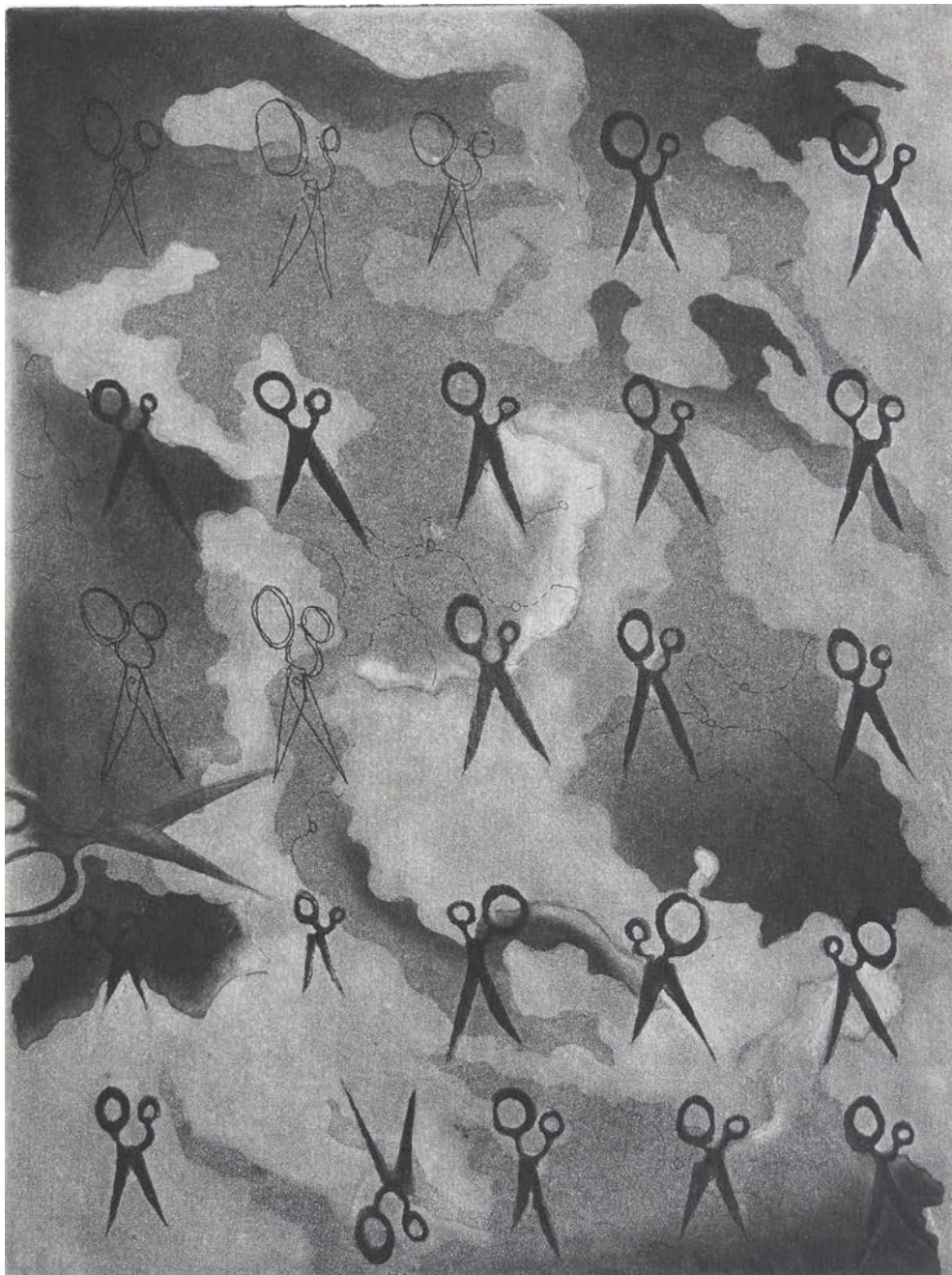
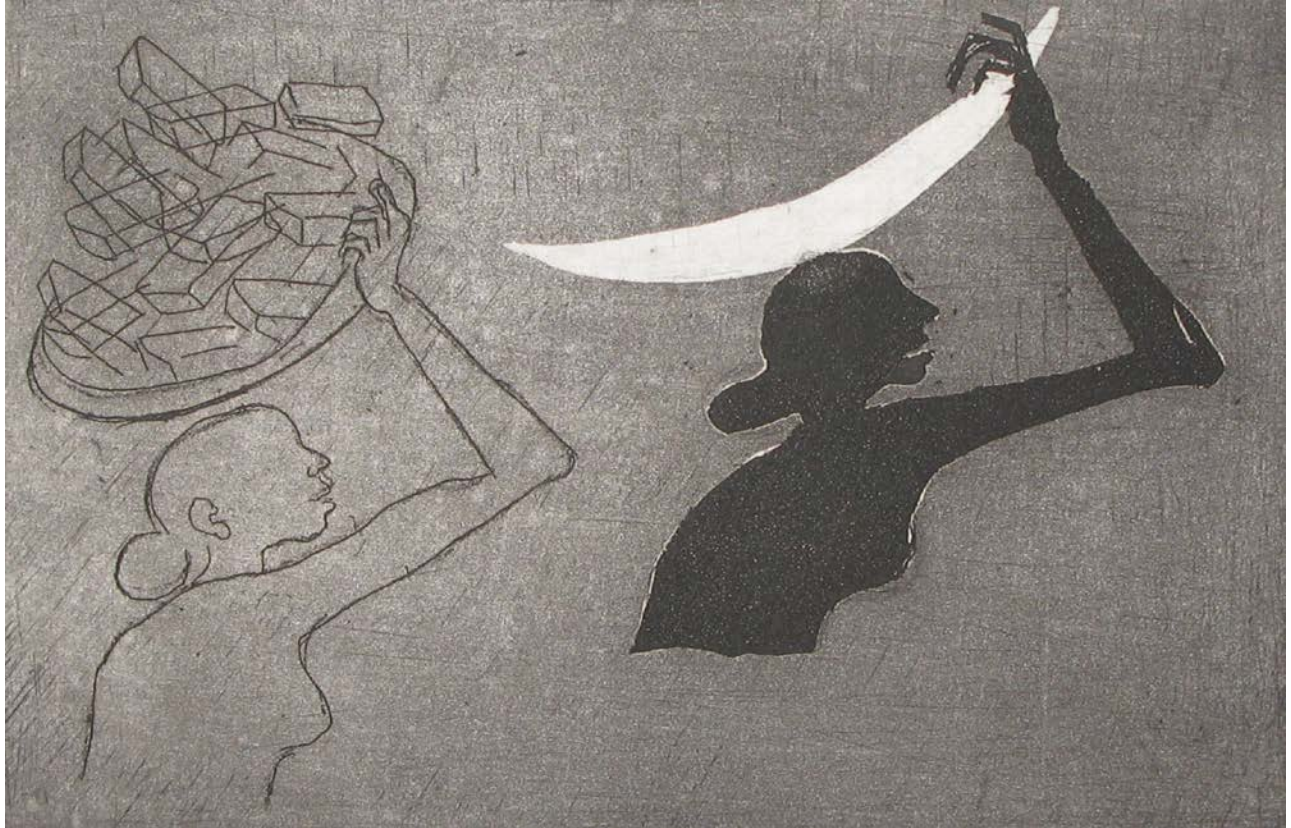


