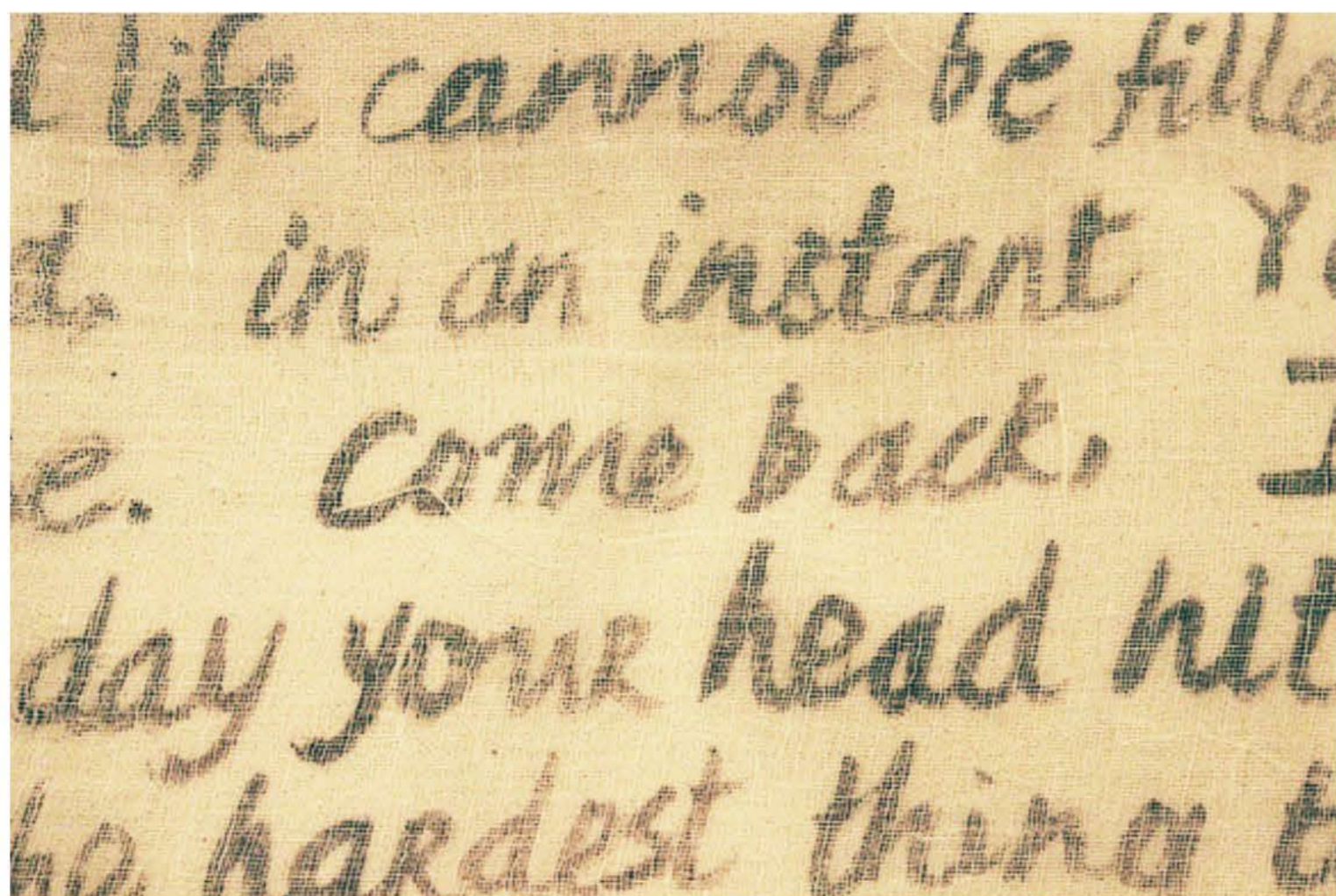




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art focus – after the fall – dhruvi acharya



Who of us has not felt the pain of losing a loved one—the acute heartache and a shattering of the self into a zillion pieces? Whether it be death, distance, or indifference, loss brings us to a version of reality smeared with the unknown, and a feeling of

loss brings us to a version of reality smeared with the unknown, and a feeling of disconnect with the present. And of all the wounds, the death of someone we love is the cruellest of all. Especially, when it sneaks into our life and takes us by surprise.

