

Bharti Kher : An Artist Working with the Bindi as well as Huge Body Cast



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Abstract

The contemporary art world is as vibrant and booming as never before with technology and concepts of the 21st-century phenomenon: a global industry on its own. The artists who are the heart of it, who with a unique power to astonish challenge, and shock, push boundaries ask new questions, and see the world afresh. With these ideas, one of India's most famous new media contemporary female artists who represented herself nationally and internationally was born in London, UK in the late 60s. A foreign-born to Indian parents Bharti is an invariant artist, who works with ready-made. She described herself as a "Citizen of the world". Being an outsider becomes an interesting thing for her with a different perspective that others don't have. Delhi became her base in the 90s, from where she flits across the world experiencing life in all its diversity and showcasing her work in solo and group exhibitions at prestigious art centers. Ever since her arrival, she has been wowing the art world with her ever so slightly outsider looking in a somewhat skewed perspective on life in India and beyond. A classically trained painter Bharti's body of work expanded to include sculpture and installation which challenge cultural and social taboos. Her work includes extreme research and intense thought, and there is honesty about her which procreates her work. Being different teaches her a lot of resilience. It makes her understand quite clearly what she is, and what she wanted to be.

Keywords: New media renowned artist Bharti Kher, Bindi artist, Hybride, Balance, Play of space in artworld.

Research Paper

Early childhood and her Intrest in Art

From childhood, she loves to create things. A person who opens the door of magic, alchemy, and creativity, she was inspired by her art teacher in school, for her art classroom was enchanted. She got a chance to see many beautiful paintings, printmaking, and photography, exposed to create films, liner cuts, and life drawings when people were even not aware of what is art and its aspects. In her school, they were taught to be fearless with handling pencils, and pens, not using erasers, colors, or even acids to expose photos. She used to go to Wimbledon School of Arts to draw with foundation students. She got to know how to see art which made her choose the direction she wanted for herself. She learned what to leave and what to create, the negative and positive space of an artwork. If we have to create a rope which is very difficult as it has many tangled ropes

inside we have to leave the rope and have to see the outer space, where it is placed: to create an object we have to see its surroundings, history, and atmosphere which represent the object more strongly. Her work is also based on this concept of absence and negotiation powerful rule in the art of describing presence.

She was bought up among the public schools and private estates of an archetype English suburb this was an upbringing that went to Middlesex Polytechnic, London. (1987-88) and then studied a foundation course in Art and Design at Newcastle Polytechnic (1998-1991) receiving BA honors in Fine Art, Painting. As she doesn't want to start her journey in the West as she likes to create large-size works that were not accommodated in London. College was amalgamating so studios were quite small, two-chair sized which was not her cup of tea. She calls herself space greedy person so, she

rebelled against it, and at the age of 23, she left London at quite a young age as she needed to explore the world. She flipped the coin to fulfill the dreams that took her to India to join the other 16 million souls already living in India's capital Delhi. It was her 6-month tourist visa but she didn't go back as she was inspired and touched by her roots, culture, and tradition.

Her experience in India in 1993 was different from what it is now, Cables color TVs were just started. For her, it was a hell different experience like shell-short who is afraid like a foreigner to come out of it. She got a studio after time passed in Delhi and experienced the difference between England and India, as seen in her work. Both qualities of freedom touch the traditions. She set tasks for herself, to understand the country and its people. She went to explore different places, photographed the in and out of it, and even started talking to people who made her love with the country and Subodh whom she met within a month of coming to India. Subodh Gupta her going-to-be husband, was even struggling artist then but is now one of the renowned names in Indian art. With their different ideas and mediums, their struggle becomes one ^[1] (The Art Show - Bharti Kher, 2017).

How her journey as an artist started in India

When she came to India for almost six years it was difficult for her to survive but she observe and exhibit different subject before expressing the bindu wore by women on their forehead; the bindi it's worn by everyone but isn't seen, a simple circle quintessential round dot on the forehead that has so many connotations. So many different societies obliteration, pointillism, marking space, pop, etc. but when it has to be named it becomes more valuable a paradox. Bindi was kind of an ironic shape of sperm, then it became something more gravities with substance. This has articulation and activism as material. When she saw the bindi stall it had been almost five years to been in India, she used bindi-like colors on her artificial materials like maps, canvas, and castings a new palate of language for her.



Image 1 Don't eat meat on Tuesdays, (detail), 1998, image credit: Bharti Kher

Source : <https://www.mommybysilasandstathacos.com/2013/11/01/a-conversation-with-bharti-kher/> Web: 10-April-2023

“After terrible works in 1994-95 little kick of satisfaction came to her heart, after a couple of shows still she was looking for something out-of-the-box concept for her artwork as said by Bhavna Kakar. Her paintings are even in sculptural form. The work ‘Don't eat meat on Tuesdays’, is done when raw meat is banned in many big cities of India on Tuesdays. This work has seven suitcases painted on camouflage fabric with a ready-made wire hanging out of canvas to a ticking timer. Strange idiosyncrasies that she noticed, were usually contradictory as to why anyone would cover their suitcase in a fabric when its purpose is to cover fabrics. So this idea of laying an exterior that was about ‘other’ began as early as then. The work is a response to the train station bombings that occurred in India at the time and the resulting announcements warning commuters not to touch unattended baggage”.



Image 2 : Hirsute (1999-2000) Portraiting mustaches of men

Source : <https://www.mommybysilasandstathacos.com/2013/11/01/a-conversation-with-bharti-kher/> Web: 12-April-2023.

Her early works were of the observations she had with just slight strangeness. Like ‘HERSUIT’ having mustaches a life-size work. This was a work where she photographed men with mustaches. In the 90s the streets of India were so masculine, but as a photographer with a camera gave her a power of third eye. With a camera, she just stopped people on the street with mustaches and asked them for a photo. Strangely, a camera disarms people, and they sometimes like having their photos taken. So mostly they were all smiles and anyone with a mustache. She took around 225 photos of everyone around her from a taxi driver, pan wala, guard, etc.

