

The unbearable lightness of moksha

Artist Jenny Bhatt's new work attempts to explore the workings of an urban mind

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We can rest assured that when Gautam Buddha attained salvation under the Bodhi tree over 2,000 years ago, he wasn't burdened with the number of likes mounting on his Instagram feed. Centuries later, attaining even a semblance of moksha in everyday life seems impossible, since our dependency on the digital world makes it harder. For graphic designer turned artist, Jenny Bhatt, the influence of pop culture and media that we're constantly battling with to achieve validation, has prompted a new show titled *Swimming in the Subconscious*. The exhibition is the 18th episode in her long-existing series, named MokshaShots that is based on anything that one finds fulfilling whether it's art, music, a vacation, a muffin, or even a tequila shot.

With brightly coloured paintings that float around the canvas like random thoughts in a pool, Bhatt's artworks look a lot like abstract stills from a Roald Dahl novel. Funky, and bursting with energy. She describes them as pop surreal abstractions that explore subconscious states, often using digital imagery that we come across everyday. From a foetus drinking, what the artist calls, a mokshashot, and replacing the umbilical chord for a charging plug, to saffron cows that have taken political centre stage, Bhatt is making a comment on the false complexities of an urban world. "The series is an attempt to mirror one's own mind through dream imagery. We're constantly absorbing things that we aren't aware of," Bhatt explains in a telephonic interview. "It's like putting together scenes that aren't unfamiliar, but cannot be explained through words," she elaborates.

The artist claims that her work is a mix of pop art, pop culture, eastern philosophy and spirituality, alternative healing practices, quantum physics and psychedelia. When asked how she manages to tie-in so many different elements in a singular series, Bhatt explains how her understanding of colour, particle physics and Hindu and Buddhist texts are not all that different. "I soon realised that

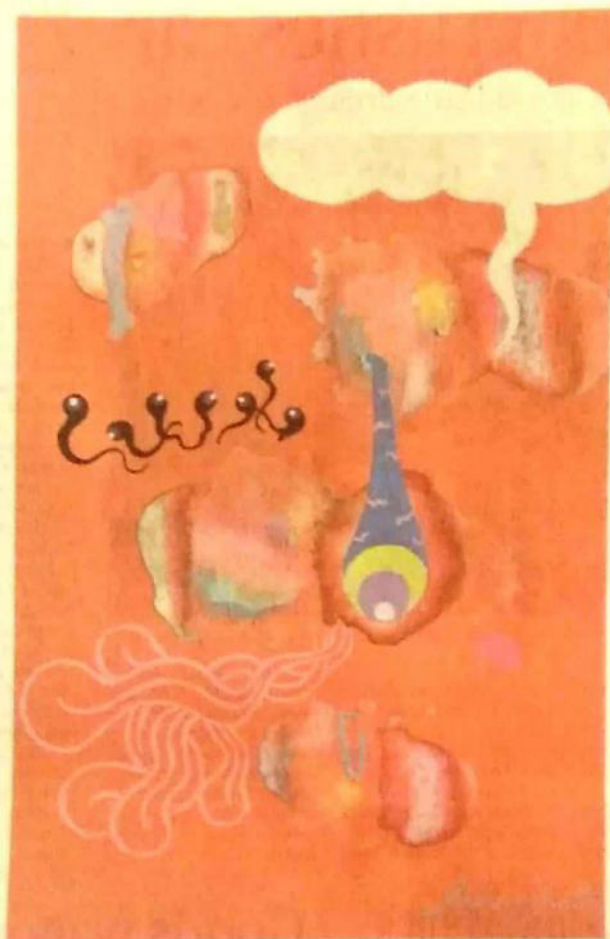


JENNY BHATT
Graphic designer turned artist

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both (Quantum Theory and the religious texts) said the same thing - essentially, that all matter is energy and all energy is vibration. And after all, what is colour, if not vibration?" she elucidates.

Over the years, Bhatt's work has shifted from surrealism to abstraction and gradually transformed into pop art. She writes about how her stint at an advertising agency helped in understanding the influence of pop art while designing apparel, accessories, furniture and products. Her style branched out to include philosophy and colour therapy after her



Driven by pop culture: (Left to right) Graphic designer turned artist, Jenny Bhatt: Fluid Mind Sand Mind Map 15 from her show *Swimming in the Subconscious*. •COURTESY JENNY BHATT

mother fell severely ill. Bhatt then began using alternative forms of treatment when medicine failed.

"I began exploring the healing potential of colour, [and] my abstract works became very vibrant. I began to use colour in its most saturated form," she writes on her website. This is apparent in the works in her current show, some of which resemble a Rorschach test. Bhatt's use of colour is fitting for a show that explores the workings of a subconscious mind,

and grapples with meditative states, memory and nostalgia.

The show extends Bhatt's narrative on the previously mentioned MokshaShots which used satirical humour to comment on social and cultural practices. The cheeky-but-slightly-overdone series began in 2009, and has now culminated into a comic book that's being launched alongside her ongoing exhibition. Featuring characters like MokshaBty, the 'consumer goddess', MokshaBrat, who is

politically incorrect, and MokshaBum, the thinker and armchair philosopher, Bhatt talks about having to be a closet feminist, and how we worship "dark-skinned, ferocious looking goddesses," but also buy fairness creams. She laughs and explains how humour is a way to say things that people might not accept otherwise.

Having been influenced by contemporary artist, Yayoi Kusama, and Mariko Mori, surrealist author, Takashi Murakami, and artist and landscape

architect, Isamu Noguchi, Bhatt's own style is a marriage of the everyday, and the abstract. Unlike many artists who might interpret the mind as a dark web of mystery, Bhatt's take on it is colourful, and vibrant. Like she explains, we might not be able to attain salvation in this lifetime, but what's stopping us from having a glimpse of what it might look like?

Swimming in the Subconscious is on-going at Jehangir Art Gallery, Kala Ghoda, until December 11