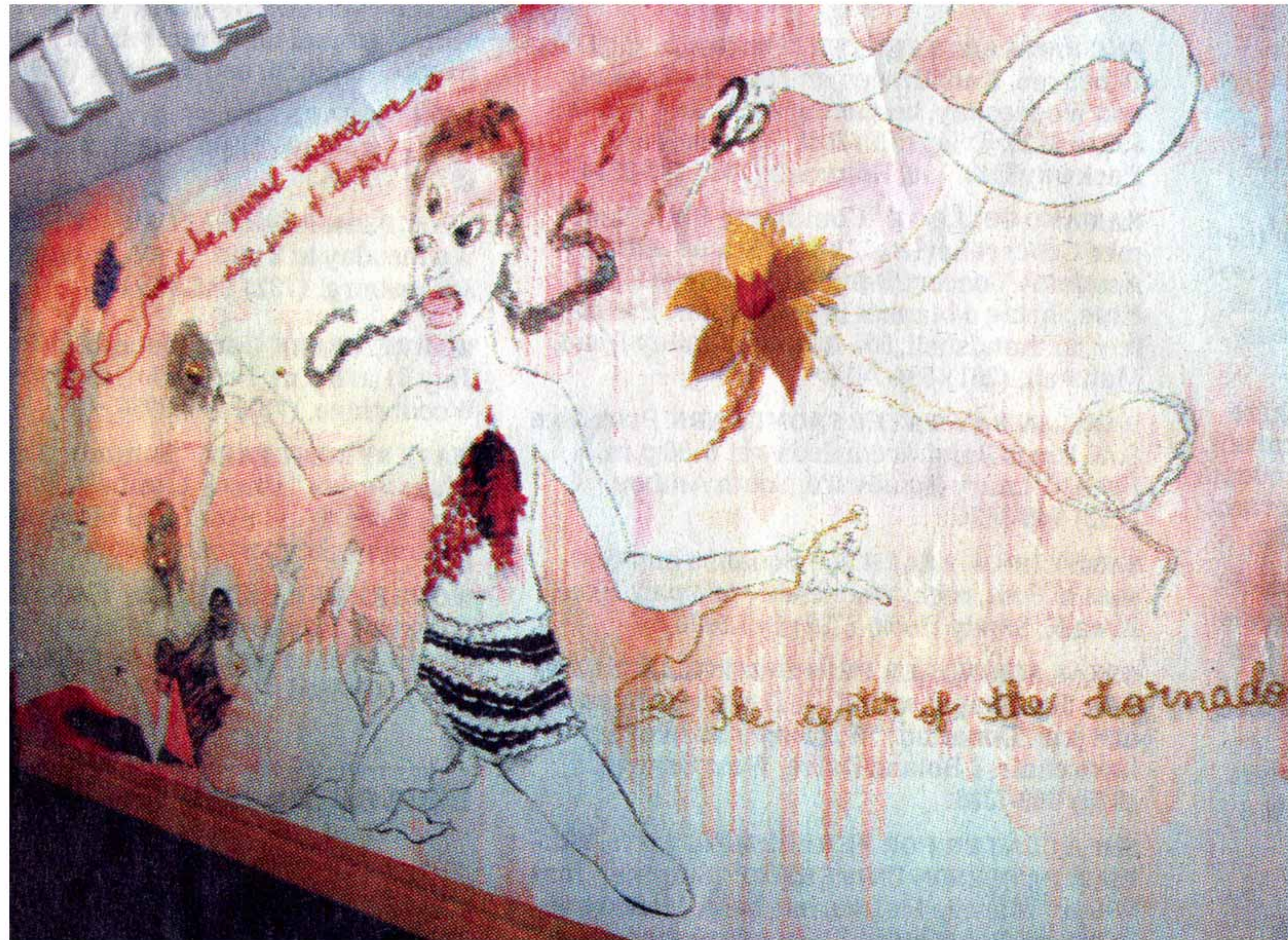


## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT



## This Mural Devours Its Viewers

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

JERSEY CITY

**E**VIDENCE of Past Lives," the new handsome Chitra Ganesh wall painting in the Atrium Gallery (actually an upstairs corridor) at the Jersey City Museum, oozes danger and sexuality. It depicts two writhing, predatory female demons in battle. I felt seduced just looking at it.

Ms. Ganesh, 30, is a successful New York City artist with a background in literature and semiotics. Her college training shows, for she has an eye for potent visual symbols: fleshlike flowers, mythological beings, ornate cursive script, Hindu hand mudras

and other cosmic signs. She also has near-limitless facility for drafting — this woman can paint or draw anything.

The act of painting directly onto the wall also gives the artist license to play with scale, depth and perspective, most obviously through the incorporation into the work of three-dimensional materials. Here and there across the wall you'll find metallic domes, snippets of glittery fabric and paper, and even bits of protective plastic floor covering. It's cool.

Looking at this painting is like floating through someone's subconscious. That's because the imagery is partly imaginary and partly cobbled together from a sea of mythological sources. Some of the obvious borrowings include Rakshasi, an evil forest-dwelling ogress and warrior from the con-

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stellation of Indian Hindu gods, and the multi-headed Hydra from Greek myth.

Rakshasi is the model for the central female figure in the painting. She is depicted here as both nasty and alluring at the same time. Her big, luscious, bloody mouth has sharp fangs. Her long slender arms are deadly weapons, while a gaping third eye fills her pretty forehead. She seems to be vanquishing the Hydra, which has fallen to the ground with a wound to one of its necks.

Ms. Ganesh isn't exactly a political artist, but it is not hard to draw parallels between her epic struggle of Eastern and Western demon gods and current world events in which political and religious conflicts are often cast as a battle between good and evil. But in Ms. Ganesh's painting, there is not a

clear distinction between the good guy and the evil guy. Sound familiar?

The title also reminds us that such conflicts are not new and have been going on for millennia. The wall drawing, you might say, recounts our terrible human predilection for self-destruction and folly. The triggers may change, but the conflicts and violence remain the same.

Then again there is also an odd sexual tension here. Perhaps the figures are not so much warring as engaged in some kind of embrace? (Mythology is full of stories of ravishment and violent godly eroticism). This may also account for the dual sense of desire and horror that the picture conveys.

Surrounding the figures are disembodied limbs performing magical actions — some



Photographs by Marko Georgiev for The New York Times

Chitra Ganesh and her wall painting "Evidence of Past Lives" at the Atrium Gallery of the Jersey City Museum. It will be on display through Aug. 14.

wield scissors, others sprout segments of cryptic text made of glittery twine. The extra limbs suggest traditional imagery of Hindu gods and goddesses, and the different powers and weapons associated with them. But they might also be the remains of past victims, casualties of our endless wars.

"Evidence of Past Lives," Jersey City Museum, 350 Montgomery Street, through Aug. 14. Information: (201) 413-0303 or [www.jerseycitymuseum.org](http://www.jerseycitymuseum.org).