She painted the mouths and mustaches of different people on a canvas which looks like women's private parts. This was a really sexualized and oddly erotic representation of mouth. Work with not just image but concept, what is a mouth? Other elements like politics, society, and sexuality start arising. This gave a famine look to the masculine body, her idea of the body which she practiced till then. It was a notion of gender that seemed so clear-cut was not^[2] (Bharti Kher-Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi-National Art Week of New Media. wmv, 2013).

She never makes sketches of the work, it depends on the space atmosphere and feeling. Often art tells you about the people who are viewing it. This creates a vast perspective of the thought an artist has put into the artwork. Her works are both in diptych and triptych. For her, the scale of work is very important. Her work is the body that she wants to part, a space that surrounds her. All her works move around the idea of body and space. How a body responds to place, placement, how it is from inside and outside, how it is emotionally, and psychologically. So by breaking down the object, its rupture gives a new beginning new possibilities, a key to start new. She creates a team of bindi by applying thousands of them together, they are repeated, and layered in a sense of reproduction as discussed with **Subodh Gupta in an exhibition at Art habitat.**



Image 3 : Bharti Kher weaves a bolder exploration of the body that is human, magical.

Source : <https://www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/2022/jan/02/chaos-life-regeneration-and-power-of-women-bharti-kher-is-back-with-strange-attractors-2401406.html>. Web: 12-Dec-2022.

'Artists have been pushing the ideas, of how to see the body through the material over surfaces to remind ourselves that our consciousness also connects us to something greater than just the sum of our parts'^[3] (Augaitis et al., 2016). As a young girl she used to decorate mannequins that were in her mother's shop even now she uses to dress her women like that, it reminds her of her childhood in the UK when she used to go to her mom's shop, She used to dress her mannequins on Saturday mornings. "Even a young artist **Richa Arya** working with clothing as subject get great inspiration from it. As clothing has great importance in body and how it shape up the space".

They have the power to attract people from the core, they have fictitious portraits. She puts them all somewhere in her studio and they are pushed and moved in different directions and somewhere they all start to come back together showing their importance, equality, strength, and uniqueness. She covers it with many fabric that now has tactility. It becomes the third material sarees are no longer the sarees they look very strong like super fragile but they are cracked they tell you about a place, weave, weave, and talk to you about families, demography, and geography. Almost everything is depicted by a piece of fabric from its origin to end. Speak about who they are and where they are from.

Likes the idea that every object has its singular point of a contract and also every object will find its perfect balance on its own. Bharti allows materials to have their alchemy like magic that's what art could do. Things which you create by using your hands to find places of balance because literally will it stand, pushing materials to do things that are not supposed to and that's is something called art.

Narrative and mythology played a very large part in shaping her consciousness. She engages with it and pushes it to her extremes to create something that is not already created. Time is looked at in the image, it is a door that opens up to another till infinity. The domestic space is the heart the center of the world like the bubbling cauldron where all spells are cast. Her hybrid-like urban goddess: looks quite cool and behaves like a superwoman from the future. While casting them she got inspired by herself, her mother, sister, friends, and other women from the family society she knows or not. She listens to them, watches them, and perhaps taps in somewhere to short murmurs, gurgles, and the whisper that manifests the cities in urban spaces in domestic houses, what are their dreams, and what her dreams are in the aspirations whom she doesn't want to be. How she

wants to be bigger, and greater is something achieving particular parameters. But she wants to know the past, her future what potential she has. How will it be to be a man, or want to experience how it would be like an animal, or too extreme as a god?

She works on many themes, ideas, and thoughts, and with different materials like daily found objects: bindi, bangles, fiberglass, fabric, resin, clay, metal, and mirrors in her artwork. But the material is not the message it's your artwork that you do. She says that she finds ideas first and then the material that goes with them. The material creates a third dimension to her work. When you create with wood and cement it not only be wood-cement it becomes something else that gives dimension and essence to the artwork. She was a highly figurative artist who changed to an abstract artist. She is not a person who is an activist but creates her world where she makes drawings, paintings, sculptures, photographs, installations, etc. dot express her wholeness, and the space around it creates a balance. For her art is not merely a knee jerk but it's like a slow burn. It's like distilling and condensing a lot of noise and research into a single moment. She uses the forms and ideas of minimalism, abstraction, and the readymade to engage with a range of ideas, including gender politics, language, mythology, hybridity, dislocation, transmogrification, and narrative.

Bindi

It is a key element in her work, which provided the initiate to her popularity. It is even derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bindu- meaning point, dot, drop, and a small particle that has its roots from ritual and philosophical past'. It is the dot that Indian women apply in the center of their forehead as a spiritual 'third eye'. Earlier it used to be applied with natural pigments, but now it has transformed over time and comes in many colors and shapes as it is now a mass product. She believes bindi is a sign a symbol of anyone's consciousness, over the years she has used it as her vision of the world which is just an object but has the power of transformative property. Bindi has its narrative and a beautiful story in our sub-continent, millions of women look at themselves in the mirror and apply bindi before meeting the rest of the world. This gives the strength of the third eye to see the world differently, it is a kind of optimistic gesture to see things in a new transformative way. As an artist, she uses bindi as a premise to initiate her work which automatically takes its form and moves ahead.

