

Bubbles of talent

Pictures/ASHISH RAJE

Dhruvi Acharya is a new face on the Indian art scene. And it is not one you can afford to miss says JASMINE SHAH VARMA

SHE is pricing her works at half the price she would sell them for in New York, but Dhruvi Acharya has to have a show in India. Money doesn't matter as much to Dhruvi, who has lived in New York since her professional life started, as the desire to show in the city where she was born and bred.

Holding her first solo show in Mumbai, the 30-year-old painter is the freshest face on the Indian art scene and one that is more than just noteworthy. On Monday, an exceptional collection of her paintings and some hand-painted

prints titled Woman, Mother, Goddess will be unveiled at the Jehangir Art Gallery.

What surprises one about Dhruvi is that though her paintings appear to have bold and strong themes concerning women, she is an amicable person who is a well-settled wife and mother of a 10-month-old. In her paintings, which balance wit and sensitivity, we see a pair of beady eyes lying in a cradle staring out of the darkness at the woman lying in the nearby bed, also awake. In another frame, a fat woman chomps on fat-free chips, engrossed in the idiot box. In another scene, a headless woman with an unflattering figure walks on a beach in a sexy swimsuit.

Dhruvi says she paints what she experiences and empathises with. Explaining why her paintings are women-centric she says, "Even though, say for



HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: Dhruvi Acharya and (left) one of her works, titled *Captive*

instance, my husband is a great husband and father, I do not know how he experiences the world. I can only paint what I, as a woman, experience."

Indian traditional and cultural values, the mores that rule the upbringing of a girl, societal compulsions, the perception of a woman by society and finally the crossover from a life in India to one in the US shape the thoughts in Dhruvi's highly symbolic and narrative paintings. We see a sea of motifs in her painstakingly detailed works. For instance, there are thought bubbles, flowers, arrows, imaginary birds and endless number of winding circles conveying a variety of meanings. One of her dominant concerns is the issue of weight. She says, "Women are made so conscious of

their figures. There are constant comments on how your figure looks, whether fat or thin. It is as if you are not a person but just a body." And that thought is deliberated in two paintings where the women have no heads but just fleshy bodies in swimsuits.

"The thought bubbles are symbolic to "the voices of other people that are always in your head" and the imaginary bird represents "the illusion of freedom", she explains.

Dhruvi's inspiration comes from life. She says, "My content will be where my life takes me." During her first few years in New York, her paintings brought out her longing for India. Her recent pregnancy and the birth of her child inspired her to paint a series of paintings about that experience.

She says she maintains a diary in which she regularly draws unlike most others who would write down their feelings and it is from there that a bigger painting emerges.

Autobiographical and yet not totally, Dhruvi's works are instantly likeable, just like her. Though Dhruvi is an unknown entity on the local art scene today, the time is not far when she will be in the thought bubbles of most art patrons.

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