma – each play important roles in the plot but remain under-explored.

Kaantha is sincere and compelling in parts, which helps balance the portions that feel less fully realised.

Kaantha is currently running in theatres

A provocative portrait of fractured masculinity

Hindi

Anuj Kumar

anuj.kumar@thehindu.co.in

There is no shot of Taj Mahal in Kanu Behl's *Agra*. There are no sprawling gardens that dot the city of monuments. Instead, the fearless chronicler of our society's hidden fractures and fault lines focuses on the cramped spaces, repressed desires, and the incommodious mindscapes in the mofussil town that the city holds beneath its touristy topsoil.

It is the *Agra* that Sahir Ludhianvi referred to in his critique of the Taj Mahal when he said that the monument symbolised the exploitation of the poor by the elite. Behl is more matter-of-fact, but there is a distinctive rhythm to his storytelling. It is like the movement of a worm under the skin that is difficult to ignore or resolve.

The introverted Guru's (Mohit Agarwal) desires, physical and emotional, are trapped in a



dilapidated two-storey home with a real estate value. Struggling to lead a life of honour as a call centre employee, Guru is consumed by loneliness and digital erotic fantasies. Infatuated with a colleague, he hallucinates, and his life spirals into a self-destructive behaviour. The arrival of his dentist sister adds to the chaos and claims for space. Through Guru's perspective, the film explores how the lack of physical space in urban India intertwines with deep-seated sexual repression, patriarchal toxicity, and the quiet

As the house becomes a battleground for territorial control and privacy, Guru is consumed by loneliness and digital erotic fantasies. Infatuated with a colleague, he hallucinates, and his life spirals into a self-destructive behaviour. The arrival of his dentist sister adds to the chaos and claims for space. Through Guru's perspective, the film explores how the lack of physical space in urban India intertwines with deep-seated sexual repression, patriarchal toxicity, and the quiet

violence of everyday family life.

It is Behl's empathy for the fragile lives he exposes that elevates *Agra* as not just a tale of personal misery but a broader indictment of the moral rot. The explicit sexual fantasies do not titillate; they shine a torch on the troubled soul writhing for salvation.

Eschewing easy resolutions, Behl and co-writer Atika Chohan ensure the layout of the house doesn't remain just a backdrop. It reflects how space and dependence on material needs shape the human psyche. The desire for a room of one's own, the presence of the father's mistress upstairs, and the son's desire all become metaphors for control and shame, agency and aspiration.

The psychological mess might frustrate those looking for clean character arcs, but Kanu is in no mood to manufacture an uplifting experience. Creating their visceral mirror images, he is aiming to keep the audience uneasy. He places the audience at the cross-section of disparate points of view of his characters and expects the audience to find their way out of the disturbance

we all inhabit, without acknowledging it as such.

When the film threatens to become an advert for male sexual misery, a limping frame of Priya (Priyanka Bose) emerges from the shadows and strikes a bond with Guru. Like Guru, Priya is also seeking her space under the sun. In and out of relationships of convenience and compromise, Priya runs an Internet

Agra

Director: Kanu Behl

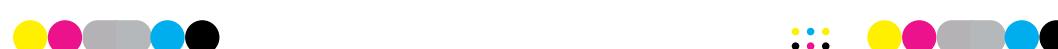
Cast: Mohit Agarwal, Priyanka Bose, Rahul Roy, Vibha Chhibber, Sonal Jha

Storyline: In the suffocating confines of a cramped Agra household, a sexually frustrated young man spirals into obsession and madness while battling his fractured family and the crushing weight of repressed desire.

cafe. Guru pays for the computer time, and she tolerates his lingering stares. Like most relationships in Behl's films, it also begins as a transactional bond, where bed becomes the seat of give and take. Gradually, we discover that the two souls, who are perceived as damaged by society and share the same gaze on them, complete each other.

Behl extracts raw, uninhabited work from his ensemble. In a breakout role, Mohit impresses with his haunted gaze and terrifying rage. Rahul is a revelation as the hypocritical father with a plan. Vibha and Sonal are bitter representatives of a generation of women who lament about patriarchy but don't want to give up on its perks. The highlight is Priyanka as the enigmatic Priya. It is hard to make a manipulative figure look dignified on screen, but Priyanka strikes a balance as the polio-afflicted Priya negotiates the power dynamics of society and home.