Dhruvi Acharya, Mumbai-based artist, lost her husband Manish Acharya, an actor and film-maker, in a freak accident in Matheran in 2010. He fell off his horse and died of brain haemorrhage.

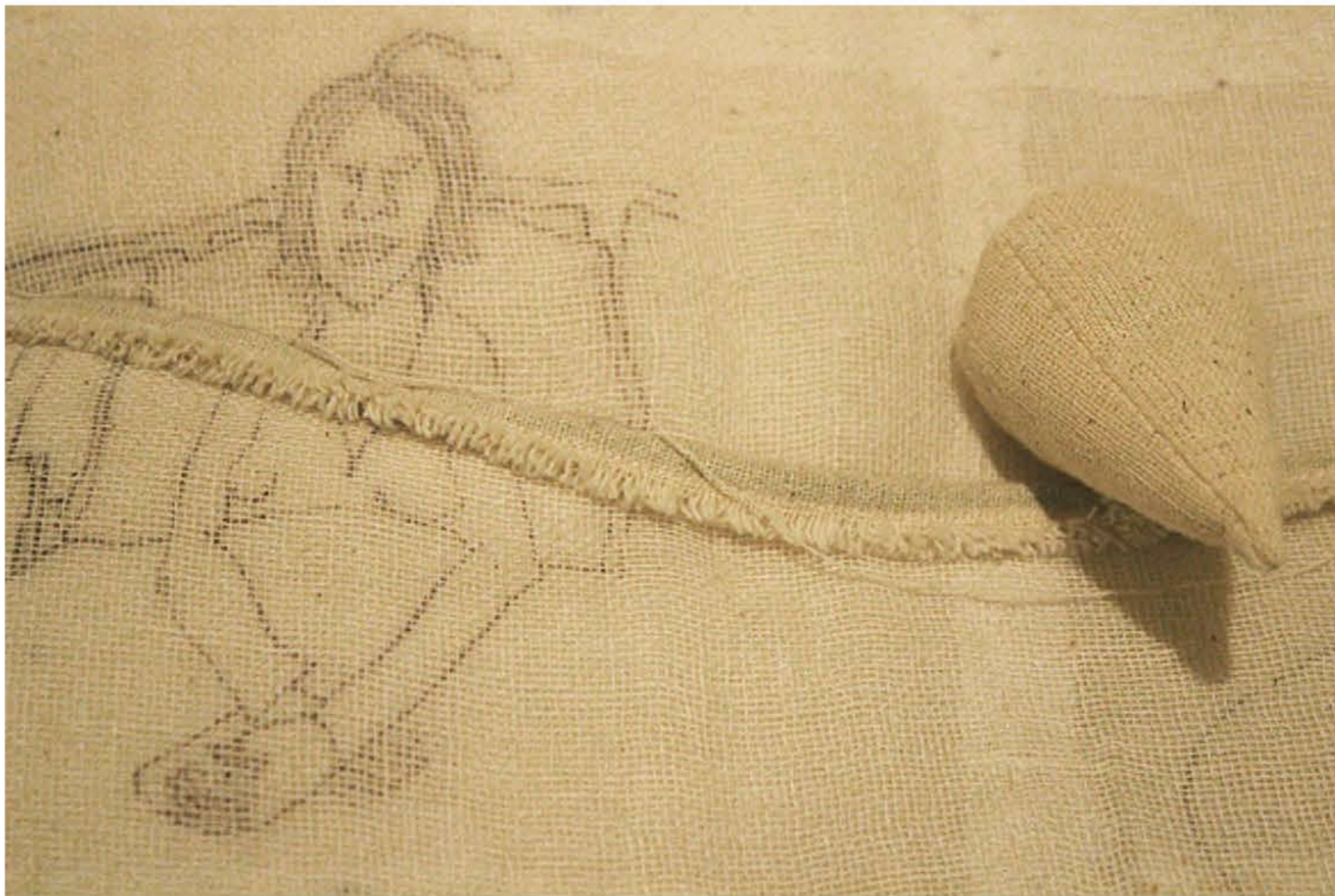
A soft sculpture monochromatic installation featuring a bedroom titled “What once was, still is, but isn’t ...” is her statement of her bereavement: a personal and poignant declaration. It is the central exhibit of her solo exhibition “After the Fall,” post a gap of eight years in India, currently running at the Chemould Prescott Road art gallery. Through the installation, Acharya also steps out for the first time from painting and delves into 3-dimensional art.

