

GALLERIES

BY MARK JENKINS

On being a woman

Fabric, as well as hair, is major component of "Be/Longing," a survey of work by the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC, pronounced "saucy"). The nine-artist show, at Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, deals with the experience of being female within traditional Hindu and Muslim cultures, and draws inspiration from nature, mythology and Bollywood movies.

Much of the art is, almost literally, combative. Jaishri Abichandani is showing a set of pink boxing gloves decorated with jewels and the faces of women who seem ready to rumble. Shelly Bahl and Samira Abbassy depict women as, respectively, a female 007 type or horse-riding warriors. But the figures in other pieces are victimized, and even faceless. Ruby Chishti makes headless female nudes from pantyhose; Nida Abidi shows sexualized women who are veiled or gagged; and Sa'dia Rehman obscures the girls' faces in collages



JAISHRI ABICHANDANI

KNOCKOUT: The ladies shown on embellished boxing gloves are ready to fight in "The Return of Devastasia," by Jaishri Abichandani.

of family photos.

Perhaps most chillingly, Monica Jahan Bose's "Agunmukha (Fire Mouth)" is a semicircle of stones with dangling bits of a singed sari, evoking the widows and wives burned alive in the region. Like so much of the art on "Be/Longing," the piece is agrieved but not acquiescent.

BE/LONGING

on view through April 13 at Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, 1632 U St. NW; 202-483-8600; www.smithcenter.org/gallery.

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