She started using bindi in 1993 as paint or clay in her 2D and 3D works. Her unconventional use of readymade

objects creates duality, taking from its domestic mundane association to a metaphysical world of art. In 1999 she did her first bindi work 'Split and Swallow', this work has two panels bearing circles created by sperm shape bindi. One giving outward radiant and another inward. Which meshes the symbols of male and female. That was the time she had an obsession with the bindi which became her nature symbol. It is because when she first saw the sperm-shaped bindi applied on the forehead of women, she was struck by how masculine and feminine this object is at the same time. It looked similar to a sperm which was quite amusing and ironic. She not only uses this shape but all types of bindi's even sometimes larger than they are. Pasted on both 2D and 3D artworks made out of aluminum, wood, concrete, and fiber even of different shapes in 2D like circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles, etc., depicting mandala-like geometries, on maps and in satellite images, animals, etc.

"When she came to India she was confronted with the effect of socio-political, globalization that describes the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition (1992), the Bombay riots (1992-1993), discrimination of women. She wants to be the voice of common people from the middle class especially women who are conservative a little bit strangely moralistic and quite unprepared to talk about sexuality not only Bharti, Nalini Malani, Sheba, Shilpa even *Mithu Sen also worked on this as discussed with Mithu mam in her exhibition at KHOJ STUDIO*". It has changed a lot till now but people were shy to talk about it at that time. Bharti uses bindi which symbolizes as strength of women in her way: like a color pallet, a painting that observes the viewer, a ready-made object applied which gives the image of masculine and feminine at one point, like supernatural power and even like a symbol of sexuality. Immediately these issues were not seen in her work but through the 1990s Kher was occupied with addressing the issues of patriarchy, taboos, and superstitions in art which over the years become a trade mark of Indian art. She humorously juxtaposed Indian culture from the perspective of an outsider looking in, this led to the process of surveying, collecting, and transforming objects to recast the viewer's relationship. She wants to be the voice of common people from the middle class especially women who are conservative a little bit strangely moralistic and quite unprepared to talk about sexuality. It has changed a lot till now but people were shy to talk about it at that time. Bharti uses this bindi which is the third eye of strength in a different perspective: like a color pallet, a painting that observes the viewer, ready-made



object applied which gives the image of masculine and feminine at one point, like supernatural power and even like symbol of sexuality. In her work bindi has many layers and symbols they see everything, give emotional and physical strength, applied as texture, color, or feel. She made it larger in her practice as it was caused, which is the aim of an artist to allow to take ideas and material and just go with the flow.

In 2002 she made 2D work that looks like 3D because of the application of Bindi which is quite extraordinary in visual appearance. She is very much fascinated by portrait animals that she manipulates as imagery in her practice. She uses the animals that Bharti is curious about that represent some human qualities. For ex: 'Rudolph and Bambi', and 'And three vultures' show the metaphor of the situation she found herself in, a simple situation of discussion. Then comes two dogs sculpture 'You are what you see', which was one of her few 3D works of beginning, where she was trying to feel the possibilities of 3D forms which are more visual and she could walk around her work. In these sculptures, the dogs were mating with each other made up of fiberglass, and resin, and covered with lots of bindi^[41] (Mayer, 2014). Then there was no end to her work and Bindi's was all around India and the world, almost all her works from 2D to 3D, 'Hybrid', 'The skin speaks a language not its own', 'An Absence Of Assignable Cause', 'I Have Seen An Elephant Fly', 'The Rinky Dink Panther', 'Starry Night After V.G.' and many more. All this has bindis on it.

Bindis and Mirrors: A mirror is a mysterious object that knows all about a person. Used by women to put back their strength in that third eye of vision at night. Even in India broken Mirror are considered a bad omen. After knowing all this, even then Bharti breaks the mirror herself because she believes 'the thought of breaking the mirror is a punk gesture', which gives her strength that breaking it could cause nothing to her, she is invincible. This gives life, a chance which is a beautiful idea of faith. As an artist, it also teaches us that when we leap every time we create any work and even ask viewers and peers to be with us in our journey it's not always the same as we think so 'to be broken is good to get repair'.

She used mirrors in her work to create illusion and attract viewers through double and triple vision, inspired by reading Miracle Louse Mirror. In the process, she smashes and breaks the mirrors to create dents, circular ripples, and cracks which appear as if shot by a bullet. Then Bharti repairs its cracks by applying a layer of bindis that follows the line created by chance. The surface is interrupted so that every reflection is

a fragment or distortion, obliterated by cracks and bindis. This reflects the thoughts of a person which are seductive and suffocating. She created these works in 2012 when she was facing difficult times and finding herself, fractured-self to be a woman, a wife, a mother, and so on. 'If the self is fractured then I try to fracture it more', a power of the material to transform into art, and then by breaking the mirror is comforting your fears to yourselves your reflection of satisfaction.

Exhibition in New York (2020): 'The Unexpected Freedom of Chaos': this work is about 'freedom', 'alchemy', 'possibilities', 'magic', the relationship between 'Yin and Yang', 'Singular and Dual', 'Forward and Backward', 'Inward and Outward', 'Micro and Macro' and a lot not described in words just could feel. The exhibition is on the theme of 'Break and Repair' a process Bharti has been doing for many years. She opens (breaks) as she believes it reveals its past which is not possible in whole. A lot of her work deeply depends on psychology and goes back to the idea of the body. She believes we all inherited vulnerability that covers or repairs us constantly, same as her mirror works, the line of cracks which are the places where the light goes inside or the crack which shows something subtle which is very beautiful in each of us.



Image 4 : The Unexpected Freedom of Chaos

Source : <https://bhartikher.com/calendar/2020/2/22/the-unexpected-freedom-of-chaos>. Web: 12-Dec-2022.

She put four broken mirrors together, which are quite untamed and are not framed. This work behaves like a sculpture. There is an element of nature like a metaphor for earth, sky, and the stratosphere. They almost had a quality of landscape. She loves to create works that are heavy but appear light and these heavy works look light when placed against a wall like a leaning person

which is an artistic translation, a transformation that is the essence of art. She pushes material to do what is not its purpose. She creates magic by floating things that are dense to combine cement and soften it by applying wax. To play with the material to confuse the optic, cement looks like butter and wax looks like stone. Stone becomes light and bindi becomes quite heavy within the surface of her artwork.

