

questionnaire with Anju Dodiya



CHANGING SKIN, 2006, watercolor and charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in. Courtesy the artist.

Born in 1964 in Mumbai, **Anju Dodiya** draws on literature, folklore, tapestry design and her own private memories in her evocative paintings. Dodiya's site-specific project *Throne of Frost* (2007), a suite of charcoal and watercolor drawings and embroidered fabrics, was installed at the Laxmi Vilas Palace in Baroda, where descendents of the princely state's royal family still live. Following a residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI) in 2007, her series "All Night I Shall Gallop" was presented at Bodhi Art, New York, in 2008. In June, Dodiya will participate in "Making Worlds" at the 53rd Venice Biennale and will show at Vadehra Art Gallery, in New Delhi, later in the year. —By **Hanae Ko**

○ **Why did you start painting on embroidered fabrics and mattresses?**

● I have always enjoyed medieval European tapestries, and in India we have our own rich fabric traditions. Painting on fabric was a natural development for me. There's a great tactile pleasure in painting on textured surfaces. The juxtaposition of fabric and image creates surprises; each time the painted body has a different skin! The mattresses have a strong physical presence and appear like "pregnant paintings" against the wall.

○ **How would you describe your subject matter?**

● Private, emotional theater.

○ **Do you regard yourself as a feminist?**

● Whether or not I am a feminist is not my area of inquiry. My question is always: Am I making art that is creative and relevant to some areas of our mind? I had formal intentions for using fabric, but that can certainly appear like a "woman's choice." Men often deprive themselves of the celebration of fabric, pattern and clothing.

○ **What material do you collect for your paintings and prints?**

● I have an archive full of newspaper clippings, film stills and costume and fashion pictures that become a part of my image making. The fabric and embroidery samples (with contributions from several aunts) went into the prints I made at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute.

○ **The works that you created for the STPI incorporate text from Sylvia Plath's poems—what is it about her writing that speaks to you?**

● Her ability to express pain is amazing. The joy of language right next to human helplessness—I felt a strong empathy here.

○ **These prints incorporated a wide array of diverse material. Where did it come from? And what ties it together?**

● I structured it like a female monologue. The Plath lines, the female heads, the mirror shards that break up the images and the hanging threads (like a web, a veil or tugging tentacles): all of these are bound by chaotic emotional mazes of love, desire, pain and protest.

○ **Does collage allow you express things that painting cannot?**

● Collage lets me combine and mix images and surfaces with a wild freedom, with a spontaneous, playful lightness of approach. For me, painting is a gradual, layering process wherein I make serious, measured decisions. Collages are like tombs where secrets are buried, and the paintings are like slow excavations.

○ **As a young artist, who were your influences?**

● Robert Rauschenberg was my hero for his joyous approach to material and color, and for his creative juxtapositions. Ingmar Bergman's films shook me up inside. I aspire to make art that has that power to move people.

○ **Have those role models changed over time?**

● Later, I discovered the Italian old masters like Piero della Francesca and Giotto, reinforcing my identity as a painter. Inward-looking art interests me the most, from Marina Abramović to Francesco Clemente and medieval Indian devotional poetry.

○ **What are you working on now?**

● I am doing a series of large-scale works on paper with watercolor and charcoal that I call "The Necklace of Echoes." Different kinds of necklaces are entwined around faces, speaking about death, memory and fear—entangled states of being.