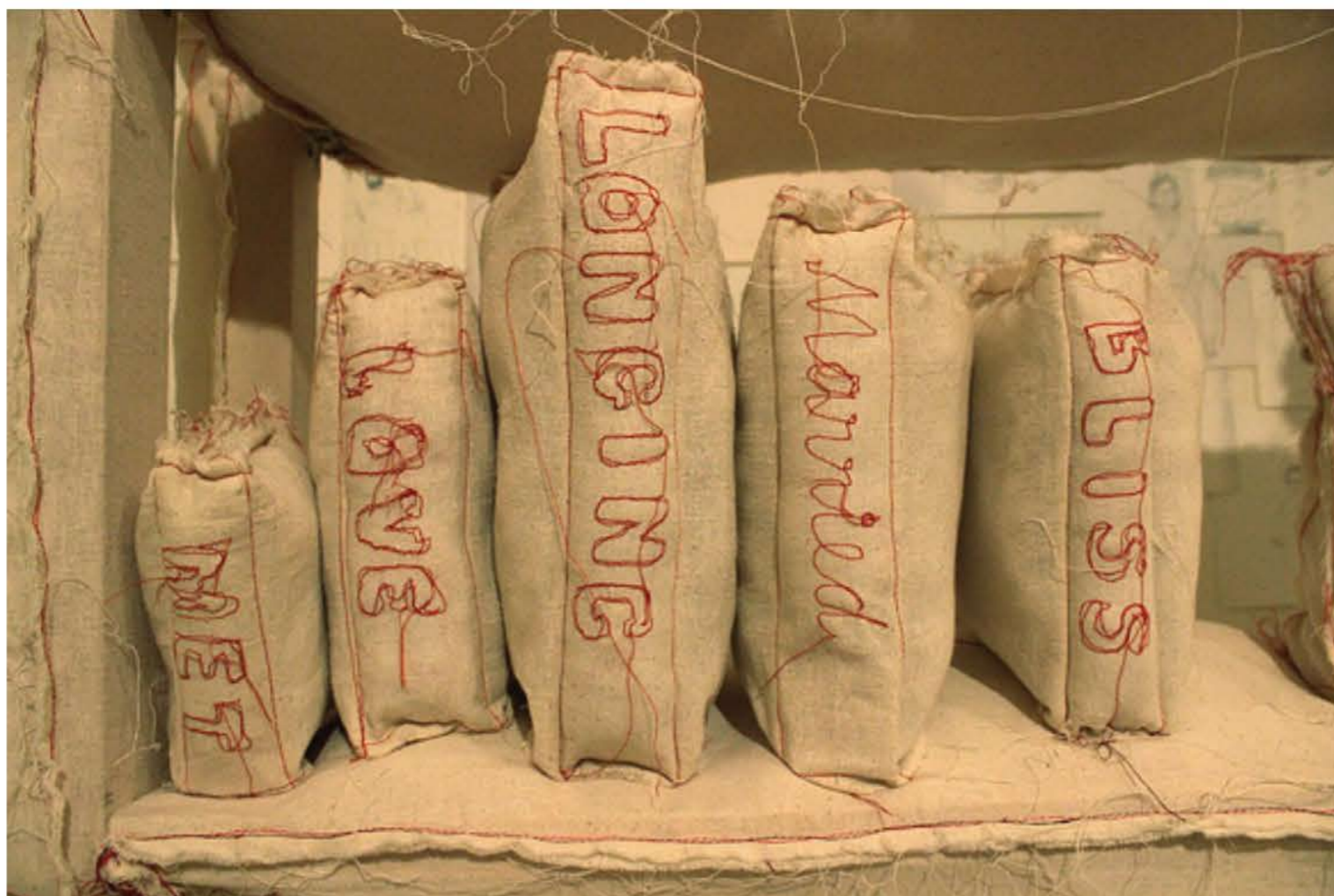
Life size furniture crafted in quilted linen and loosely embroidered in red thread hang suspended in the air inside the room. Drawings made over a period of two decades envelop the walls from ceiling to floor. Together, they recreate a dream-like space that is simultaneously real, and not real, much like the early days of grief when we experience that which is unfathomable, irreparable and unpredictable.