She uses bindi both conceptually and as a sign. It becomes a code, text, and skin, like a covering to her works. Bindi in her work has an idea of sticking eye to ask the question of what do you see? How do you see it? Bindi allows her to completely function in the realm of abstraction in one part of her studio.

The Idea of the body

Over time Kher is constantly engaged with the abstraction and the figurative, in both works she explores the idea of the body. It is a vehicle of emotions, feelings, and thoughts that silently explain everything. By focusing on the corners of her alchemical art anyone can feel the place of body in her work. It reveals the importance of drawing that shows her broader practice, exploring the complex visual language in a plurality of her work: the monumental bindi paintings, Links in a Chain's layers of word and image like the solitude of the Chimeras, and the impossible equilibrium of her 'balance' sculptures – are drawn together, and through which she conveys her understanding of the world. Her works describe the body not as a physical presence but as something greater than its existence as a balance between body and mind, and the space that we occupy not only as individuals but as larger collectives.

Initially, she used her own body and then of many other women in several mediums and forms to describe the internal soul and how it feels to get someone else body. Many of her famous works are 'The Warrior Series' (Cloud walker, The Messenger, Warrior with Cloak and Shield, And All the While the Benevolent Slept), 'Sari Portraits' where she uses raisin coats to create saris which were inspired by her mother's boutique shop. In these works, Bharti mixes up mutually contradictory characteristics of different genders, animals, and aliens and their possibilities of metaphor. According to her body is a metaphorical site for the construction of ideas around gender, myths, and narrative.

Bharti Kher has worked with many mediums creating paintings, sculptures, installations, and text, but she believes casting is the most intimate process of rendering a human emotion. It's a strange and cathartic process to

create a body. When skin is created with clay, plaster, or resin over and over so all the pores and creases of edge fill it's like encasing/ mummifying a living being: to capture their breath, to find imprints of their mind, thoughts, and secrets of their souls.



Image 5 : Bharti Kher, Six Women, Indian summer Festival, "Matter", at Vancouver Art Gallery (2016).

Source : <https://www.seditionart.com/magazine/matter-vancouver-art-gallery>. Web: 29-March-2021.

"Matter" A solo show by the artist Bharti Kher, Six Women, at Vancouver Art Gallery (2016) curated by Daina Augaitis and Diana Freundl, is the first of its kind to be shown in North America. The exhibition is supported by the Institute of Asian Art and was part of the Indian Summer Festival. The exhibition displays sculptural, painting, and photographic works. The most recent and charming of the exhibitions was 'Six Women', which features six life-size casts of naked women that have an exact representation of their gender and work as sex workers from Kolkata who were paid to sit for Bharti. Women sitting on chairs serve as a dignified, intimate portrait in which anyone can feel their age. In India culture aged female body is given respect and space but in contrast to the standard by which womanhood, dignity, and beauty are connected. This is an ongoing process of questions and thoughts about vulnerability of the women only in nakedness, self-conscious transactions of money, or bodily experience. By this Bharti asks herself, 'if the body can carry the memory of other bodies as well, what does this mean? Can a body carry narratives that don't belong to it?' Located within the Embassy of the Real, Kher's sculptures address the physicality and inherent vulnerability of the body and quietly challenge our perceptions of the body in contemporary culture. They are beyond the physical rendered form it's a tender portrait of women that has a calmness, gentle flesh that gives the emotion of purity.

For Bharti, it was a wonder to describe women not from their bodies but as souls. She believes what a cast carries is in the hands of the model, not the artist. The process of casting to create a body also amazes Bharti, She said

she has no idea as to how people think when heads are encased in plaster, which is the most challenging and awkward time. The last part completely involves the trust and calmness of the model. They have to be what they wanted at that time. It is the emotion of information that is transmitted to the work and transaction between the model and the artist as ethically, philosophically, and cathartically.

Bharti is not a feminist artist but feminism is a strong part of her work. She confidently expresses her work and feelings as being female and believes that there should be more successful artists to be aware of female struggles.



Image 6 : The Skin Speaks a Language Not Its Own, 2006, fibreglass, bindis, 142 × 456 × 195 cm.

Source : <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/bharti-kher/>. Web: 23-April-2021.

The Skin Speaks a Language Not its own (2006): Many years before Bharti saw a photograph of a collapsed elephant in a newspaper and she was fascinated by the four/three cutting. An elephant was tired and in pain in that photograph and Bharti wants to capture those emotions in its artwork. As the image was a rear view she needs a model which is difficult in a city like Gurgaon. (A thriving satellite city of the capital). So she went to find one from the colony of elephants and kept her in the studio. Even took reference from a beautiful female elephant on route to a wedding, and consulted surrogates like a cow, to calculate how the weight of a body would fall on the ground.

It was the most famous and memorable work that made an upward graph in her career. A life-size sculpture of an elephant in fibreglass covered with sperm-shaped velvety bindi. By this artwork, she becomes the moment of Indian art as it is even sold for \$1,493,947 (around Rs7 crore). Even as an entrepreneur her work fetched record by any female contemporary Indian artist at auction. This

work is awe-inspiring in its minute detailing and scale that portrays a female Indian elephant. This sculpture shows an elephant with her knees untenable position. The application of bindi starts from the center of her forehead and every curve of her skin is meticulously contoured with a whirling array of sperm-shaped. She brought two archetypal clichés of India bindi and the elephant together. Not only in India but also made global art radar. This work also artist describes the female and male gaze in the same work. The Skin Speaks... prompts the viewer to look beyond the elephant's form, to ponder her skin's texture. Bharti Kher is, more than anything, a storyteller and artist.