Weaving Contours: Arpana Caur

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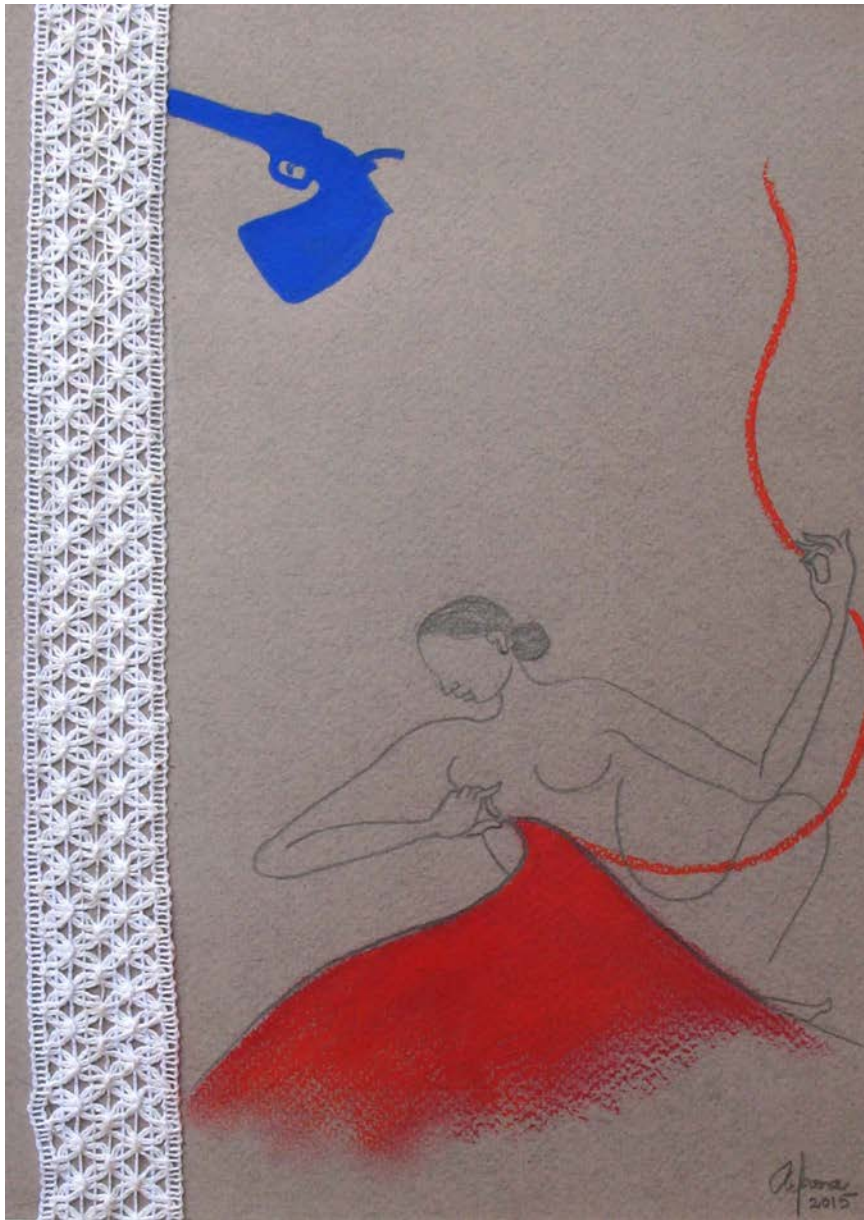
Floating symbols, scissors suspended in mid air, allusions, metaphors and echoes of a generation-welcome to the world of Arpana Caur. At the Academy of Fine Arts in Delhi is an epic collection of works on paper that is a veritable treat in an art world that is caught in the throes of a recession. Caur has created her own niche away from the races and unhealthy rivalries of the galleries in India and had her own pace to create within her own sensibilities.



