

entertainment

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Sandrasegar's cut out for success

■ VISUAL ARTS

Alison Barclay

SHE spoke the forbidden language, so, when the authorities called at her rebel-outpost primary school, Sangeeta Sandrasegar and her classmates would run.

It was the 1980s and the Malaysian Government had just decreed English was out for Malaysian schools and Malay Bahasa was in.

"But we went to a school that still taught in English, which was actually illegal," Sandrasegar says. "So we used to get school inspectors coming around and we would have to run up and hide in the attic."

Learning English after hours was lawful — but not much use to Sandrasegar who, being Australian, already spoke it. Australian, but with a Malaysian-born dad. And Indian ancestry.

"In Malaysia and Australia I get read as an Indian," she says. Yet she has never been to India and is quite scared of ever doing so. No wonder she's confused.

But art can turn confusion into fusion. Seven years into life as an artist, Sandrasegar is getting the hang of reconciling childhood memories



Paper chase: artist Sangeeta Sandrasegar.

with adult reality, old myths with modernity and her assorted nationalities.

Meanwhile, her family puts up with paper snippets all over the house. Her favourite method — and the one she will show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art this month — is the paper cut-out.

"I'm interested in the idea of retrieval of stories," she says.

"The new work is based on the myths about spiders and women. In French, Japanese and Chinese cultures there are all these stories about anthropomorphism and spiders are seen as having feminine qualities; there's the idea of weaving as a trap or enclosure. And there's a spider goddess, Arachne."

NEW04, ACCA's survey of the latest names on the contemporary art scene, has Sandrasegar in company with Guy Benfield, Nadine Christensen, Anthony Hunt, Stephen Honegger, Tom Nicholson and Parekohai Whakamoe.

Some paint, others use digital technologies, and all come from Melbourne. The ACCA show is perfect timing for Sandrasegar, who has just completed seven years of study at the Victorian College of the Arts with a PhD.

"I did it to get the free studio," she murmurs, "but I wouldn't say that to the VCA."

■ NEW04

Where: ACCA, 111 Sturt St, Southbank
Until: May 9, free