As I remove my sandals and step inside the installation with shoe covers on my feet, I feel I enter her space, and perhaps also mine, where loss lives. A framed image of Acharya and her husband hangs over the desk, milestones in their relationship are stacked in a book case, and the bed is covered with spikes on the now emptied side. Tear drops trail down the windows and bed spread. A circular rug on the quilted floor recounts her pain in first person when faced with her loss: the words “come back” a ubiquitous cry.



What once was, still is, but isn't ...: An installation of soft sculpture and drawings (done over 20 years); Above: Overview; Below: Details





The numb disoriented expanse of the installation spills out into the remaining exhibit area where I am now met with a lush world of grim, layered, synthetic polymer paintings, and pen and ink works, interspersed with watercolours.

Armed with an MFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Acharya's inimitable storytelling style here is replete with graphic novel inferences and comes from her love for Indian miniature paintings, comic books, and street art. Her years of work straddling India and America and their related popular culture further define her approach.

On these unprimed canvas and linen surfaces women are surrounded with empty speech bubbles and flowers with chattering teeth as they struggle to understand and accept a new reality. The oft repeated teeth, Acharya explains, are reminiscent of "the harsh but well-meaning words, thoughts and ideas which always return to "bite" you when you least expect it."

Each canvas seems to narrate its own version of how death feels to the surviving partner. I stand facing “Scream,” “Hibernate,” and the chaos of “Thoughts and Words” pouring out of the mind, each equally valid, and real. Meanwhile, women with bullet wounds on their hearts, continue with life, albeit in a pool of blood, in her 13 part “Bleed” series.

Amidst all the pain, a recurring lone peacock feather arises from her characters’ heads serving as a mark of power, energy, and light. It is a testimony to the ultimate victory of coming to terms with loss, and being able to move on. “Awakening,” a monumental canvas, brings this magnificently to the fore wherein the protagonist stares out at the viewer from the bottom right corner, almost seeming to say, “I am ready for tomorrow.”

“After the Fall” is perhaps best described as a cathartic experience, or so I felt. For the artist who narrates her journey, as well as the viewer who travels a mirrored voyage in their own lives, the works are therapeutic. And as a result of the interaction with each other through art, they both come out stronger.