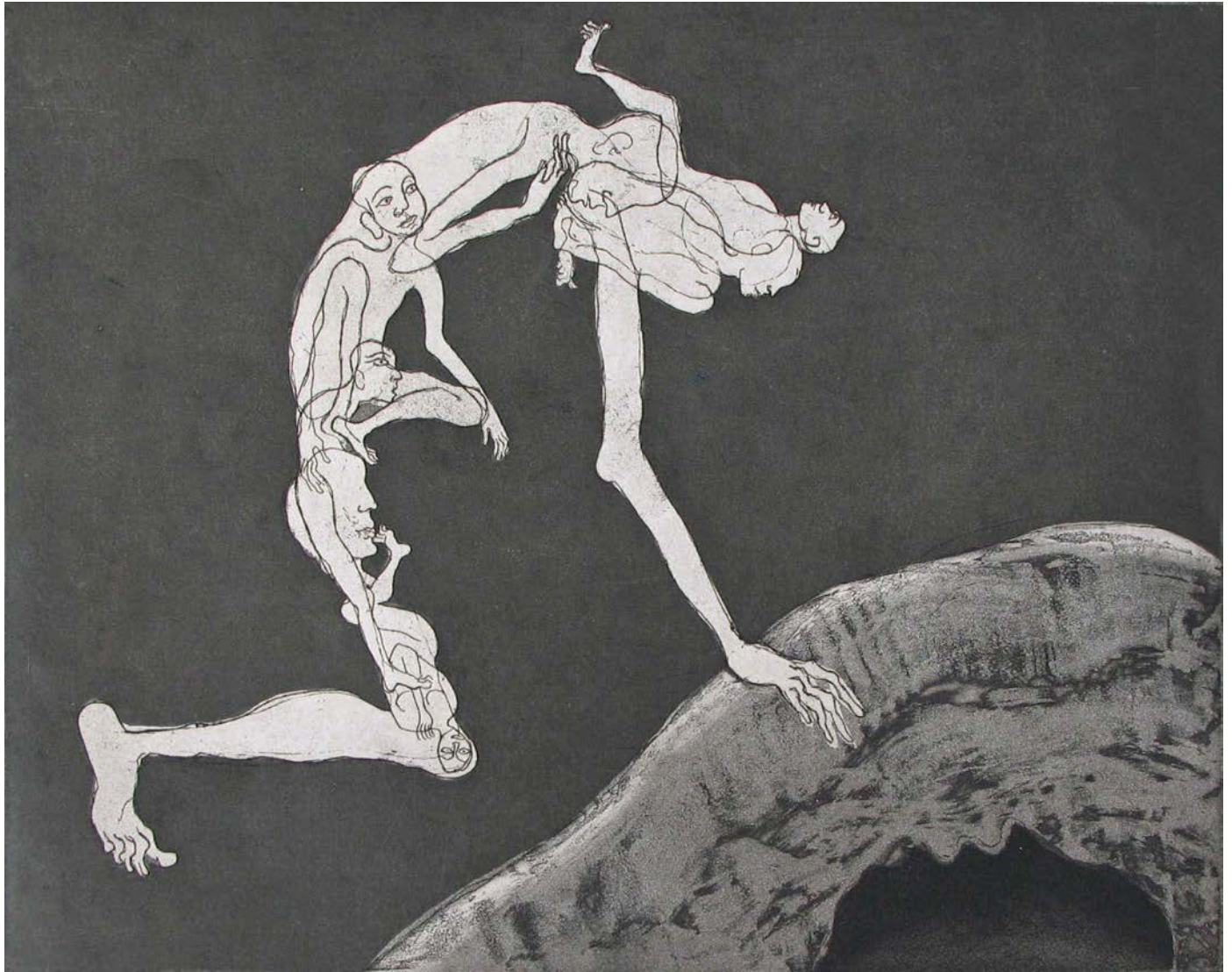


Women do not dominate these works, other elements and folk motifs and everyday symbolism does. Arpana's delightful gouache *We are like this Only* is a startling exposition of a mojri (handmade Indian shoes) with a fluorescent girl resting her head on the shoe that threads the absolute consciousness in the subtle suggestion of nirvana even as she places her deep seated eyes on the top left –the work has more feminine intonations than masculine. Perhaps academically intellectual in the manner of weaving in the thought of realization and contemplation being so tensile and tactile like a thread Arpana's work has this magic of mysticism and limpid lyricism in the compositional content.

