

SOFT



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A “soft sculptural bedroom installation” by Dbruvi Acharya goes on show at Nature Morte in New Delhi this month. In her own words, the artist unpacks the visceral human experience of love, loss and life

Living with death is an odd experience. Awareness of the physical non-existence of a loved one colours almost every experience. One can accept and adjust, but the void remains.

And it is funny how the human mind adapts to living with this lacuna. Sometimes the mind understands, and sometimes it plays tricks: the past, present and future merge in different ways; dreams, nightmares and reality become interchangeable.

My work dwells on this alternate reality and makes visible the negotiations that take place in one’s mind in order to live. The soft sculptural bedroom installation ‘what was, still is, but isn’t...’ is a contemplation on loss, love, longing and memories. This is a room you can walk into, with walls covered with hundreds of drawings from my drawing books from the last 20 years and the floor covered with soft mattresses. The ‘floating’ furniture is hand-stitched from cotton fabric or *kora kapda*, made at three quarters of human scale. The bed has a bedcover with drawings of memories, with one-half covered in small cones symbolizing thorns. The bookshelf has 16 books, each one with a title encapsulating each of the 16 years my late husband and I were married, as well as a fabric box that replaces the stolen silver box that once held precious ashes.

The paintings in my solo show ‘Permeated Absence’ mull over the awareness of the physical absence of a loved one, symbolized by drawings of memories, by thought bubbles left vacant or paint marks representing emotions. The paintings also address the gnawing awareness of one’s own mortality, and the ‘joys’ of navigating this life and world in a middle-aged female body, with the rising awareness of the ageing body and failing health. The paintings also bring to attention the objectification of women, and expectations placed on how they must look.

When the works are viewed, I hope the specifics of the stories and the meaning of each image become unimportant, and all that is felt and remembered is the universality of the human experience. ◆

Permeated Absence, solo show by Dbruvi Acharya is at Nature Morte, New Delhi, from 11 January to 8 February 2020.











Did you feel it? Did you
feel the rock As your lovely head hit
(It? Hit it so hard... did it hurt? Was the pain
intense? Sharp? Blunt? Or was the shock so great You
felt no pain? Did you fall off the horse because the saddle
broke? The horse jumped? You lost your balance? A branch hit your
head? But you know? Know you were dying? Or were you unconscious
The moments before you died? I hope so. Would you be living if? "Manish is
hurt" I rushed to you - for half an hour I ran, then a cure for an hour "How is he?"
A shade of the head saying "no" I said "he died?" And my mind went blank. But for a
flash of moment "no" me!! Me in white A speck of white in a room of dark. I didn't
understand "at last" I did I turned back physically I wanted to turn back time
"Do you want to go outside?" "No" "Did it really happen?" "Yes" "Did he really die?" "Yes."
"He shouldn't have died, no?" "No" "It shouldn't have happened, no?" "No" It's all over now
I thought. I just sat there. My mind numb with shock. I didn't cry I didn't understand.
"I want to see him." "Are you sure?" "I want to see him." I marched, so some one led. I saw you
under a white sheet. I lifted it. I saw your face. Covered in blood. "I want to clean him."
"Why don't we go sit outside?" "I want to clean him" I wiped the blood off your face. But your
head. Your head kept bleeding. Into a bucket. Placed under the stretcher. I kissed your face
I kissed your lips. You were still warm. You looked like you... You sleeping. I sat by your side
I want your hand. Somehow understood it was for the last time. I couldn't let go. I knew
I could spend my life. In that room with you. I didn't think of our boys. I didn't think of
anything. I just sat there. Not knowing. What had hit me. When your head hit that rock
A minute. An hour. A day at a time. I manage to pass time in bits and pieces. I gather
bit and pieces of my shattered heart. And life. I don't think of the future. For
16 years. you were the love of my life. 7 days after we met, you asked me to
marry you. 2 months later. I agreed over the phone. Together we studied,
had children, traveled, worked, lived and loved. The void your death
has left in my heart and life cannot be filled. If I could die
instead of you I would. In an instant. You know that is true
Come back. Please. Come back. I know what has
hit me. The day your head hit the rock
& it is the hardest thing to bear.