Agra is currently running in theatres.



Now You See Me: Now You Don't

Director: Ruben Fleischer

Cast: Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson, Dave Franco, Isla Fisher, Justice Smith, Dominic Sessa, Ariana Greenblatt, Lizzy Caplan, Rosamund Pike, Morgan Freeman

Storyline: 10 years later, a new generation of magicians seeks help from the original Horsemen to take down a formidable villain



A jolly spell for the third time

English

Mini Anthikad Chhibber
mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

Jack Wilder (Dave Franco), the sleight-of-hand specialist, took the words from our mouths and minds when he says the pandemic, AI and other things have created a need for magic. While magicians talk of illusions and deception being their stock in trade, an important component in a magic act is the audience and their need to believe.

Even if we know it is all smoke

and mirrors, that two-hour escape from our grimy lives into glittering world where the laws of physics are elastic, is the right medicine to take on further slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Ten years after the events of the last film, the magicians known as the Four Horsemen – Danny (Jesse Eisenberg), mentalist Merritt McKinney (Woody Harrelson), escape artist Henley Reeves (Isla Fisher) and Jack, split up.

A new trio of magicians, Charlie (Justice Smith) impressionist Bosco (Dominic Sessa) and locksmith/pickpocket June (Ariana Greenblatt), rob a smarmy tech bro of his ill-gotten gains using deepfakes and holograms of the original Four Horsemen.

Just as they are gloating over their success, Danny arrives at their hideout and after dissecting their performance, says he was directed by a tarot card and the Eye to get the three for a high-stakes heist.

The mark is Veronika (Rosamund Pike), all-round wicked lady who owns diamond mines and is selling to the worst of the worst apart from laundering their money. The job is to rob The Heart, the largest diamond in the

world, from Veronika.

There follows thrilling sleights of hand, illusions and mental gymnastics in a glittering trip around the world with stops in France and Abu Dhabi.

Some old friends including fifth horseperson, Lula (Lizzy Caplan) and Yoda-esque mentor, Thaddeus (Morgan Freeman) drop by. The surprise cameo at the very end, setting up for part 4 is welcome too.

The heist sequences with misdirection and prop switching are breathtaking as is the escape from the gracious French castle using the Ames room where everything is upside down or is it? and Relativist stairs leading everywhere and nowhere.

There are snappy, quotable quotes as the ensemble cast riff off each other, while Pike is frosty and imperious with an accent and wardrobe to match. At under two hours, the third installment of the Now You See Me franchise, directed by *Zombieland* and *Venom*'s Ruben Fleischer is undiluted fun.

Now You See Me: Now You Don't is currently running in theatres

Snippets



Anushka Sen teams up with American producer Ken Lewis

Actor Anushka Sen has teamed up with American producer Ken Lewis for her debut single, 'Chameleon', whose audio version was released on YouTube on November 18. Ken is a two-time Grammy Award winner and has worked with global artists including Taylor Swift, Kendrick Lamar and Kanye West.

Known for starring in the coming-of-age OTT series, *Dil Dosti Dilemma* (2024), Anushka recorded 'Chameleon' during her recent trip to the USA. The track is a lively blend of Lewis' signature pop elements and Anushka's energetic vocals.

Speaking about her debut as a singer Anushka said that 'Chameleon' came out from a "very personal space".



Pankaj Tripathi turns producer with series Perfect Family

Actor Pankaj Tripathi has turned producer for an upcoming series, *Perfect Family*, starring Gulshan Devaiah and Neha Dhupia in the lead. Directed by Sachin Pathak and created by Palak Bhamri, the eight-episode comedy-drama also stars Manoj Pahwa, Seema Pahwa and Girja Oak in pivotal roles.

Notably, the show will stream on YouTube under a structured pay model. According to a press release, the first two episodes of the show will be available to access for free on November 27, 2025 on the YouTube channel JAR Series and the rest of them can be unlocked at a one-time charge of ₹59.