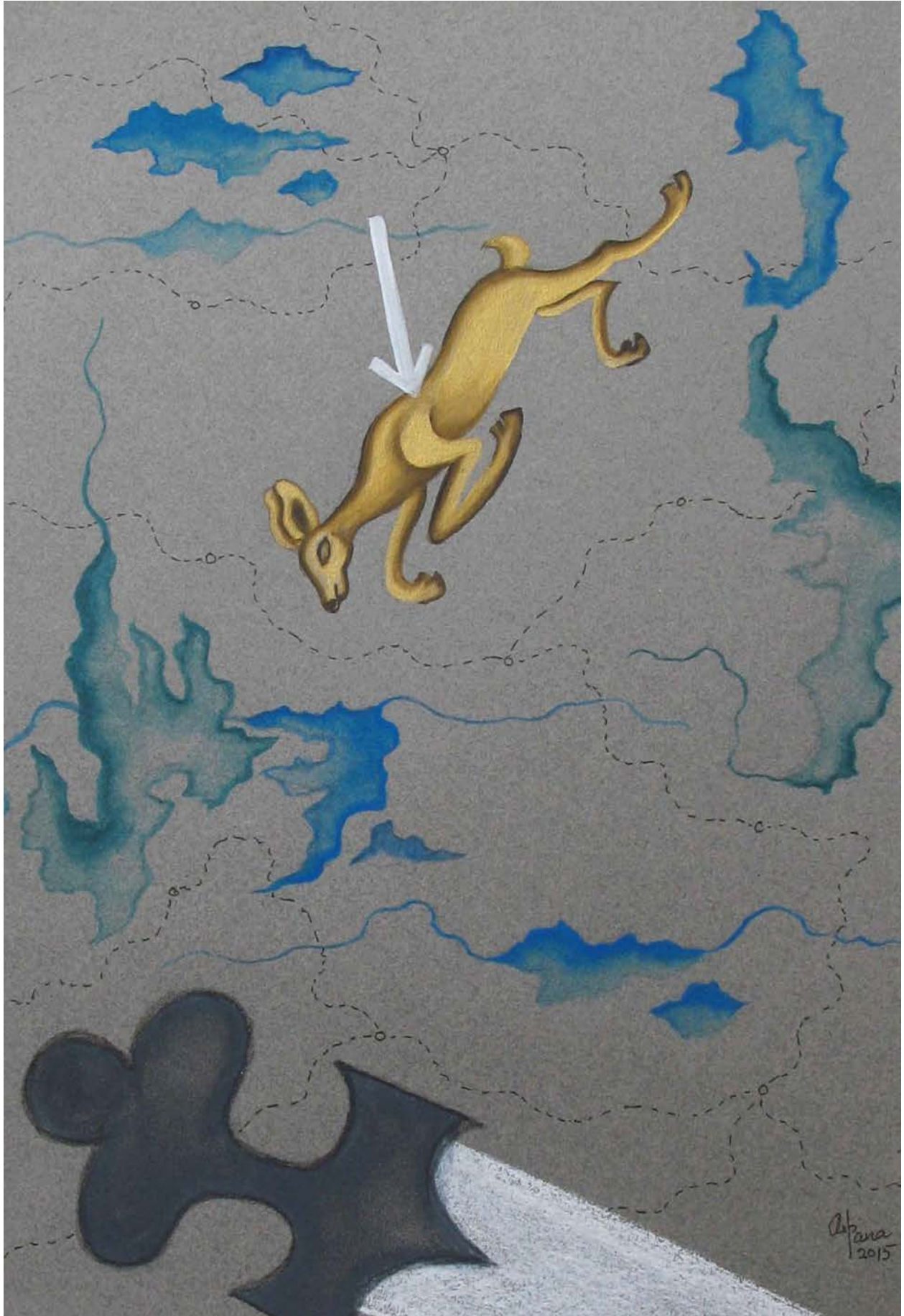
Over the years, her major preoccupation has been her identity – both as a woman and as an artist. Gradually, she felt she was restricting herself to themes rather than aesthetic preoccupations like composition and the visual tension within the painting. She then started looking at the architecture in Pahari miniatures that led to her creating strange, linear tensions vis-à-vis the roundness of the figure. The Pahari miniatures captivated her also for their “unusual composition – their strange, linear architecture and vibrant colors. Progressively, in the eighties, her work showed a significant shift from subject to aesthetic concern.