Image 7 : An absence of assignable cause, 2007. Fibreglass, bindis 173 x 300 x 116 cm.

Source: <https://viedesarts.com/perspectives/bharti-kher-bindis-create-a-conversation/>. Web: 17-Dec-2022.

An Absence of Assignable Cause (2007): One day she was reading a Maritime Journal on the internet and got excited when Bharti got to know that there was a picture, from 1956 to see in \$9 by Professor Friedman or someone with his hands in grey slush. She was amazed by the huge, giant size of a whale's heart. Kher felt it would be approximately the size of a small car which would be an amazing piece of art, the biggest heart on earth pumping lots of blood within its chambers. She researched a lot to get a visual image for reference, as there was limited at that time. Her stepmother and children also helped her to find a picture of a blue sperm whale's heart. Back to square one. Eventually, after calling museums in Australia and posing as a student. She got a drawing that looks like comparative to human and animal hearts. So, based on the drawing, the fact that two-chamber heart... but the whole thing's speculative, and a hunt for a chimera. The relevant allegory here is, assumedly, with the unknowable, quixotic human heart. Yet the slipperiness of this work chimes, in an oddly rational way, with Kher's overarching sense of what she's doing in stacking up episodes of incommensurability.

Hybrid

A lot of the earlier paintings Bharti was making at Art College were images of strange amorphous creatures that were part this animal, part that animal, part human they are all multi-dimensional, multi-fascinated. Behaving like a goddess, housewife, mother, sister, friend, whore, mistress, and lover she is everything. She's in one state extremely powerful but also vulnerable and succinctly imperfect. This is their domestic space and within it they are all seeing, knowing, and speaking yet they are not. She twins the ideas of metamorphosis, morphology, and hybridity.

A work showing self as multiple. This concept was old since she was young but she incorporated it in many different ways concerning time. This series began in 2003-04 to depict a body that is a goddess dealing with space that was and still is worth unpacking. A domestic space of love, desire, kids, and home with another space like a social, political, maneuvering, and economic play of power. A place where one learns about relationships while developing their social skills.

These works are about women who set up spaces: the protagonists whose craving is multifarious. A new race for the future is created by unfolding the chapters of life. These new races don't care or bother what people think of them. They are free from imposing and limited classifications of gender, sexuality, history, and body.



Image 8 : Angel Feather duster Chocolate muffin

Source: https://www.india-seminar.com/2014/659/659_bharti_kher.htm WEB: 12-APRIL-2023

When she came to India her soul started behaving like many personalities, Many roles are played by us like an artist in a studio, in a home is a mother, wife, daughter, somewhere someone else role plays. Some of those roles are contradictory. Some are chosen, others put upon us. The hybrid figures resist all classifications of class, race, and time – they could be anybody, at any time. But what they do implies, in most cases, an internal wish to do something other than what they're doing.

A few of the works are inspired by Bharti as she was an Indian in London and A London born in India which makes her personality ironic, a little bit paradoxical, funny, and fearful. Others are related to Greek, Hindu, and Persian mythology and narratives which love to read. Which gave her terms of how metaphor creates a fascination in imagination.

She thinks that her hybrid women are powerful like gods. The blue face of the baby represents Krishna. She will be worshipped ... as the great seductress. She may turn black as she ages because they fear her sexuality as dangerous. So she will morph for the sake of her sanity and peace to become one of many multiples that play out her life. Today she is with her beautiful mother' and their bond will always be stronger for that.

These women approach this onomatopoeic familiar only to be confronted by a skin that's attached itself to a body, not of its own making. Like a subversion that spreads and continues to evolve leaving the host body with no memory of what was original or authentic. That, by carrying the skin of another, she makes herself more entire, more powerful, more herself. She has enhanced her identity like the shaman or the hunter to possess more energy than before; atoms that she can will to change her covering.

As a woman, she must serve, serving a muffin. You welcome everyone into your life with a smile and want people to leave preconceptions at the door. While entering they are judgmental and see your nakedness while you are busy entertaining them. After knowing that you should not judge a book by its cover we all do that precisely.

Her avatar is that of a 'so many people' person :(in alphabetical order) Cook, daughter, driver, goddess, hunter, lover, maid, mistress, mother, prostitute, sister, wife. Constructed to fulfill a particular yet vague criterion. As if all her domestic politics and place could be swept up into a single neat image. That's why she can speak in a still image; on a computer screen and in your mind. If you listen you can hear her inviting you for that tea. A strange and real encounter that could change your life forever.

She observes: *'Animals don't wear clothes. Sometimes people make monkeys wear hats and trousers. They think it's amusing to fashion and mimic the human condition this way, but what is more revealing is the limitations of their wisdom.'*

"You only hear with your ears but I can hear with my entire being. You only speak with your tongue; I smell you with my tongue and I taste the world with my eyes,

whisper and speak through my flesh in a language you cannot begin to hear; man only sees with his eyes open and I see with mine closed: all the deadly calm that precipitates chaos." [5] (KHER, n.d.)



Image 9 : The Hunter and the Prophet Family portrait

Source: https://www.india-seminar.com/2014/659/659_bharti_kher.htm Web: 12-April-2023

A metaphysical state where one has the power to be in a comfortable zone and say no to wrong. So you gain the state of truth by not failing in your ambition Truth is, being normal but not like you with your extravagant soul that looks for truth like a prophecy; as if it was written somewhere on a wall for you to decipher. You want to be the code-breaker, but you can't read.

They are created and the mongrels, the half-castes, the bastards, the crossbreeds, the half-breeds, and the half-bloods. The alchemists who summon the elixirs and the magicians who disappear at will. The tricksters, enchantresses, and shamans.