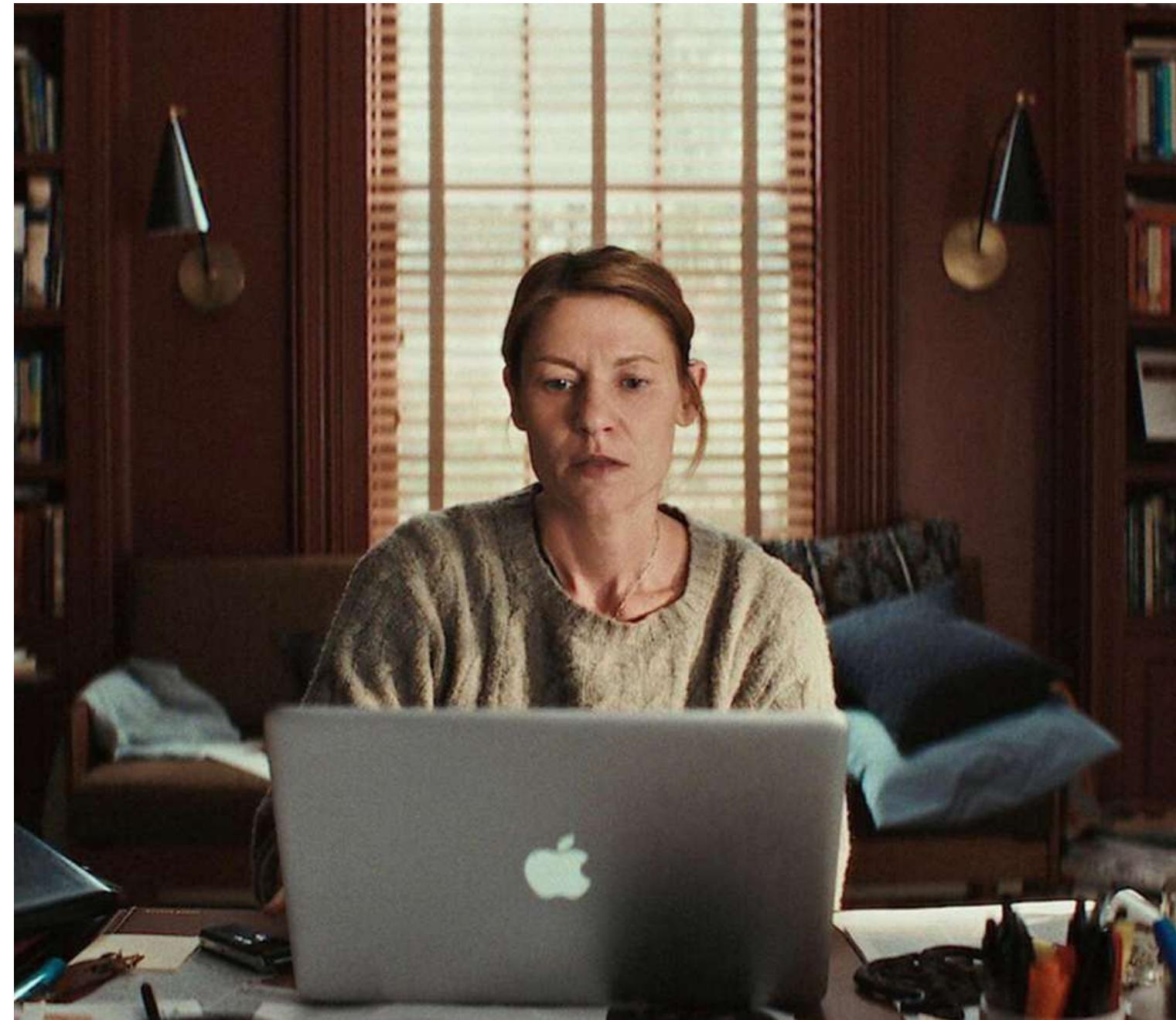


Legend of Zelda live-action drops first look at Link and Zelda

Nintendo and Sony have unveiled the first images from the live-action *Legend of Zelda* movie, offering fans their long-awaited glimpse of Link and Princess Zelda brought to life. The photos by Nintendo marked the official start of production on the big-screen adaptation of the iconic videogame series.

