



Life under layers

# I am not the fat woman on the horse

Dhruvi Acharya discloses, telling you it's life around her that struggles to creep into the multiple layers that cake her paintings. YOUR GUIDE chats with the sell-out artist, while she ruminates about societal violence, lost childhood and why her sons won't give up being Hanuman

By Tinaz Nooshian

There's absolutely nothing that Dhruvi Acharya can do about the arrows being shot in a spray of slivers on her ceiling, by her three and five year-old sons. "You can't shoot at mama's paintings!" is about the only warning the two have heeded. And while for the two kids, who take turns to imagine they are Batman, Hanuman or Shri Ram, it's just an hour of role playing, "What's with men and violence?" is all that Dhruvi can manage to utter.

The Mumbai-based artist's latest exhibition, Two Plus Two Equals, is (or should we say "was" since it was sold out even before it opened) one that draws from

life, with a new veering towards kids and the make-believe world they live in. A work titled, Menace, sees a balloon boy with multiple arms, juggling a cricket bat, weathered teddy bear and a banana, all at once.

"With the hectic childhood kids lead today, I'd call them multi-taskers. People perceive them as a menace, trouble, that's why the name. And of course, the fact that societal menace, whether rape, child abuse or murder, leaves them desperately vulnerable," she says.

The I'm-not-very-good-with-words artist prefers to pin her blustery stream of consciousness in a drawing diary, where most of her works are born. Not all of them are autobiographical. "I am not the fat woman on the horse, but I will be able to connect with the idea behind each image," she explains.

Dhruvi transfers any one of those images onto canvas, using a technique that sees her work with over 10 layers of paint; each acrylic work taking over a month to complete. Inspired by pop culture, comic strips, Indian minatures and Japanese art, Dhruvi's works straddle wit and wisdom.



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A recent self-imposed exile in New York, away from her kids and husband, saw her try her hand at water-colours for the first time. "I love the immediacy of the medium," she smiles, telling you about the 51 water colours that "were grabbed at the preview, as she and Chemould Gallery owner Shireen Gandhi, stepped back and watched nervously.

With just two small works remaining from a bunch of 72, Dhruvi confesses that she'd rather hold a show "where I don't sell". "Knowing that works I've toiled over for months, won't be with me anymore, leaves me depressed. I invariably end up keeping a few for myself."

And while that may not go down well with the market-driven art scene, Dhruvi is honest to tell you that she's a pathetic businesswoman. "I just can't handle the promotion, marketing, media exposure bit. I was being interviewed on national television, and my hands were quivering!" she says in between an anxious chuckle.

With a 6 inch square work costing over a lakh, and an exhibition taking about two years to put together, you'd have to amass moolah and patience till you get your hands on a Dhruvi Acharya. Till then, soak in the sight while the ongoing exhibition continues till October 4.

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Menace; acrylic on canvas