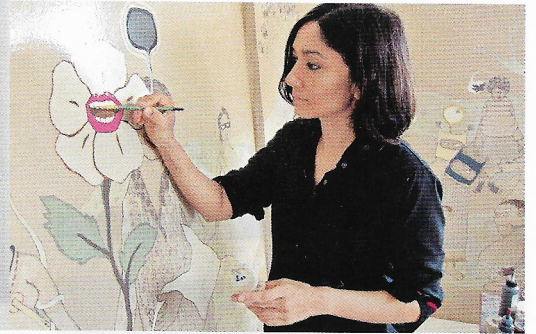




(Clockwise from left) *Woman and Men*; Dhruvi Acharya; *Recollections*; *Thoughts III*.



ART

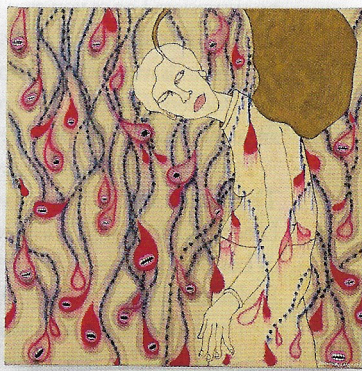
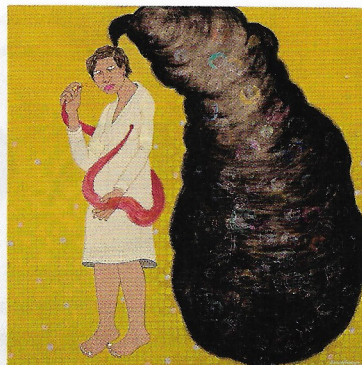
BEGIN AGAIN

Artist Dhruvi Acharya explores surviving loss and grief in her first Indian show in eight years

IN *THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING*, her seminal work on the aftermath of loss, Joan Didion writes, “Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.” After the death of her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, Didion turned to literature and writing to make sense of the suddenly bare landscape of her daily life.

Artist Dhruvi Acharya has undertaken a similar trajectory to create *After The Fall*, her first show in India in eight years, after the death of her husband, Manish Acharya, in December 2010. It traces the journey Acharya has lived through since then, as a wife, mother, daughter, woman, and artist, placing an intensely personal experience in a larger context. The 45-year-old artist, who earned an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, is a recipient of the Aditya Birla Kala Kiran Puraskar and a nominee for the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award; her work has been shown at galleries in New York, Milan, and her hometown, Mumbai, and is a part of collections internationally.

“I make sense of the world through my work,” Acharya says. She draws every day, creating a diary of sorts, which records her observations and experiences; from these, she chooses one or two to develop. It’s a process rooted in reality as much as in ritual. “I began painting my memories of home when I got homesick after I moved to the US, and when I became a mother, my paintings explored that new role. My work helps me put life in perspective and this show is no different.”



She is careful to explain that *After The Fall* is not melodramatic. “I took time off from painting because I did not want my work to be sentimental. The passage of time helped put things in perspective and allowed me to make work which is honest and has some dark humour, as always.”

The result is a collection of art—27 paintings ranging in size from 1x1 ft to 6x16 ft, an 18-ft scroll, and other works on paper—that is acutely observed, rich in emotion, and poignant. By first processing her grief, and then taking a step back, Acharya has recorded multiple aspects of the experience. From finding herself a widow at 39, raising two sons on her own, to the well-intentioned but hurtful remarks of others, to the sheer volume of loss, each piece tells a story.

Continuing with the theme of memory and belonging, Acharya has also created a soft-sculpture installation that forms another part of the show. “It [depicts] a bedroom with floating furniture. On the walls are my archived drawings from over 20 years. The bed has been a constant [motif] in my work as it is the place where we spend our most personal time.”

Six years after a terrifying loss, Acharya has created a brave and hopeful body of work that is beautiful in its vulnerability.

“It explores surviving grief, the emotional and psychological processes of reconstructing oneself, and living a purposeful life once again.” ■ *After The Fall* is on at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai, from October 14 to November 19.

By Chinmayee Manjunath