Her photographs of hybrids change to a 3-dimensional form that brilliantly harmonizes her concept (of animals, modified humans, and sometimes object arrangements of genteel furniture and crockery), in a sense that's apt. Her art as a whole articulates its angular cultural commentaries through parts not fitting together. 'Arione' (2004), for example, is a case study of the unbalancing power of simultaneously percolating binary oppositions. A six-foot-one-inch-tall fiberglass sculpture, she's an Amazonian black female figure in hot pants who might be serving the plate of muffins she holds, or just as easily be claiming them. Her bared chest might appear demeaning, yet she wears a shoulder holster and her left hand assertively rests on her hip. Her left leg turns equine and culminates in a hoof, which in turn stands on a silver circle, rooting her to the ground.

She's beautiful from some angles, ugly from others, ancient and futuristic. Black sperm-bindis writhe over her skull in place of hair.[6]

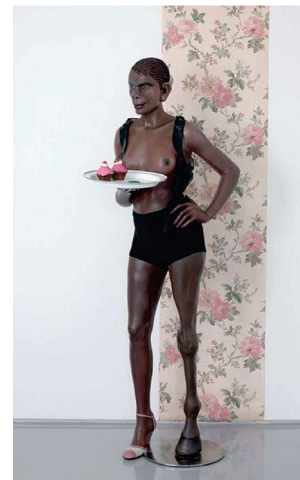


Image 10 : Arione (2004)

Source: https://www.india-seminar.com/2014/659/659_bharti_kher.htm Web: 12-April-2023

She emblemizes the act of being forced into a role and of escaping from that role, in miscellaneous ways. Stacking contradictions related to gender, race, species, role, and even temporality, the sculpture is vitalized by a constant crisscross of assumptions. Some kind of stochastic theory underlies it. (This is also evidently the work of a sculptor who trained as a painter, being a buildup of intensities – the hoof a sealing detail analogous to a final spot of color on a canvas, though Kher herself clarifies that the holster played that role.) Not surprisingly, Kher's biography also explains this: formerly an Indian in Britain and now a Briton in India, she's assumedly a connoisseur of displacement and disconnection but then also a name.

Arione's Sister, 2006 refers to Arion, Hercules's steed in Greek mythology – depicts the figure of a woman, science fiction with an elongated forehead and pale green nude figure, surrounded by a halo and again with one hoof, a fan of upscale shopping bags fanning around her like the conch behind Botticelli's Venus – and it was almost like she was an angel. The bags weigh her down, but they're wings with which she will fly. *"It's easy to say that the displacement in my work reflects my personal life, that the misunderstanding is about myself – but everybody has it, even the people who live here. People ask where these women like Arione come from. They say, 'They're you'; I say, 'No, they're you'. Those feelings of neither being from here or there don't just apply to those who move from different countries."*



Image 11 : Arione's Sister, 2006

Source: https://www.india-seminar.com/2014/659/659_bharti_kher.htm WEB: 12-APRIL-2023

Kher points out, noting how the meaning of objects and forms can change through a spectrum of viewers and associations. exist in a liminal state between humdrum domesticity and violent phantasmagoria, as their photo-shopped selves—part human, part animal—appear both seductive and demure, seemingly in agreement with their given roles, as well as domineering and resistant, having elected to relish in their own duplicitous and multiplying selfhoods. The poetics of the body reveals Kher's interests in entropy, mutation, and transformation, as witnessed by humans and animals alike^[7] (Menezes, 2021, p.46-47)

The Intermediaries

Bharti's Intermediaries series is her prism imagination to expose the in-betweens, between peoples their space, bodies, relationship, and, origins. The idea of something becoming something else. The body, the form, and the structure have the possibility to carry the skin of another to describe the process of transformation. Inspiration from 'Ardhanarishwara' (principle of the dualities of male and female energies) is a series of sculptures created of clay figurines of mythical beings, which Kher breaks, reassemble, and juxtaposes to create hybridized, otherworldly relics. Amalgamating imagery of mythological iconography and local culture, Kher dismantles found objects to locate the internal possibility of the work and to push them to become something that transcends their object hood. Hidden vulnerabilities surface in a process akin to Japanese kintsugi, in which

acts of fragmentation and repair come together. As Kher explains, 'I break things to know them, opening up material to discover and reveal something that is not apparent when it is whole.'

They are ready-made dolls made with the simplest five earthly materials fire, (clay, cement, brass, wax) water, light, and soul that Bharti puts in. She calls these dolls Gollu, they were first developed in 2016 when she bought 1000 small clay objects from South India, of which 300 were broken when arrived. She kept them in their broken bits, a day they were conjoined into human hybrids.

Bharti's interests changed from intrigue to a deepened intensity of mutations. The objects represent an entire range and source of life: from animals to gods to the secular, and by physically breaks open these figures with her hands and fusing them into new avatars^[8] (GHOSE, 2021). Her intermediaries explores both global and national space across multitude forms. Her sculptures comments on the cultural fabric of social dynamics rooted in lifestyle. Her work has layer of reference from science, history, narratives, mythology, ritualistic, secular, psychological and physical. They create an aura of transitional space, notion of go-between, mediums fascinates Kher which is in the center of all works 'the Abstraction of shape' her works are her imaginations that are influenced from her surrounding environment: because you make work about where you live, about who you are and where you are from

Intermediaries in Venice Biennale 2022



Image 12 : Intermediaries(28 pieces), Venice Biennale 2022.

Source : <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/plumage/bharti-khers-intermediaries-in-venice-2022/?source=app&frmapp=yes>. Web:01-June-2020.

She placed 28 intermediaries in Venice Biennale 2022 which all have different forms and meanings. These dolls have a notion of self as multiple which Kher feels as being universal. Her art practice is intimately intertwined with her life, not only because she borrows motifs and artefacts for her work, but also because she has an inquisitive mind and a strong desire to understand sociological issues that concerns more global and collective [9] (Nair, 2022).

