

Bharti KHER

Bharti Kher: The Unexpected Freedom of Chaos

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Bharti Kher: *The Unexpected Freedom of Chaos*

By David Rhodes



Bharti Kher, *Virus I*, 2010. Mahogany wood, brass, 10,000 bindis, instructions for installation. View of the wall bindi spiral produced, exhibited at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (UK). Courtesy the artist, Perrotin, and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art.

This is New Delhi-based artist Bharti Kher's first exhibition at Perrotin New York, eight years after her show at Hauser & Wirth. Change and reconfiguration are core issues for Kher, and her practice is heterogeneous, reiterating the significance of flux and transformation in her works. Here two distinct groups of works are presented, "mirrors" and "Intermediaries" are exhibited together, with a wall piece, *Virus* (2020) situated close to the gallery's entrance.

Virus is a solid spiral of white bindis measuring 31 inches in diameter (bindis are small discs worn daily by Indian women on their foreheads, and which Kher has been using as readymade objects for close to 20 years). A 30-year project (2010-2039) started in 2010, *Virus* is presented over time for specific exhibitions. Obviously, the word virus has a different relevance now from what it did when the exhibition opened in New York on February 22, but the piece's exponential growth resonates with our current predicament. The accompanying text, episodic, year-by-year, is part record of events from dates past and projections of those yet to arrive—it includes fact and invention, reflecting an inevitable passage of time, but refracted through post-truth's increasingly frictionless fiction. Placed next to *Virus* is a mahogany and brass box for the 10,000 bindis and a set of instructions for installing the piece. It is quiet, subtle, like a time tunnel slowly appearing in an otherwise mute and passive wall.



Installation view: *Bharti Kher: The Unexpected Freedom of Chaos*, Perrotin Gallery, New York, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin.

The “mirrors” comprise cracked and split sheets of mirrored glass, the surfaces covered in patterns of colored bindis. *Cry Me A River* (2018) is the only one of five mirror pieces to be contained within a frame and mounted like a mirror, or painting, on the wall. The other four are more sculptural and lean like people against the wall, supported by means of a low shelf. *Placebo landscape* (2019) is one such work; at 205 inches tall it is monumental, yet elegant. Like a splintered iceberg it is both seductive and ambivalent. The bindis mark the surface across the fractured and cracked mirror like a net or screen in space, a mist of color against the mirrored depth of field.



Bharti Kher, *Namaste Henry Moore*, 2019. Clay, cement, wax, copper/brass, 70 1/16 x 9 5/8 x 9 5/8 inches. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Alex Austin.

The “Intermediaries” complete this installation, their columns of varying heights partly caught in the fragmented reflections of the “mirrors.” Rectangular or circular columns of concrete with a number of discrete layers of wax and metal at the top, they support fired clay figures—traditionally used at harvest festivals and brought from southern India—that have been broken and reconfigured into hybridized creatures, part god, animal and human. *Namaste Henry Moore* (2019), “namaste” meaning a respectful greeting, is just above 70 inches in height; unlike the large scale of *Virus* or the “mirrors,” the “Intermediaries” vary from around waist height to a little above head height, always remaining related to the viewers’ own verticality and stature. On top of *Namaste Henry Moore*’s circular concrete column,

resting on a brass section plinth is a composite female figurine and other partial objects standing on and reflected in the smooth horizontal surface. An elephant head, askew on a narrow trunk of clay, is positioned next to and above the female figure. While the title, the woman, and the elephant's prominent breasts call out to Moore's abstracted nudes, here Kher includes other partial objects, as well, suggesting a various or composite self or a fluid world of optical sensuality and mythological creatures, all interrelated, amalgamated, and temporal.

Kher has said that she "break[s] things to know them," in presenting works that reveal, through their particular composites, aspects not apparent in singular forms. The ruptures alert us to the productive variety and inherent chaos of the world, as well as the multiple selves that constitute any human being. Totalizing knowledge is false and superficially reassuring, a mechanism; the truth and pleasure of the world are rather to be found in accepting the continually changing juxtapositions manifest when categories are crossed, and materials mixed.

May 11 - 24, Perrotin is launching an online viewing room, called Perrotin Viewing Salon. The inaugural exhibition will survey for the first time Bharti Kher's Atlas work to date.