The images spotlight actors Bo Bragason and Benjamin Evan Ainsworth in full Hylian form. The pair stand in a sweeping green field that hints at the film's vision of Hyrule, grounding the fantasy world in the dramatic New Zealand landscapes where the project is currently shooting.

Plot details remain tightly guarded.



A psychological thriller

Exploring the themes of grief, loss and the desire for vengeance, the miniseries, despite a few pacing missteps, is held together by Matthew Rhys

Streaming

Mini Anthikad Chhibber
mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

Aggie Wiggs (Claire Danes), who won a Pulitzer Prize for her first novel, is struggling with a severe case of writer's block. She lives in a large rambling house in a fancy New York suburb. She is grieving the loss of her eight-year-old son, who was killed by a teenage drunk driver, Teddy Fenig (Bubba Weiler).

On the anniversary of her son's death, Aggie is disturbed by the barking of a pair of huge dogs. She realises they belong to her neighbour, the real estate tycoon Nile Jarvis (Matthew Rhys), who has just moved in. Nile is suspected of murdering his wife, Maddie (Leila George).

When Aggie sees Teddy and his mother laying flowers at her son's gravesite, she rails against them. Nile offers to take Aggie out for lunch in an effort to start over. When her editor, Carol (Deirdre O'Connell), calls about the progress of her second book, Aggie remembers Nile saying over lunch that her second book project sounds boring and that the populace only has a taste for "gossip and carnage."

The Beast in Me

Episodes: 8

Creator: Gabe Rotter

Starring: Claire Danes, Matthew Rhys, Brittany Snow, Natalie Morales

Storyline: A grieving author with writer's block crosses swords with her enigmatic neighbour

As a throwaway line, Nile suggests she write a book about him. Aggie pitches the idea to Carol, and is drawn deeper into Nile's complicated life. She meets Nile's second wife, Nina (Brittany Snow), his father, Martin (Jonathan Banks) and his wife, Lila (Julie Ann Emery) at Nile's step-brothers' birthday party. Martin's brother, Rick (Tim Guinee), lives with Nile as his security detail.

An FBI agent, Brian Abbott (David Lyons), who seems to have gone to pieces in an attempt to nail Nile, warns Aggie about Nile. Abbott's co-worker, Erika (Hettienne Park), wants him to leave Nile alone. Aggie meets Maggie's parents, Mariah (Kate Burton) and James (Bill Irwin), who only have nice things to say about Nile, a sentiment not shared by Maggie's brother, Chris (Will Brill).

There is also a city councilwoman, Olivia Benitez (Alyse Shannon), who is opposing the Jarvis' expansion plans. Through the easily bingeable eight episodes, we learn about the characters and their motivations, even as the different layers of truth are peeled to reveal another layer of obfuscation and interpretation.

While Danes' tics and mannerisms have not moved past her Carrie from *Homeland*, Rhys is endlessly brilliant as the charming, arrogant, and the dangerous yet endlessly fascinating Nile

(why is he named after a river, though?).

The clue that breaks the case wide open that Aggie uncovers, having slipped past the eyes of all the police and FBI agents, does take one out of the show as does the penultimate episode, which is a flashback, and slows the pace.

For all those quibbles, *The Beast in Me* is a layered exposition on the human condition in beautiful houses and woods. When Nile dances to the Talking Heads' 'Psycho Killer', is he confessing or feeling the music? Are Aggie's clogged pipes emblematic of all the facts she is not willing to face up to? As her ex-wife, Shelley (Natalie Morales) tells her despairingly, "You would rather invent a murder than look in the mirror."

In the end, apart from unmasking the killer, Aggie admits to "cradling vengeance like a second grief," and telling herself "the story she needed to hear". *The Beast in Me*, which is the name of Aggie's second book (Nile makes a crucial change in the title), is an adrenaline-fuelled ride through the funhouse mirrors of human wants and loss, shepherded by Rhys' extraordinary performance. Incidentally, none of the dogs, including Aggie's cute little dog, Steve, come to sticky ends.

The Beast in Me is currently streaming on Netflix