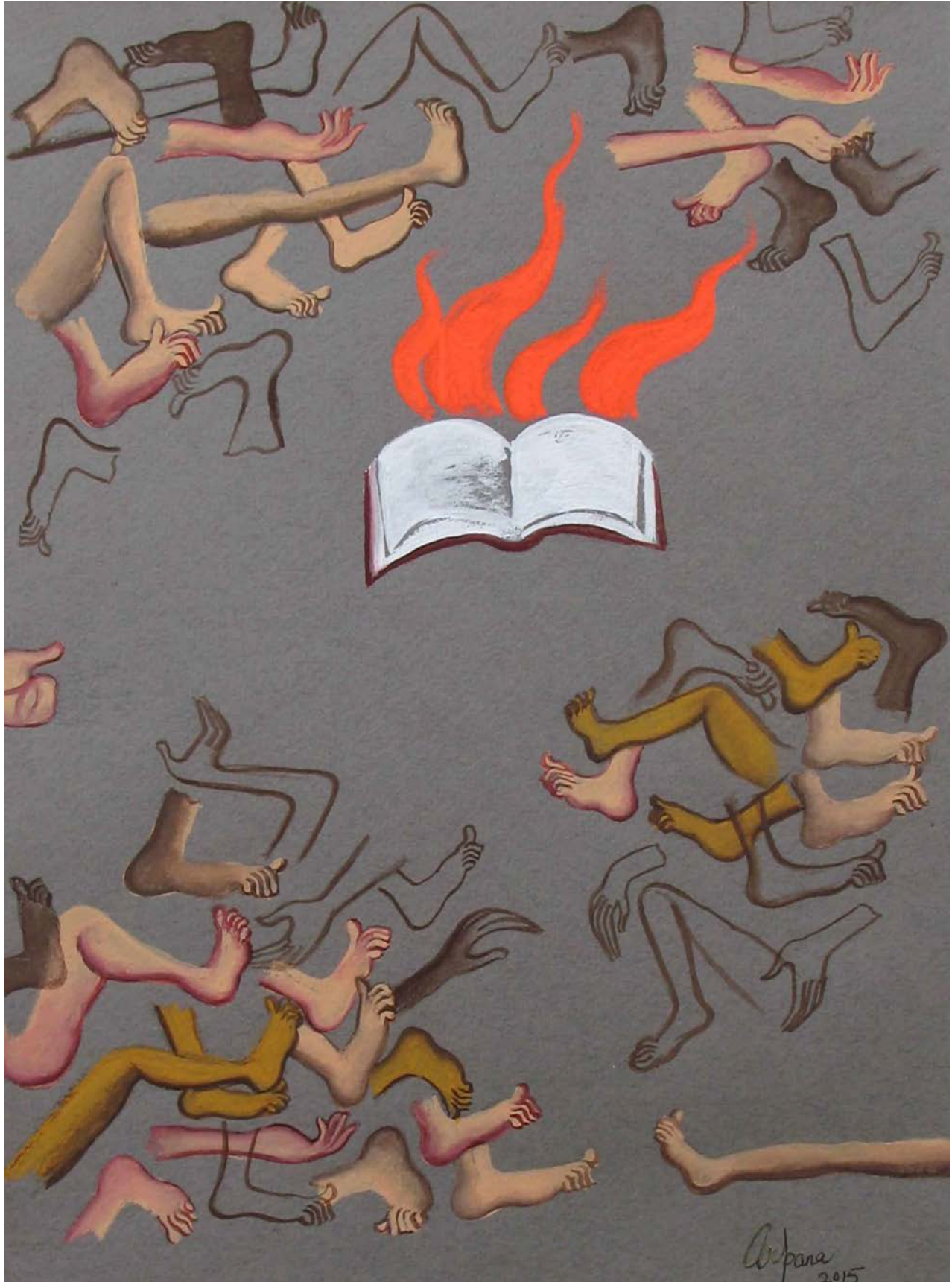


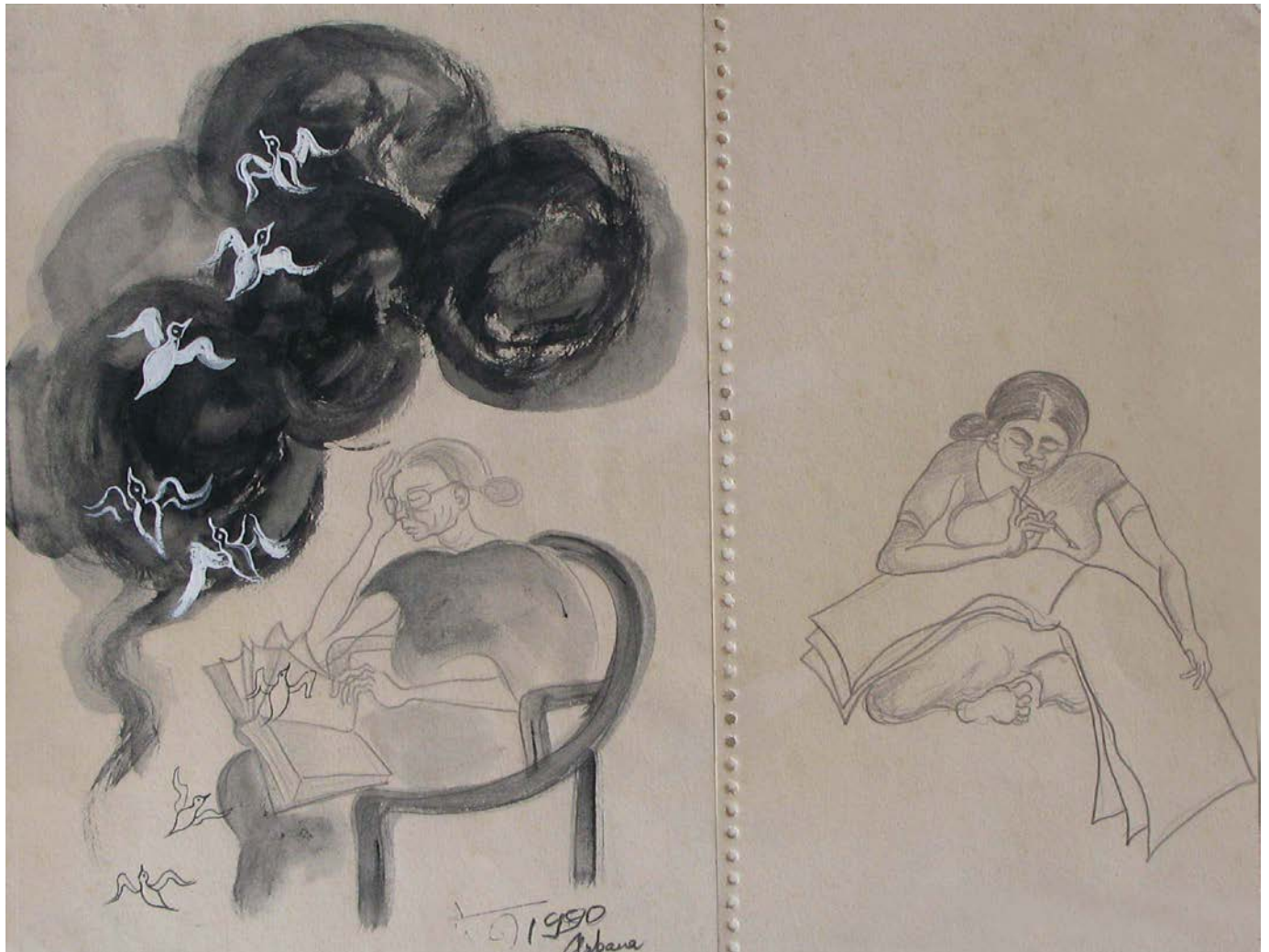
Years ago in an interview she had said: *“ I agree that women dominate my work. But the women in my paintings are sturdy, women you see in your homes or your neighbourhood. There is no hint of sexuality. Women and nature are both symbiotically tied in a circle. I believe women represent the latent force, which has not been explored properly even today. They can counter the challenges of industrialisation and extreme urbanisation. Inherently, they have a power to renew and regenerate. “*



