

Artist documents her dual identity

■ **Exhibit:** *Dhruvi Acharya's paintings capture her life in both India and the United States.*

By GLENN MCNATT
SUN ART CRITIC



Blurry: Barbara Pollack portrays in her photos the idea that our knowledge of others is limited.

In the luminous paintings of 29-year-old Indian artist Dhruvi Acharya, cartoon-like thought bubbles rise from the heads of people and streams of arrows issue from their mouths.

These graphic references to the processes of speech and communication, which in Acharya's art are a source of mystery as well as of clarity in human interaction, seem as much the subject of the artist's paintings as the enchantingly drawn figures and objects they contain.

Acharya's work, at the Gomez Gallery through Feb. 3, is a visual and emotional diary of her dual life in India and the United States, an allegorical arena in which ancient tradition confronts

contemporary consumer society.

The result is an art composed of equal parts myth and pop culture, sacred and secular icons through which all the contradictions that being an Indian-American implies are given lyrical, symbolic expression through line, color and pattern on the painted surface.

"Dharamsala," for example, is a large, 6-foot-square painting that recalls a recent visit by the artist to India during [See Art, 5E]

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which she heard a talk given by the Dalai Lama.

The central figure is a woman shown floating above a glowing cloud that appears full of stylized eyes. Below, drops of rain or tears seem to descend. Interestingly, the eyes of the female itself have no pupils. Her shirt is also covered with eye motifs, and she appears to be holding papers or books of some sort in her left hand, while her right hand grasps a pen or pencil.

Acharya has said that among her sources of inspiration are Indian miniature painting, contemporary comic books and American abstract-expressionist painting of the 1950s. She uses thin layers of color to reflect moods, express feelings and to depict the layering of memories that constitute our experience of present and past.

"Through my work I continue to learn about myself, and this enables me to gain a deeper understanding of others," she says.

"I hope that the specifics of the personal stories and meaning of each of my images will become unimportant when viewed, and all that is felt and remembered is the universality of the human experience."

Gomez Gallery is at 3600 Clipper Mill Road, Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Call 410-662-9510.

and bone, fiber and liquids — and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."

Pollack's pictures present her intimates as Ellisonian spooks and Hollywood ectoplasms — spectral human presences whom even those closest to them refuse to see, and who might well claim, as did Ellison's unhappy protagonist in the conclusion of the book: "Who knows but that on the lower frequencies, I speak for you as well?"

Galerie Françoise et Ses Freres is in Greenspring Station, 2630 W. Joppa Road in Lutherville. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday noon to 4 p.m. Call 410-337-ARTS.

Surrealist by chance

It is said that though Einstein made major contributions to the development of modern quantum theory, till the end of his days the great physicist refused to accept the implications of its laws.

"God does not play dice with the universe," he replied famously to the idea that, on the smallest scale, the behavior of matter and energy are completely governed by chance.



Allegory: Dhruvi Acharya's "Birth" painting will be featured at the Gomez Gallery through Feb. 3.

Tassin's series of six large earthworm drawings, for example, were made by dipping the wriggling creatures in food color inks and placing them on large sheets of paper, where they crawled around, leaving behind oddly expressive imprints of their progress. (The worms were not harmed in the process.)

In another series, Tassin coated brick-size blocks of wood with a white adhesive substance and placed them on the ground in a wooded area.

Leaves, bits of dust and other

debris that fell on the blocks stuck fast to the adhesive; when the blocks were organized into a grid for display on the gallery wall, the patterns that emerged took on the quality of an organically generated abstraction reminiscent of a 1950s-style "all-over" painting.

One may object that Tassin's constructions aren't really artworks at all, because they unfold independently of any intent on the part of the artist. Underlying such objections, however, is the tacit assumption that an artwork must reflect some definite intent, a concept that really only has meaning in relation to its opposite, that of chance occurrence.

It's interesting that for all the mathematical progress that has occurred in the field of probability and statistics, science still hasn't any more clue to what chance "really" is than it does of the nature of light or gravity, for instance.

The idea of artistic "intention" no doubt has its roots in the myth of a Divine Creator, who calls into being a universe operating according to laws he or she has ordained.

Modern quantum theory, however, suggests that our knowledge of those "laws" is at best conditional, and that the hand of the Creator, if he or she exists at all, is destined always to remain hidden behind an impenetrable veil of probabilities. Tassin's art may be interpreted as simply one artist's attempt to make that veil visible.

The Fells Point Creative Alliance Gallery is at 413 S. Conkling St. in the Highlandtown section of Baltimore. Hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 410-276-1651.