Ancestor: An 18 foot tall painted bronze sculpture placed freely at Doris C. Freedman Plaza at the southeast entrance to Central Park. This depicts the universal mother figure linking cultural and personal pasts and futures. It is a stem from her ongoing series 'Intermediaries' but here for the first time she gave her gollu doll a monumental scale, which welcomes everyone with simile.

It reflects cross-cultural identity that embodies the complexity and potential of Indic and global traditional; deities that challenges the unity of male and female powers. Ancestor is a feminine figure adorned with the heads of 23 children's on her womb, belly, shoulder and back. Manifest a senses of belonging that all are welcomed in her warm embrace and celebrates motherhood (a keeper of wisdom and eternal source of creation and refuge). As her children are from everywhere, all countries, all religions, all genders, and all peoples. Kher's "Ancestor" reminds us there's one common theme 'the victory of good over evil', reaffirming the light within us.



Image 13 : ANCESTOR: A multi-headed goddess statue

Source : <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/plumage/bharti-khers-enchanted-ancestor-sculpture-unveils-at-central-park-ny/> WEB: 27-APRIL-2023

She and her ancestor had a connector. She is the keeper of wisdom, she is a mother goddess and she is carrying everyone. Public art fund is extraordinarily unique in that they support practicing artists to make interventions in public spaces and she feels Ancestor was the work that needed to be in a city that traffic and footfalls and people with different cultures. We are tracing journeys all the time and our children are away to leave a trace of ourselves forward, but our ancestors are proof that we also have passed. This work started very early in 2008 when she was in a basement and holding a small sculpture from the Harappa civilization. These are around 3000 BCE old. What she learned from them was that in a time happens would blow a single breath into the hollow chamber of the figure to activate his potential as a toe term as a seer, as a spirit as a guide [9] (GHOSE, 2021). As an abstract artist, she also loves to do work with figures, casting, and animating figures with her hand. When she tried to South India in 2014-15 she saw clay-backed sculptures. She started to collect in the transport back to the studio many of them arrived broken as clay is very fragile, but her work is incorporated with the ideas of mixing and fusing disparate objects. She loves to play with the figures worked with them over a period. Begin to fashion these sorts of new hybrid beings rupture and repair something that she could do repeatedly throughout her practice. These hybrid bodies started occupying very transitional spaces between reality and illusion. Which made her excited about the potentiality of these new avatars. As now they look new they have power. But the ancestor is more of an avatar as she is huge, and connects with an idea of womanhood, with motherhood philosophically, biologically, and politically. In this sculpture you can see a daughter in orange, she stands behind her mother almost inside her mother. As all children do they just want to be part of their mother almost as if they want to go back to their bodies? [10] (Nair, 2022). Motherhood had so many things like unpaid work, national service, and imperialistic services that hold up patriarchy sort of idealized. In this work she tries to tell motherhood is messy it's a never-ending process. The system is hard-fought and the cracks in her show her journey and the children on her body are like different identities, even the idea that we change all the time, like nature changes with the evolution that we are continuously in flow.

Balance (The Unexpected Freedom of Chaos)

The works are about possibility and alchemy, they are about magic, about the singular and dual, relationship between yin and yang going forward and backward. The

exhibition starts with the premises of break and repair, something that is visible in her works for many years. She breaks things to know them, their history, purity, material, and origin. She believes by opening them she could reveal them, which is not possible as it is a whole. A lot of her works are deeply psychological they go back and forward to the idea of body and the mind perhaps the soul. There is an inherent vulnerability in all of us, somehow cover and repaired constantly. She loves to make things that are very heavy but appear to look very light. It's a simple artistic trick a translation a transformation that is the essence of art-making for her. She pushes material to do what she doesn't it wanted to. She creates magic by floating things that are dense to combine cement and soften it by applying wax. To play with the material to confuse the optic, that cement looks like butter and wax looks like stone. Stone becomes light and bindi becomes quite heavy within the surface of the work. These are the ways she balances the work.



Image 14 : Hiraeth Three decimal points, of a minute, Equilibrium of a second, of a degree.2014

Source : <https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauserwirth-exhibitions/5147-bharti-kher-three-decimal-points-of-a-minute-of-a-second-of-a-degree/>WEB: 19-APRIL-2023

Balance is the inner self and potential for otherness: one that glidingly encompasses the politics of race, gender, and cultural difference; indeed, any external pressure. Yet it is a cubist portrait, compressing linear time. While we may all contain multitudes, our various selves reveal in rotational sequence. Kher's animals, women, even furniture – stand-ins for people, for her, for us – tend to fan out and overlay their sundry selves in simultaneity, displaying what they might want to be alongside what they have to be, each appearing to counterweight the other. The glass isn't half-empty, or half-full: it's both at once.

Every object has its singular point of contact and perfect balance on its own, Bharti allows these object to find their own alchemy and magic that becomes art. For finding their perfect balance there are no limits, no

time, and, no days when you will reach its zenith. It is a process in which you want the material to do what it is actually meant for.

Kher is always fascinated by ready-made objects their origin, body, texture, and balance so now she assembles, transforms, and juxtaposes found objects that have their own history with the space. Wooden wheels and architectural remnants, mannequin body casts, and pillars all clash in the mis-en-scene of dystopia and grand orchestration. In a very hazardous manner these elements are placed: handed on a rope, suspended from the ceiling, balanced with counter-weights, propped up in the space they belong. Objects seem to be dramatically installed with illuminating ray light of search-light used to navigate the sea. Both light and objects create a volume with the space. The object defines it, intersects it, and uses all the dimensions to balance it like the ribbon that links the balloons. It appear like a chaos: unique, dependent on one another for new. Audience witness a narrative that is a past or about to happen. The only stability in the ensemble is a triangle, the work that gives the exhibition its title, in which a single point of contact holds everything together in perfect equilibrium.

