

QZ&A

An Indian artist is expressing the fears and frustrations of the pandemic in her paintings

May 15, 2020



By **Manavi Kapur**
Culture and lifestyle reporter



Fatigue.

FROM OUR OBSESSION

Being Human

We've never been as connected, or as isolated.

There is nothing normal about a global pandemic.

As economies stutter, lives come to a halt, and people lose loved ones, all notions of creativity and productivity completely transform. For some, the tragedy unfolding all around is paralysing, but many artists in India and the world have found a channel for this pandemic in their work.

Mumbai-based artist Dhruvi Acharya has not only found solace in her art, but also a way to depict the altered worldview during and after Covid-19. Her watercolour on paper paintings reflect a socially distant and masked human existence, the courage of healthcare workers, and the travails of migrant labour. This fits well within the 49-year-old's oeuvre of layered, psychologically complex narratives, with a touch of dark

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In an interview with Quartz, Acharya explains how the pandemic guides her most recent work, and the impact it would leave on art and artists. Edited excerpts:

What was the thought behind your latest works inspired by the coronavirus pandemic?



These works are a visual interpretation of my own thoughts and fears.



Like everyone else living through this pandemic, there are many thoughts, fears and feelings of appreciation in my mind. When I begin to make a watercolour, I do not know what I am going to paint about—it is more of an intuitive process—I just bring my brush to paper and start making an image and then I respond to what is on the paper, and a sort of narrative slowly develops in the painting. The works I have made have been about the isolation we all experienced due to social distancing, the fears of the virus, the breathlessness associated with the disease, the household chores, the bravery of doctors, the plight of the daily wage workers, and so on.

Did you draw particular inspiration from previous artworks that emerged from a national and global crisis?

Not really. I mean, of course, I have seen and studied the works of art made during or about periods of war and disease in human history. But these works are a visual interpretation of my own thoughts and fears.



DHRUVI ACHARYA

Warriors.

Did you struggle with the creative process, given that a crisis like this can often paralyse people with fear and anxiety?

For me personally, art has always been a source of solace, comfort, inspiration and a way to gain perspective during times of distress. I firmly believe in the power of art—be it music, films, poetry and literature, dance and drama, and the visual arts. I know that along with very loving family and friends, it was art that others had made and that I eventually got back to making, that helped me come to terms with my husband's untimely death. So, during this pandemic and the mandatory social distancing, painting was the only thing that helped me somewhat make sense of what was happening.



A sea of isolation.

World War II led to a significantly altered worldview and birthed an entire art and literary movement. Do you think the coronavirus pandemic would do the same?

Yes, I do think this experience of living through this pandemic will change humans in terms of how we live, think, view the world, and the art we make.

What will this altered world that is fast becoming a reality look like?

Everything is different, right now, from the life we were used to. Our social interactions, our society as a whole is changing. I don't know how exactly things will play out—no one really does. But once we have a vaccine and gain immunity to this virus, my hope is that we humans will change our ways.

I hope we all understand we need to prioritise health, family, the lives of other creatures, nature, science, and education above weapons, war, religious fanaticism, mindless development, and production. And I hope we will pay heed to scientists' warnings about the climate change that will affect all of humanity and learn to value our earth, or else we will keep suffering in a constant cycle of disasters and diseases.

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Dhruvi Acharya
2020

DHRUVI ACHARYA

Of men, women, and masks.