Arpana Caur employs certain distinctive metaphors in her creations, namely the scissors and the extended hand, as mentioned above. Explaining what prompted her to employ the scissors as a metaphor, she has stated: "I needed a metaphor for time. The Greeks believe that scissors have the power to cut Man's fate that is in a state of perpetual suspension, so I thought let me use the scissors."







Critic and curator Gayatri Sinha, who has deeply studied the artist's oeuvre, noted: "An image challenged as one of moralising domesticity, is in a way liberated by Arpana Caur as the woman is placed outdoors. Instead of a feminine, income-producing function, it becomes a political comment on women's productivity."

Here in this historic culling of paper works the erotic is downplayed in favor of the sturdy: There is no hint of an expressive sexuality; woman and nature are both symbiotically tied in a circle of perceived threat and uncertain renewal. The other major concerns in her work include time, life and death, the environment, and the violence of man on man (like Hiroshima, the Partition of India, and the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs).

Punjabi literature influenced Caur's artistic perspective, and writers such as Shiv Batalvi, Amrita Pritam, and Krishna Sobti were visitors to her home. The literature and philosophy of Punjab contributed to the strains of melancholy, mysticism and devotion that may be felt in her work, while the Pahari miniature tradition provided inspiration for Caur's manipulation of pictorial space. Despite her diverse influences, however, Caur's subjects remain firmly rooted in the quotidian world of the woman, showing women engaged in commonplace acts such as daydreaming or typing.

The repeated dualities in Caur's work both confirms and subverts the traditional picture of imagery in painting. Years ago Caur's works had the image of women sewing quietly, within the acceptable parameters of femininity which in a way liberated by Arpana, as

the woman is placed outdoors, embroidering larger destinies. Instead of a feminine, income-producing function, it was a political comment on women's productivity. In that backdrop of the role of women these works span a wider and richer perspective and give us open doors of perception that look at a larger world of whys and wherefores.

Another riveting figure is her Yogi, he is created more as a seraphic image that can walk through bricks and this creates heady signature of grace and yogic yearnings in a world that is thinking more of fitness. Caur has a very clear notion of colour and contour and her hallmark is the degree of originality that stems out from her inner and outer observations that unravel more like ripples of reverie. At once intricate, deeply driven by her literary background Caur is a modern day Shergill in India and her poise and passion is what seeps through this collection that must be seen by art lovers and students alike.

DISCLAIMER : Views expressed above are the author's own.