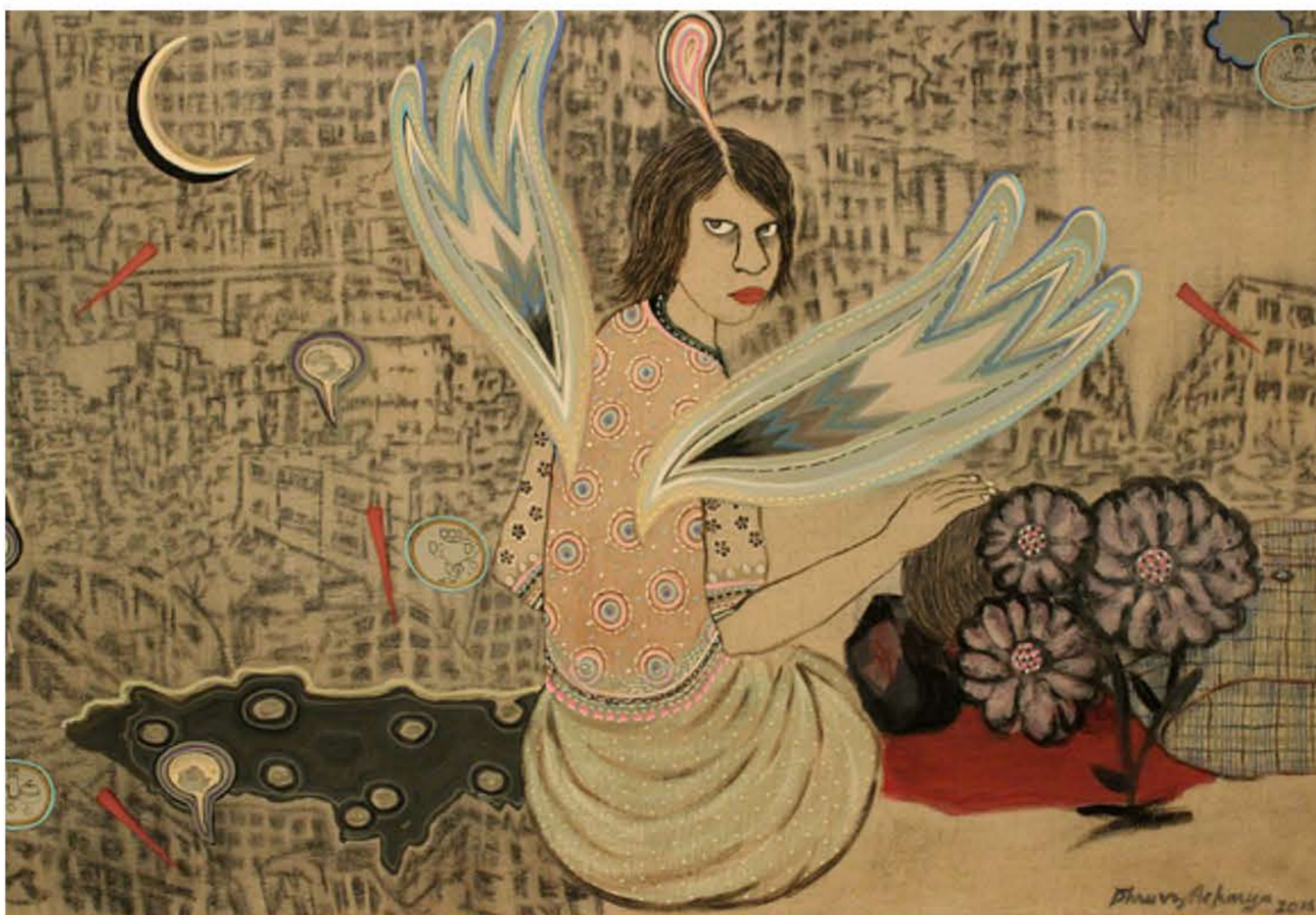
Life: Mixed media on canvas; 48 X 72 inches each (4 panels) [2016]



Departure: Charcoal, synthetic polymer paint on unprimed canvas; 48 X 72 inches [2015]



Thoughts III: Pastel, synthetic polymer paint on unprimed linen; 24 X 24 inches [2015]



Detail, Awakening: Charcoal, synthetic polymer paint on unprimed canvas; 48 X 108 inches [2016]

After the Fall by **Dhruvi Acharya** is on display at the **Chemould Prescott Road** art gallery, Fort, Mumbai, from 15 October to 19 November, 2016 from 11 am to 7 pm.