

Dhruvi Acharya and the art of dealing with loss



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New Delhi, Jan 10 (IANS) The works are in different stages of being mounted. Even as the paintings with multiple layers start occupying their destined spaces on the walls, it's hard not to miss the bubbles and the texts on different canvasses, the figurative language and the humour. And yes, a soft sculptural installation, which was first shown at Chemould Prescott Road in Mumbai in 2016 in her solo exhibition titled "After the Fall".

Artist Dhruvi Acharya, whose show "Permeated Absence" gets set to open at Nature Morte in the national capital on January 13, makes an entrance. "Imagine, I just passed the gallery, but now I am here," she laughs.

She isn't dressed wearing enough woollens for this sunless Delhi winter, but she says these are the only clothes she is carrying.

This Mumbai-based artist did not really plan "Permeated Absence". She works, and then notices a thread emerging and running which essentially becomes the "foundation".

While her latest show is about mortality, dealing with loss and the human body -- in terms of ageing and then it goes back to an important area, the autonomy of the female body -- she adds, "There are so many diktats about how the female body should behave. A lot of those things have also become part of the show."

Acharya, who lost her husband several years back in an accident, admits that the works are also about when one lives with absence as a daily thing. "That runs through me and my work. That's the thread running through the show and that's from where the title emerged."

Talk to her about the strong autobiographical elements in both this and her earlier show, and she asserts, "Yes, the last one was about a particular loss. One notices the frailty of the human body as years pass by. I am 48 now and I can already feel the changes."

Acharya, who migrated to the US after her marriage and received an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) degree from the prestigious Hoffberger School of Painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), admits that the distance from India was instrumental in giving her a new perspective.

"I may love several aspects of Indian culture, but there are many which don't really make you feel proud. Of course, there are things that you crave for about home when you are away. However, noticing some aspects of an alien culture, you tend to compare," she says.

The artist may have been drawing ever since she was a child, but that doesn't mean she wanted to be a career artist.

"I found immense solace and joy in it. Initially, the plan was that I would do graphic painting for three days a week to earn some money and devote rest of the time to painting. However, I was lucky to be picked up by a gallery soon after graduate school, and didn't really have to make wedding cards," Acharya says.

Stressing that the dark humour and irony one witnesses in her now come naturally to her, Acharya remembers her drawings from two decades back -- full of angst and pathos.

"But over the years, you realise that a lot of things can be said in an easier to digest way, and humour can really facilitate that. Of course, everything is not funny, but when it is deeply personal, you earn the right to adopt that perspective.

"Talking to people who have gone through devastating losses, you realise the way to summon that human strength, which comes from looking at it from a distance. Don't some people write books...," she says.

Whatever Acharya makes emerges from drawing. She prefers to just sit down and do that, so that whatever is in her mind comes about.

"Sometimes you do 50 drawings and there may be only three or four that are good enough to have the potential to become a painting. I have so many drawing books going on. However, what is most important is the fact that once the painting starts, not just visually, but conceptually too everything might change completely," Acharya says.

Animation is next on her agenda, something she studied and enjoyed during her years at Sophia College for Women. "That time, everything was hand-drawn. Now I can't wait to create my own 3D works," she says.

By now, most of the works are on the walls. All set to relate to the losses of those will look at them.

--IANS

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