

# Ethnic voices brought to the fore in exhibition

By Frank Dolan

**D**EENPA Mann Kler is not a common Killyleagh name, but the Indian-born artist finds the town's seclusion just what she needs. Deepa has been living on our shores for 13 years now and greets you with the most genial Northern Ireland accent. She is married to local man Peter Bryson, whom she met at Bath University and with whom she has two children Fynn(6)and Bella (2). Deepa's latest exhibition A Strange Kind Of Peace in the Waterfront Hall explores equality and identity. This is Ms Mann Kler's second exhibition. Her first in 2006 explored the female form. Deepa should know all about equality as she works for the Equality Commission in Belfast. She produced a report into racism in Northern Ireland in 1997. Out of the Shadows was regarded as "path-finding". In it she high-lighted the cease-fires as a watershed time in this respect.

"It was only since the cease-fires that matters concerned with the ethnic minorities have been deliberated in the wider public arena in Northern Ireland,"she said. So it is informed by these sensibilities Deepa has approached A Kind of Peace. Taking a year long career break, Deepa threw herself into this 23 piece oil on canvas project. "This was also an opportunity to catch up on my children's upbringing. They understand that painting is something that mummy does and they know not to touch." But A Kind of Peace may not let Deepa rest in peace. She does not seek controversy nor does she shy from it. In And Man Created God in His Own Image? she challenges the perception of Jesus Christ as a white man. A man of colour is depicted on across. Another image depicts a black man laid out as in The Shroud Of Turin or a scene from the resurrection. Does she not think this will provoke ire from conservative Northern



Ireland? One thinks of the controversy *The Life of Brian* provoked in Northern Ireland. "It is my duty as an artist to say

what I feel and think," she said. "I must challenge the given. Who knows what Jesus Christ looked like? For centuries he has been depicted as white. All I'm saying is a deity is what you make it." Deepa admits she would not have come to this standpoint had she still been living in her native Leicester. "The proliferation of culture in the Midlands doesn't make you think of yourself as any different. Northern Ireland is unique, but it's changing " Deepa sees herself as a working artist and is very much in the selling market . "It would be nice if these could be bought and exhibited in a public place," she said. "An artist is no different in that she or he needs to live. I do many commissions but hopefully this will put me out there."

■ **A Strange Kind of Peace runs at the Waterfront Hall from February 4-29. Deepa's website is [www.deepamannkler.com](http://www.deepamannkler.com)**