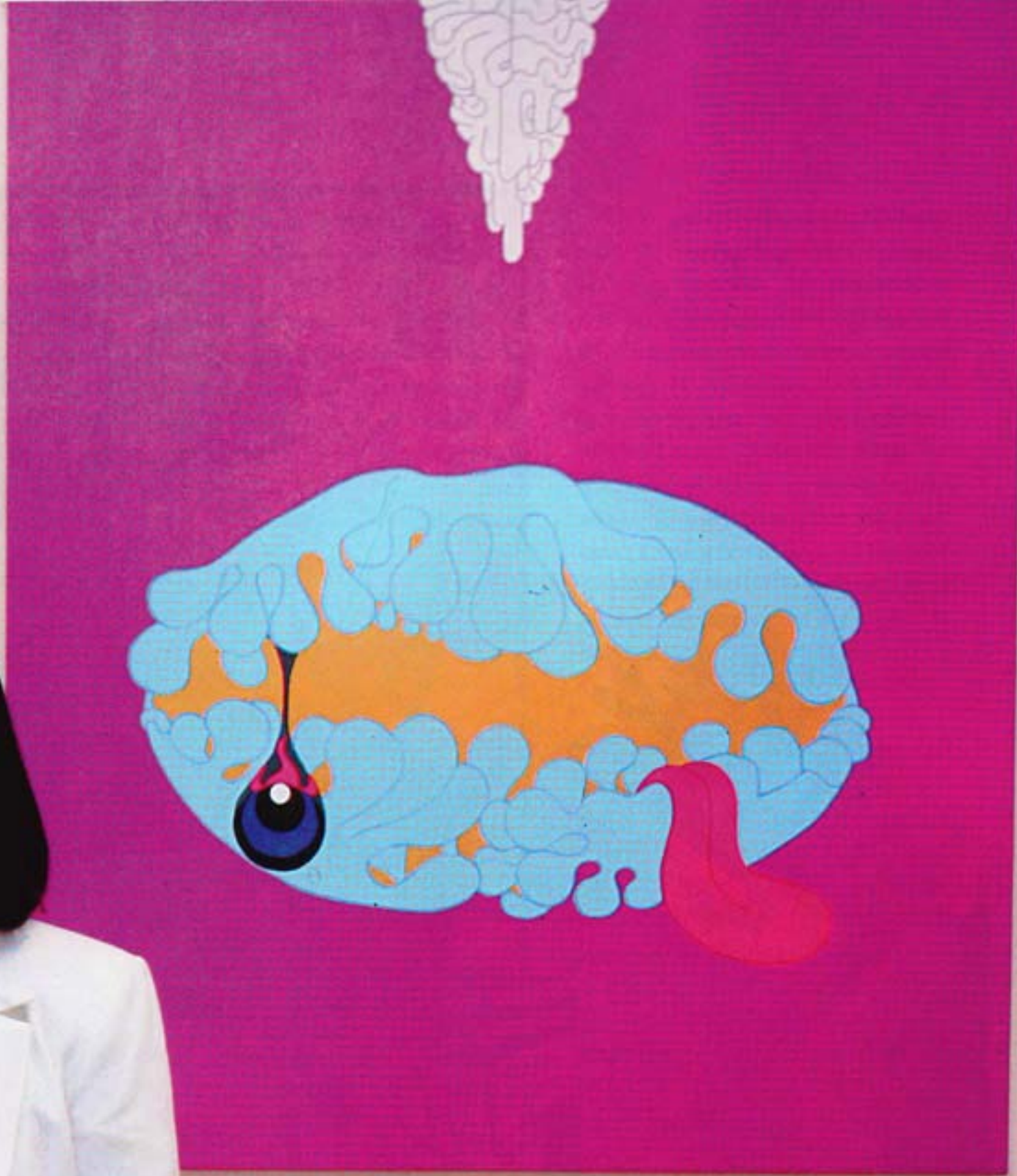


POP

GO *the* COLOURS



In her world, colours take centre stage; monsters come in chocolate flavours and the roads to the quest of spirituality lead to e-commerce, Mandala. Meet the colour bender, and great artist, Jenny Bhatt

| By VINAY AGRAWAL |

Jenny started off as a graphic designer at Lintas, (now Lowe), moving on to write on spirituality and art for various publications. Needless to say, her trajectory has been unstructured and non-linear as compared to the other artists'. She also created a popular comic strip, 'Inside Ouch', which ran successfully for five long years.

