



figment

A Story Teller's Cellar

At a time when artists are, without hierarchy, employing every possible medium from pencil to pixel, contemporary painting has reinvented itself in dialogue with the changing crop of 'neo' practices and the shifting logic of the seasonal avant-garde. Traditional boundaries of representation and abstraction have been wrecked, letting in fresh possibilities of the decorative arts, kitsch, pop and folk art, illustration, mythology and other neglected mineshafts of the general culture like the world of caricatures. Artists today mix the straightforward with the ironic, ironing out high art infections with low art remedies. Upper-case themes find lower-case renditions making much of the art fat-free, efficacious, provocative and pleasurable.

Dhruvi Acharya, like many young artists of her generation, remains alert to the manifold choices available to a contemporary artist. If the self engrossed tone and content of her work, which traffic in broad themes of introspection and self-analysis, at times stand the risk of dipping into melancholia; the homogenous content is cleverly arm-twisted by a refreshing range of stylistic references and demystifying methods. The use of unlikely, bright, candy colours to explore sepia-toned, contemplative themes is one such departure from the conventional argot of the atelier. Acharya's graceful paintings bear affinity with sources as diverse as the sexually and politically charged paintings of Lari Pittman, the elegant folios of the Indian miniatures, the florid-morbid imagery of Frida Kahlo, the goofy grin-girls of Takashi Murakami and the baroque surfaces of Gustav Klimt and other Jugendstil practitioners. She consciously skips the mimetic possibilities of representational painting, and instead settles for a flat and stylized rendition; her unique, painterly language becomes a rich dialect of sources spread across historical time and geographical locations.

Day Dreamer's Nightmare

Dhruvi Acharya's recent suite of drawings and paintings collectively titled 'Figment' foregrounds the solitary female figure. Such existentialist isolation of the figure is a sharp departure from the tenor of her previous works where the paintings were often teeming with people. Playing the protagonist, they appear in several avatars: the diminutive girl child, the burdened mother, the reluctant poetess or the urban goddess in disguise. However, the one common element they all seem to share is that they attempt to communicate with their viewer, a complex psychodrama in mute. The hi-pitch of happiness or the dipped tone of distress, are wired through tight-lipped commentaries; the paintings appear like hard copies of a silent soliloquy.

In Acharya's oeuvre, the vacant postures and deadpan gestures of the tragedienne/ comedienne somehow seem to convey labyrinthine stories that are delivered through well considered silences and ellipses. Her taciturn figures, often bearing empty speech bubbles, are surrounded by an earsplitting concentration of motifs and metaphors that form the codified proscenium within which the women conduct their low intensity performance. The brimming backdrops are packed to carrying capacity; images are closely juxtaposed or oftentimes overlaid like a translucent palimpsest leading to a synchronic build up of stories.

The sleek surfaces offer bleak panoramas throwing up a range of varied objects or images: sharp alligator clips, carnivorous foliage, paper clouds dripping teardrops, et cetera. This chock-a-block repetition of images throughout her paintings, make them appear like anecdotes where each line is loaded with alliterations. The female figure becomes the seed around which Acharya chooses to harvest her discreetly feminine fables of the futility and fatality of human experience, notes on missed carnivals and tales of daily rituals.

Even though the formal structure and painterly ciphers are suspended in a complex rhizome-like network, the overall effect is effervescent and deliberately 'lite'. There's nothing explicit about Acharya's pictures and the imagery remains intentionally inadmissible. However it is through sheer pictorial inventiveness and visual persuasion that she provokes her viewers to play detective and speculate about the history and circumstances these enigmatic figures may inhabit. Going by their attire the women in Acharya's work appear urban and would share the same generation as her. This perhaps is a conscious choice as it compels the viewer to think of them as self-images or as tangential alter egos. What is interesting is that Acharya generates a sense of the autobiographical without having to precisely spell out the self-image with direct suggestions. Her narratives of family life and the surface undulations of relationships are conveyed without the prosaic domestic moment becoming the key reference document of her work. Even in works such as 'Paint', where the 'woman as artist' is seen blankly staring at an empty canvas, or in another instance such as the painting titled 'Mother', it is the universal tales of the creative act or notions of maternal sacrifice that take precedence over the fact that Dhruvi's own life is a consistent jugglery of her roles as mother and artist; as someone trying to inhabit the divide between the domestic and the fantastic.

Even as they appear like tender narratives of female subjectivity, the drawings and paintings in 'Figment' are not an overt or covert commentary on gender disparity and no opinion on women's rights are registered here. Delivered through calculated doses of the burlesque, the grotesque and the arabesque, these are stories of each human being caught between the daydream of hope and the nightmare of reality.

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