

# Breathe easy

Dhruvi Acharya's latest solo is a dark, humorous take on the depleting natural resources



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**D**HRUVI Acharya's simple and smart appearance is quite in contrast to her newest large frames of canvases. She arrives at the Chemould art gallery dressed in black. Her only indulgence—a curtain of thick hair that she hides behind even during the photo-shoot. "I am camera shy," confesses Dhruvi Acharya. "When my husband Manish (Acharya) offered me a cameo in *Loins of Punjab Presents* I said no," says the artist, whose solo at Chemould Prescott opens on August 6.

This is Acharya's third solo with Shireen Gandhi and this time the painter has returned to larger canvases. The intimate 2X4 works of Acharya, who recently gave birth to her second child, give way to a blockbuster show with her largest work measuring 7X14 feet—a new dimension that has her bending over canvases twice her size as she layers it with paint. A whole set of new stories replace her earlier witty

works where she critiqued the depiction of women in mythological stories of *Amar Chitra Katha*. She shifts her focus to urban angst, but women still continue to be her protagonists.

A natty Apple laptop sits on the coffee table between us as we settle down for a cuppa and brownies at Trafford Court's Sleight of Hand. There we catch up on life and her upcoming solo *One Life on Earth*. "The idea for this show came to me when I was training for the marathon, I realised that I was breathless and got what was closed to an asthma attack. It set me thinking, one day the air we breathe may not be safe, like the water we drink and we may have to buy our own oxygen packs in order to survive," says Acharya, pointing out that oxygen bars in metros are an indication of things to come.

Pushing this idea to a surreal and whimsical level, this one-time student of arts

from the Maryland University creates a world where women grow flowers on their body. They sell it to others who store them in a back pack that's used to make oxygen. "I had a lot of fun creating fake ads for the products that we may need in order to keep breathing safe air. It brought to fore my skills as a graphic artist and I constantly punned on corporates selling us what should be freely available in nature," says Acharya, whose canvas *Air Fair* is the ultimate take on corporatisation—the haves and the have-nots jostle for a right to clean up the air.

A vegetarian who believes in conserving, recycling and is against the use of leather and fur, Dhruvi believes that people should be rewarded for consuming less. "I try not to use products that exhaust our already depleting environment," says the pro-green gal.

The peacenik also propagates, through

her canvases with anti-war statements. We see a woman, mutated by a radioactive air, floating through a sea of weaponry and a military chopper that daunts her flight. Using her trademark comic blurbs and sound effects like boom and bam, the artist creates a comic fiction that is dark and witty.

The solo shows at Delhi's Nature Mort in October and travels to New York later. "My hands are full, but I like to work at my own pace. I support art fairs and auction houses but I never let them tell me what to paint and how fast," she grins, draining her cup and refreshed by the prospect of the opening night in August.

## ON HER PEDESTAL

- Lari Pittman, USA
- Takashi Murakami, Japan
- Julie Meheretu, Ethiopia
- Margaret Kilgallen, USA
- Os Gemenos, Brazil