

Bharti KHER

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The artist says her sculpture of a mother figure, located at the southeast entrance of the park, represents "a guide to search and honor our past histories."



Bharti Kher's "Ancestor" is on view through August 27, 2023. (All photos Elaine Velie/Hyperallergic)

Miles away from the Statue of Liberty, another looming statue of a woman has arrived in New York City. With an upheld hand that evokes a *mudra* blessing depicted in traditional Buddhist and Hindu imagery — and 23 children emerging from her body like flowering buds on a tree — artist Bharti Kher's "Ancestor" will now guide visitors into Central Park.

Kher was raised in the United Kingdom before moving to her current home in New Delhi. In 2016, she began reconfiguring vintage ceramic objects from South India, resulting in her ongoing series *Intermediaries*. The original ceramics range from depictions of animals to gods, but Kher uses them to create "new avatars." Her Central Park installation, unveiled September 8, is a continuation of this years-long body of work.



Twenty-three figures emerge from the body of “Ancestor.”

“Ancestor,” with a cloaked child covering behind her and the faces of other children growing from her powerful form, is undoubtedly a mother figure, but one which Kher created in her own imagination. She describes the statue as a symbol of multiculturalism and interconnectedness, and the figure of the mother as a universal symbol of care, a source of creation, and a much-needed presence in public spaces.

“I invite viewers to leave their wishes, dreams and prayers with ‘Ancestor’; and to pass on their wisdom of living and love to the next generation,” Kher said in a statement. “She is the keeper of all memories and time. A vessel for you to travel into the future, a guide to search and honor our past histories, and a companion — right here, right now — in New York City.”

Kher hand-painted pigment and patina bronze onto “Ancestor,” giving the sculpture the appearance of old ceramic and suggesting that it has stood there for years.



The outline of a child stands behind “Ancestor.” The cloaked figure is more recognizable from behind.



“Ancestor” faces the crowded Midtown streets from its place in Doris C. Freeman Plaza.

The southeast entrance of Central Park, called the Doris C. Freedman Plaza, has hosted over 60 installations since the establishment of the Public Art Fund in 1977. The most recent works were artist Sam Moyer’s 2020 “Doors for Doris,” a stone installation that connected Central Park’s landscape to the Midtown metropolis outside, and Mark Mander’s 2019 “Tilted Head,” a surrealist bronze sculpture that appears to crumble like a stone statue.

Daniel S. Palmer, adjunct curator at the Public Art Fund, which sponsored the installation, called Kher’s sculpture “exactly the kind of monument we need in the 21st century.”

“It is a deeply personal expression of hybridity and global identity that invites dialogue about the importance of honoring our ancestors and fostering cultural exchange,” Palmer said.

“Ancestors” will remain on view through August 27, 2023.