

## Figment

Chemould Art Gallery, Colaba

A woman is bifurcated lengthwise with two heads, each facing in a different direction – she's literally in "two minds". An artist glares frustrated at her empty canvas, paintbrush in hand while an ominous cloud squirts paint-rain everywhere.

Dhruvi Acharya's cartoon-like, two-dimensional figures are ironic offshoots of everyday dilemmas. "There's always a story in my paintings," says the 32 year old. So in *Mother*, the artist has depicted her deceased mother-in-law with her face obscured by large pink lotuses, "Because she was always thinking of others, rather than herself," explains Acharya. While in *Torch*, a lady in the dark shines her torch in the wrong direction, missing the objects she's looking for.

Acharya claims to be fascinated by the contradictory roles women play in contemporary Indian society. "You can be making tea and doing puja on the one hand and going off to work on the other." So, her figures are often torn between different courses of action. *Voices* shows a lady surrounded by little chattering mouths that float around

in bubbles while she struggles to come to her own decision and in *Yap Yap* a girl's having a squabble with her other half (depicted as a bad-tempered green monster). "I paint moments of contemplation – when all disappears except one's thoughts and internal dialogues," says Acharya.

But it is Acharya's approach to the surface of her canvases that is most exciting. Influenced by the Japanese Super Flat movement – acclaimed in the late '90s for its adherence to "anti-perspectivism" – she's interested in manipulating the two-dimensionality of the picture frame. Her larger works use acrylic, gel and gold paint to produce different textures. In *Paint*, minute images have been sandwiched between the layers of vivid paint and shiny gel, generating the illusion of depth.

Acharya's recent spate of paintings differs from her earlier works, where a plethora of images and text – usually

gleaned from Indian miniatures and comic books – were crammed onto a canvas to shape multiple meanings. She's still juxtaposing images, but her new works appear pared down. The images are bolder and brighter and we are allowed to focus more on the central, stylised figuration and the way she's created intriguing surfaces. If in the process Acharya has lost some of her complexity, there is also the possibility that she's found her own voice. *ZJ*