'It is a mobile that naturally finds balance or a point that marks the place and time and coordinates of where the world can stand still for a minute or a second of a degree. By both defying and accepting gravitational forces all objects can find perfect equilibrium, poise, and meaning'. Kher further explores the artistic strategy of stripping objects of their meaning and making them open to misinterpretation and magic, creating alluring works of abstract beauty.

Idea of Home

For her space is the most important thing for an artwork because of this she left London and came to Delhi. As she was not getting the space there she needed. She in love with her studio, for her it is her first home. In Hustle bustle of satellite city of Delhi Gurgaon she had a studio of three stories. A place where her ideas germinates to shape and her live begins every day. One floor she had her office where all her finished works are placed other is the workshop where ideas takes shapes. She don't work on one project or idea at a time many things go in her studio simmentaneously. Works are on different states: Layouts, molding, and even in the form of ideas. She experiments a lot with material and how it's gone look at its final stage in her lab. Her studio is a jam of large and small figures that look like a 'bizarre stage show' of puppets and dolls.

Over the time her artwork has an idea of the home and the house, how the objects play in the space. She loves to negotiate with the awkward and fragile space and how the treads run through the landscape wall decoration. With all her new exhibitions she see the space where she has to play with her art. Based on that she starts her process. As place are not same they have different size, history, interior and aura.

Hauser and Wirth, London (2010): Her first solo exhibition was at Hauser and Wirth, London (2010), an election building that was built in 1800s by Edwin Lutyens as a bank before coming to India. She approached this space because she feels it is for her. A cool and quite homecoming from India, even the space was designed by a person who has long and string history in India.

The space seem to her like a mountain so she put a home, a tree and a mountain, that was “*a landscape with in a landscape*”. Other than landscape she place a house of bindi in her space. She collects objects for a very long time like tea cups, buys fabrics, she randomly goes to antiques to buy old stuff without any reason that has an innate relief that an object is infused with the history of the people that have used it, which conceptually becomes a new beginning for works. In the same way, every gallery has a history of space. It is like a confession room that make you commute to the work, the flow of life in form of bindis where you describe yourself being its part. The interior surfaces is animated like an oculi feminine with bindi, providing a boisterous, almost pagan, counterpoint to the hushed rituals of the confessional. The single light bulb hanging from the ceiling brings with it images of forced confessions in prison cells. The claustrophobia of the domestic realm, a persistent theme in Kher’s work, finds parallels in the staged decorum of the church with cupboards that whisper secrets that oscillate between truths and lies.



Image 15: In Conversation with Bharti Kher.

Source : <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/bharti-kher/?auth=req>. Web: 27-Dec-2021.

Kochi Biennale: the beautiful space to display work amaze Bharti as it was raw and has a great history of sea. It was not white cube it is having blank walls which have mark of past, that becomes transient yet devoted. The view to sea, boats, ship building docks with gigantic gantries, the island in the distance, and the best is the residue of Arab, Portuguese and Indian travelers and their trade. This makes the place more vibrant then the artwork.^[12] (Gersigny, 2022).

She is insanelly narrative and consider architecture and narrative of a space before the process. She create her works that speaks the language of the space its uniqueness and gravity. Stories that relate makes her works alive. She move mountain a folly of strength to give her perspective in her work. She is experimental artist plays with objects and believes in multitasking and things to give 100 percent in all her task in studio as an artist, at home she is a daughter, a wife, a mother and ongoing out she has many personalities. Some roles are contradictory some chosen and some are put on us. In her art she experiments with all classifications race, class, and time- they could be anyone or anybody at any time. But most important urge of a psyche is to do something other than what they are. Got to know many things how she relate her space with home with a very talented and young artist Vikrant Kano who himself works on this subject, so he describe her perspective very well.

Conclusion

Bharti establish herself not just as an outsider but also as an artist, it was completely alien to her when she came to India but she played a great role of an artist. So as an artist, she started observing what was outside there. Visits to markets and streets help her to see a new culture, how women dress here, men’s expressions and dressing-up, social and political life, daily life, what is this country about, what types of people are here, etc. This helped her to see the life of India and more importantly, gave her the inspiration she came for. From the beginning, she had an obsession with readymade which was her first concern, and that just became an investigation while observing the streets. Being an outsider becomes her quality, as you don’t know the local language of the place it’s like losing your five senses. So for being an artist, you have to be like a snake that hears with its tongue. So if you can’t speak, you watch and listen and hear the unsaid. Being ignored is also a place to know a place better. So sometimes being ignored is quite interesting you read

things which people couldn't hear. You watch more and when you can't communicate you listen. In the silence, you hear the unsaid language and feel the spaces between the people.

Through the mid-90s Bharti became a working artist immersing herself in the Delhi art scene. An artist such as Bharti is free-spirited and cannot be confined to a medium. Her creative energy spills across a diverse range - from digital photography to sculpture and installation to painting. Her work interrogates the relationship between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' addressing issues of identity, race, class, feminism, and consumerism. Modern Indian art has progressed a lot through anti-institutionalism even in Bharti. Her artwork is quite frenetic and breaks the boundaries by going through many mediums and many different strings. She is very much fascinated with the object and their sizes her works vary from a small sperm-shaped bindi to a large heart of a whale.

Her artwork has graced According to Bharti, her work is said to be quite manic because it goes through many mediums and many different strings. Her works have lines and underneath treads that don't take you anywhere, but there is a kind of constancy in the questions that are in the journey of art. Her work takes birth from the start basically and reads text from books, interested in nature, the ideas of hybrid the way that we live in the world today, the way human beings fight with nature, the self-way we live in cities, the way we are so awkward and fragile at the same time, we can be so cruel and so very tender at the same time. She not static but always with something or other with vast difference between the two.

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