

## Short of Breath

Dhruvi Acharya's latest works create a world where air is on sale. By DEEPALI NANDWANI

**ARTIST DHRUVI ACHARYA'S** paintings are whimsical, detailed and highly layered. She often uses wry, dark humour and fantasy to depict issues like environmental degradation or the portrayal of women in Indian mythology. Acharya will show her new works on eco-horrors and Indian comics, collectively titled *One Life on Earth*, at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai, in August and Gallery Nature Morte, New Delhi, in October.

"The inspiration for the show came from my own experience of running the marathon in Mumbai," says the 35-year-old artist. "I wheezed for hours on end. Even when you come down from New York, you end up sick for the first few days because of the pollution."

On her canvasses and with her paintings on wood, Acharya has created a world where people have mutated. They've changed shape, they float, grow claws and use 'breath-packs' to survive. "It's a world where the haves and the have-nots continue to exist, though in a different context," she says.

"Those who have mutated are the haves. Those who haven't, the ones with the 'breath-packs', are forced to steal from the haves," she says.

In *Air Fair*, a 14-foot, 23-panel painting, Acharya has composed a mock-advertisement for oxygen, which is juxtaposed with images of prospective consumers. This large multi-panelled painting brings together her interests: contemporary street art, typography, design, comic books, and advertising.

The show will also feature Acharya's works revolving around Indian mythology. In a series of three paintings called the *Words*, she has pasted comic book pages on to the canvas. While some paintings have people represented by empty speech bubbles, in others,

Acharya has inverted the idea. The words in the speech bubbles are clearly in place, but the people are missing. It provokes the viewer into figuring out the tale by simply reading the text. The show has over 90 paintings and a few large ones are a composite of several smaller independent panels.

Acharya is inspired largely by American art, comic books and the elaborate detailing of Indian miniature paintings. "Contemporary American art is irreverent, quirky and detailed, much like my work," she says. "American artists like Larie Pittman and Barry Megee use humour effectively to present their worldview. The line between high and low art often blurs."

*(One Life on Earth will be on at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai, from 7 August to 30 August and at Nature Morte, Delhi from 4 October to 15 November)*



BY JIRAO PAVAR



Air Fair

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