

# Sculptor with a vision

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Eminent sculptor Vidyashankar Sthapathi comes from a long lineage of sculptors, dating back several centuries, perhaps as far back as the building of the Brihadeeswarar temple in Thanjavur in the 11th Century, says artist and film maker Gita Hudson. The 78-year-old sculptor has been trained in all the classical arts and traditional sculpture, but chose to forge his own path.



One of the prominent artists of the Madras Art Movement, he studied at the Government College of Art and Crafts, Chennai. “He specialises in sheet metal sculpture, and his work speaks volumes about him. Having gained immense knowledge in *sirpa sastra* and the *vedas* , he went on to create his own style in his works. He was rooted in tradition and stayed within the grammar of *sirpa sastra* , without breaking the norms, but was modern in his artistic expression,” says Hudson. The sculptor, who has won three National awards, lives in Kumbakonam. He had served at the Government College of Art and Crafts, Kumbakonam, as its

principal, and he continues to sculpt.



Some of his remarkable works include his depiction of Nataraja, a woman on a swing and his stylised form of Jesus Christ, to name a few. “He was innovative in his style, but he always stayed close to Tamil culture. Probably if he had been in Delhi or Mumbai, he would have gained more prominence and more of his works would have been displayed in big museums,” says Hudson.



He has experimented with many subjects, and in a variety of ways, using sheet metal, lime plaster, bronze, wire and stone. The book, titled *Bronze Decoded* , compiled by Hudson, will be a good source of reference for future generations, and it is a compilation of his interviews over a period of time. There are 50 images of his most significant sculptures. A film, *Sthapathy's Mangai* , made by Hudson in 2009, will also be screened. The story of his life and art is a tribute to this period and a contribution to the history of art in Tamil Nadu, says Hudson.