

KARIN MILLER-LEWIS LOOKS AT HOW
DHRUVI ACHARYA DEPICTS PENSIVE
WOMEN AND EXPLORES THEIR
BESIEGED MINDSCAPES

LIVING WITH ONE'S THOUGHTS



Dhruvi Acharya. *Yap-yap* Acrylic on panel
6" x 6"



Dhruvi Acharya. *Choices* Acrylic on panel
12" x 12"



Dhruvi Acharya. *Paint* Acrylic on panel
48" x 48"



Dhruvi Acharya. *Flower Thought*. Acrylic on
panel. 30" x 30".

HARVEY PEKAR, THE AMERICAN UNDERGROUND COMIC ARTIST, ONCE SAID, "I do not have it a lot worse than most people, but I pity myself more." He knew that, with discipline, self-pity yields great material for art. The works in *Figment*, an exhibition of Dhruvi Acharya's new paintings, exhibited at Gallery Chemould, Mumbai, from the 16th of November to the 4th of December, mine the same rich vein. Combining deadpan caricature and sensuous ornamentation (inspired by Indian classical painting traditions), Acharya makes images that address her fears and frustrations.

Burgeoning ideas are portrayed as delicate buds in *Seeds*, which depicts a state of meditative solitude. Elsewhere, however, as she gets into an internal dialogue with herself, the artist feels besieged: in *Voices*, *Yap-yap* and *Connect*, chattering jaws are seen assaulting an isolated female figure. *Choices* presents a pair of thought-bubbles hovering competitively above a two-headed woman: the divided self, Acharya seems to imply, is as vulnerable to intimidation from within as without.

Creating art is no less anxious a contest. In *Paint*, an artist confronts a blank canvas. She wears a stoic expression as blue and grey colour-cells rampage overhead like toddlers refusing to be corralled during storytime. A backdrop of scratchy doodles invokes a barrage of half-formed ideas and second thoughts; they seem to suggest that her wait for clarity, for inspiration, will be a long one. The girl in *Flower Thought* pokes at her blossoming thought-balloon as if to test it to see whether it will hold water. In *Hot Air*, the female protagonist strokes her belly, which is as bloated as the distended bellies of the enlightened mystics shown floating around her. Her disenchanted glower perhaps conveys a skepticism for the proposition that one can transcend oneself through art.

Acharya's formal strategies and imagery are purposefully simple, even reductive. Although some paintings suffer from worn imagery and a monotonous emotional atmosphere (root-balled trees make a tired complaint about dislocation in *Tree*, for instance), the best works aim for animation and humour through the interplay of simple binaries. Acharya builds her smooth surfaces out of matte and glossy layers of paint. The contrasting textures seem to make the foregrounded figures and the background patterns exchange places. Most fundamentally, her works intertwine the urge for the soothing beauty of ornamentation with the sharp disabusing wit of popular graphic arts. The odd, lively harmonies that result, provide more than a wry grouching about intransigent emotions. Whatever her self-doubts, Acharya's pictures affirm her conviction that art remains a fine way to come to terms with the limits of one's obsessive desires. 