

**PERROTIN**

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**PRESSBOOK**

Bharti KHER

*Artforum*

*September 2018*

## REVIEWS

## Bharti Kher

DHC/ART

In 1993, Bharti Kher weighed moving to New Delhi versus moving to New York. For an artist born and raised in England, she chose the road less traveled and relocated to India. As her recent show attests, Kher's decision has made all the difference in her choice of materials and motifs. In a series of sculptures made between 2012 and 2016, heavily lacquered saris draped on cast-concrete plinths create portraits of the absent bodies they reference. In *The night she left*, 2011, saris twist up and around an overturned chair on a set of reclaimed wooden stairs that dead-end into a wall. Who is "she," and where has she gone? Does her cryptic disappearance invoke romantic intrigue or the sexual violence against women so rampant in New Delhi?

Kher's favored material is the bindi. An adornment predominantly worn by a woman on her forehead to signify marital status, the bindi also represents the third, or all-seeing, eye. These days, bindis are popular, commercially manufactured accessories that come in a seemingly endless variety of eye-popping pigments. Mining the potential of these mass-produced dots for seriality, repetition, and optical illusion, Kher has made a career of plastering them on everything—from paintings and maps to room-size installations and the aforementioned staircase.

The wonder of the bindi as a ready-made mark is also its potential drawback. A cheap solution to a range of compositional problems, bindis freshen up a picture the way lipstick freshens up a face. In Kher's art, the method of application determines their success. In a series of large-scale paintings that recall pointillism, Op art, Minimalism, and other global traditions of abstraction, Kher submerges the viewer in multicolored fields of dots that thrum with energy. Dazzling as they are, they nonetheless fail to deliver on the artist's promise that the "work looks back at you" with its field of third eyes. The obsessively constructed images are far too hermetic to offer that kind of spiritual reciprocity. Elsewhere, however, bindis adorn a series of Mercator maps to astonishing effect. Meticulously affixed in undulating lines of color on these notoriously distorted, Eurocentric maps, waves of bindis blur the lines between north, south, east, and west, while conjuring trade routes, swells of spermatozoa, and other charged methods of hybridization. In these collages, which transcend the decorative, Kher employs the bindi symbolically to subvert the colonialist sense of superiority inherent in the Mercator projection system—as well as in the Western art world.

Building on themes introduced by her bindi works, *Six Women*, 2014, comprises six life-size plaster casts of naked women resigned to expose perceived imperfections of their bodies. Cast from the differently sized, shaped, and aged bodies of sex workers whom Kher paid to pose in her studio, the figures pierce us with their vulnerability. While their colorlessness is a welcome reprieve from the polychrome paintings, it is their precarity that moves us. Although their eyes are closed, their spectral presence engages the viewer emotionally, even without the allure

of the factory-made third eye. Seeing their flesh immobilized in plaster, I was seized by the memory of my mother's body before she died.

In *Mother and Child*, 2014, one of the most compelling works in the show, two shop mannequins stand undressed before a primitive wooden sculpture of a boy wielding a sword. Aside from the fact that one mannequin is missing both her left breast and leg, while the other sprouts a patch of fur on her back, their forms are nearly identical. Their colors, however, diverge. Patched with white plaster, the partially dismembered figure is light beige and wears turquoise eye shadow; the other is a uniform, lustrous black. Salami-colored resin fills in the wound left by the breast's amputation; the breast itself appears surreally on the boy's back. Referencing the violent partitioning of British India in 1947, the trinity of figures confronts the legacy of colonial brutality, which Kher implicitly compares to matricide. The partition is history, but the scars remain.

—Ara Osterweil

## LONDON

## "All Too Human: Bacon, Freud and a Century of Painting Life"

TATE BRITAIN

"John Minton committed suicide because 'Matisse and Picasso had done everything there's to be done in art.' Unfortunately he had not heard of me," boasted Indian artist F. N. Souza. At Tate Britain, curators Elena Crippa and Laura Castagnini corroborated Souza's point—sort of. Spanning more than a hundred years, and featuring slightly fewer than a hundred paintings, their exhibition proclaimed the so-called School of London to be the natural heir to the figurative legacy of the "School of Paris." Although Souza himself was not presented as London's answer to Picasso—the show's title made amply clear that Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud were neck and neck for *that* slot—he did have an entire room to himself. There we met Souza's celebrated *Black Nude*, 1961, whose rictus grin recalls that of Kali, the dark-hued Hindu goddess



Bharti Kher, *Mother and Child*, 2014, resin, wood, wax, fur, 58¼ × 24 × 70⅞".