As I step into her art haven, I am greeted by bright pinks, tangerines and yellows—all waving to me like long lost friends. Her art is anti-dull and anti-boring, and quickly transports you to a vibrant plane. Dressed smartly and colorfully, Jenny too resembles an extension of her artwork. And, I encounter an army of cute demons—the *Moksha* demons, as we pass by.





While remembering her childhood days, her face lights up with the colours of warm memories. 'My grandmother was my biggest supporter and that too an enthusiastic one. If I wanted to paint a lotus, she would say, 'Come, I will take you to a place where you will find blue and purple lotuses and things like that,' she reminisces. "In my school, my art teacher used to complain that Jenny didn't know when to stop. If I started, I would go on and on. Sometimes, I used to work till three in the night and my grandmother used to say, 'Enough now, work tomorrow,'" says Jenny fondly.

Jenny first conceptualised the series, *Moksba Shots*, around six years ago and from her art works, it's evident that she spent a long time on it. She had made five deities called *Moksba Pets*, which included a consumer goddess, thinker and philosopher and an evil, *moksbasura*. Jenny already knew it was going to be an ongoing series. She says about her style of working and the series, "Having organised that part of it, I thought of what the visual interpretation of the concept would be. Now, I am thinking about the other aspect of the same subject. Then, I take up one issue at a time and work on that. A large work takes me about a month. If I start doing the *Mandalas*, it goes on for a while."

The birth of her collection can be traced back to her personal quest for spirituality and her voyage to find certain questions about her life. "My mother was ill and this forced me to ask a lot of questions," she explains. Jenny started delving into alternative healing techniques and reading a lot of philosophy—the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta*. "I was working with healing properties and frequencies. I learnt to meditate and when I learnt it, I wanted a scientific explanation for it. So, I learnt transcendental meditation which





has been scientifically proven to work, and it lowers blood pressure," she says. Understandably, the artist's work at that time had moved to abstraction.

While practising meditation, she developed a penchant for quantum physics and particle theory and started equating them in her abstract works. "The ideas from the *Vedanta* and particle physics say the same thing—that all matter is energy and

all energy is vibration. I had a lot of knowledge about these things and I was working with humour parallelly," she shares. And, one day, Jenny decided to try and bring all the different types of expressions that she indulged in—writing, humour, and painting—together.

While on the enriching journey, Jenny realised that people often took spirituality way too seriously and





wanted to make a comment on that. She says she also wanted to make some observations about the Indian society and about its peculiar cultural habit. "We make God out of everything," she exclaims, and adds, "The other thing is the system of hierarchy. It is there even in the art world—people consider certain art forms, for instance, installation art, to be superior to painting, and I wanted to break all that. I feel that pop art is much more accessible. Pop art is democratic."

She doesn't mince words when she talks about the commodisation and fetishisation of spirituality—a phenomenon, which has led to a booming market based on it. Drawing from her personal experiences, she says that she has been to a few gurus and observed that they were recycling the *Vedanta* and packaging it in their own way. "The truth is that they work like

a corporate—the guru is the CEO, and the rest are structured around this set up," she says. Jenny feels that each guru has a different spin of the same idea. "First, they make you aware of your inadequacies and then ask you to buy stuff from them," she says, dismissing it off as a mere brand building exercise.

Interestingly, she is the first Indian artist to launch a series of art toys. When we ask her about it, she says that the artists in her genre of work make art toys. "It's a thriving industry, with the largest collectors being the Japanese people," she says.

As a parting question, I ask her about her role in changing art's visual grammar. Jenny says that she is focusing on her own work and visual language. "As an artist, I have control only on what I do; I have no control over other people's responses. And also, people look at art with their own mind and experiences," she explains. Pop art, Jenny says, is much more accessible and appeals to the youngsters. "I feel making products is the way to make art accessible to them. They are not going to buy a painting—it's outside their budget. But at least, they get the image of the painting," she says.

Adding further, Jenny reckons that as far as the older age group is concerned, if you kind of lead them into it, they understand the concept. She feels that while everyone relates to God, instead of worshipping these deities that are handed down, one should study them seriously and find out their history and forms. "My art is for today's life. Since one is used to worshipping, keep a *Moksba Bum* on your table or a *Moksbabuy* to remind yourself how consumerist the society is," she urges. "That's my take. To be fair, everyone can easily co-exist. The art world is an extremely complex place to navigate (laughs)," she concludes. And, we couldn't agree more! 