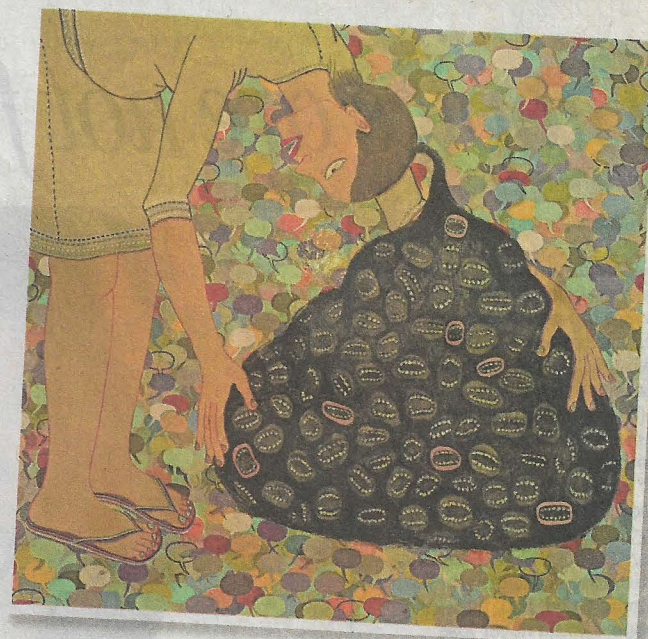


Woman and Men



Thoughts & Words

WOMAN, INTERRUPTED

Mumbai-based artist Dhruvi Acharya's first solo exhibition in eight years explores the "female experience" and how the mind deals with death

Sapna Mathur

A 2016 painting by Mumbai-based artist Dhruvi Acharya depicts a shouting match between a woman and three identical-looking men. The figures, on opposite sides of the canvas, are seemingly arguing about how a widow should live her life after her husband passes away. Behind the woman — a middle-aged lady carrying a rifle on her back — runs the text: "Your husband died, but you are still living... You don't have to wear white... it's not your fault. Go out... meet people... maybe you will find a companion." The men stand against the same backdrop, but the text on their side of the painting is different. It reads, "Your husband died so you may as well die... sati abolished? Then be a living sati." As the argument drags on, the men get aggressive. The first man holds a flower in his hand, as though he is trying to coax the woman into understanding patriarchal

MORE INFO
After The Fall opens at the Chemould Prescott Road gallery in Fort on October 15. It will be on till November 19. From 11am to 7pm, except on Sundays.

norms. But the second has a flower and a revolver in his hands. The third man, eventually, holds just a revolver. Acharya says that the painting is about what a lot of women who lose their husbands go through. The 44-year-old herself lost her spouse, film-maker Manish Acharya, in 2010. But the artist asserts that the other works at her upcoming solo exhibition, titled After The Fall, don't overtly address patriarchy. Rather, the show is about how people cope with death. "It deals with loss and how the mind finds ways to live a positive, meaningful life again. One can have two reactions after one is knocked down by life — stay down, or

gather courage, get up and go on. After the fall, comes the winter, and then spring and the summer. Nothing is really permanent," she says. This is Acharya's first solo show in India in eight years, and features the award-winning artist's comic-inspired portraits of women. "I have read comic books for as long as I can remember, Amar Chitra Katha, in particular. I think they were influential; it was where I learnt about Indian history and mythology in a fun way. It was only when I read some of them as an adult that I started questioning the implications of some of the stories that are part of Indian culture," she says. Although most of Acharya's paintings revolve around women, they don't idolise the beauty of the female form. Her protagonists are ordinary women across all ages, with imperfect figures and sagging breasts. The artist's major motif — wordless speech bubbles (sometimes featuring chattering teeth) that signify



PHOTO: ARIJIT SEN/HT

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DHRUVI ACHARYA, ARTIST

what these women are thinking but not saying out loud — is present in almost all the artwork on show. The mother of two is exploring "the female experience" through her more than 80 "subtly feminist" pieces,



Sari

one site-specific installation, and a 7x32 foot scroll. "I draw whatever is on my mind, which includes things I feel, think about, have read, overheard or experienced. I do think that women in general are not treated as they should be. Women are treated terribly at worst, or differently at best. I have yet to meet a woman in India who doesn't have a story to share about how she was treated or touched inappropriately," she says.

The installation, called What Once Was, Still Is But Isn't, features a bedroom that has furniture suspended in the air and drawings made over a period of 20 years covering the walls. "The idea was to create an ethereal space that is at once real, and not [real] — much like the early days of grief, when one feels one is living in a dream-like space," says the artist.