

# The cartoons are on canvas

*Dhruvi Acharya's work is a mix of fear, wit and motherhood*

Rukhmini Punoose

**T**O INHABIT Dhruvi Acharya's world is to live in a space that is truest to your subconscious self. For all her thoughts, memories, fears and observations flow freely from her mind onto the canvas, without being censored. This stream-of-consciousness narrative has a healthy sprinkling of self-deprecation and wry humour. Acharya, 34, is as easily amused by the world around her as she is about the magical, make-believe universe her little sons create when they slip in and out of playing characters like Batman, aliens or Hanuman.

As Acharya's three and five-year-old boys are growing, she watches them with a mixture of fascination and fear. The unspoken fears of a mother occasionally creep into her canvas, with rape, child abuse and violence brooding in the backdrop as innocent games are played in the foreground.

Unlike her women characters, who are never masked, her children inhabit her spaces with paper bags over their head. "I'm not sure I understand the male world and I can only represent it from the outside. Even though they're my own children, it's impossible to know what they are really thinking the way you'd know what's happening in your own head," she says.

Cartoonish though her protagonists seem, with their curiously twisted features, the speech bubbles that hover over them are often empty. The words lie outside them, often covering the entire background of the canvas. "The bubbles symbolise the character's emotions, and are not there to provide information," she says. Which explains why they sometimes look buoyant and other times droop in exhaustion.

Her animated figures wear richly textured clothing (she admits she's fascinated by Indian textiles) and her deftness with acrylic is keenly illustrated in her ability to apply layer after layer of paint, making



On the fast track (left) is a parody of the middle-age effect on the body; The multi-armed mass in *Menace* (bottom left) indicates the fears of a mother that her children could be victims of rape or abuse; *Float* (bottom centre) depicts the ability to rise above the negative elements that bog you down; *LOC* is about the daily negotiations between parents and children on what is permissible



muslin actually look like muslin—floaty, translucent and ethereal.

This gold medallist in the applied arts from the Sophia Polytechnic College moved back to Mumbai two years ago from the US. She spent several years there, first completing her Masters under the tutelage

of the illustrious artist Grace Hartigan and then living with her husband in New York. While she has showed several times in the US, her show titled, two plus two equals at Chemould, is her third solo show in Mumbai.

The exhibition will be on till October 4, 2006