

**PRESSBOOK**

Bharti KHER

*Blouin Artinfo*

*November 2016*

## **Bharti Kher's Balance Brilliance at Galerie Perrotin Paris**

"The Laws of Reversed Effort" at Galerie Perrotin Paris until December 23 is a solo exhibition by renowned Indian painter and sculptor Bharti Kher, who is perhaps best known for her "bindi" paintings and her extensive use of everyday, found objects.

Taking inspiration from Indian and European classical mythology as well as the complexities of everyday life, Kher uses the properties and characteristics of a wide range of materials to convey her ideas and messages. She describes her practice as "deeply feminine," referring to "the female hand"

"When I want you to look at my work I want you to experience it physically," says Kher. "So you not just smell the work, you kind of feel the work intrinsically in the ways that you understand your own physicality, which is probably why I use in my own work so many materials."

Continuing her ongoing engagement with a wide range of subjects including identity, culture, gender politics, and mythology, "The Laws of Reversed Effort" is an exhibition of four conversations executed within the four spaces of the gallery.

The centerpiece of exhibition is the artist's provocative and daring "Six Women" 2013-2016, which consists of a series of life-sized sculpture of female figures, cast from real women – in this case six female sex workers from Kolkata.

According to Kher, "Six Women" deals with the idea of the ageing female body as well as the exchange between a woman and another woman in terms of their body, and what that actually means.

The key theme of "The Laws of Reversed Effort" is balance – "a constant pulling and pushing of forces" that comes to light in works such as the artist's balance pieces and the mirror piece "What can I tell you that you don't know already?" 2013.

In the catalogue essay, New Delhi-based art critic and curator Gayatri Sinha states that the question of balance is vital in the work of an artist like Kher, whose oeuvre may appear like simultaneous conversations within the same room.

"The engagement with balance teases out the idea of equilibrium: Kher seems as preoccupied with the equilibrium of physical forces, as psychological," says Sinha.

To find out more about the inspiration and motivation behind "The Laws of Reversed Effort," BLOUIN ARTINFO got in touch with the artist and asked her a few questions.

### **What was the motivation for "The Laws of Reversed Effort" at Galerie Perrotin and what does the title reveal about the exhibition?**

Balance is essential to our lives and our bodies. The show is about equilibrium and the idea that to push in one direction means that you push into motion a counter – the other. It's the law of physics and philosophy and also maybe my own law of art. To make someone think about the body you don't just make a body. You make around a body the negative spaces and things you don't see.

The rhythms of our cycles determine the functions of the body; our balance is determined biologically in the functions of our ears. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, "As the head moves, hair

cells in the semicircular canals send nerve impulses to the brain by way of the acoustic nerve. The nerve impulses are processed in the brain to help us know where we are in space or if we are moving."

I like to make works that make you feel like you know something about yourself even when you are not thinking about the body.

**How do the works in "The Laws of Reversed Effort" reflect the primary motivations, themes, and preoccupations of your ongoing practice?**

The cabinet work "The betrayal of causes once held dear VI" 2014-2016 works with the museum cabinet as the carrier of meaning and an anthropological source of information – as if we expect the object to impart wisdom. I have made the object a body. It carries 7 epidermal layers working like skin. And as all the works in the exhibition speak to one another, this work speaks to the mirrors "What can I tell you that you don't know already" 2013 and agrees that the body knows what it needs to know. I've used wax like a carrier of code for you to unpack.

**What is the significance of the materials you have worked in the creation and development of the works in the exhibition?**

Materials are carriers of meaning and alchemy. All I do is activate the material. Wax, for example, has a wonderful magical property that like mercury retains itself in both states of liquid and solid. Descartes said:

"But even as I speak, I put the wax by the fire and look: the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound. But does the same wax remain? It must be admitted that it does; no one denies it, no one thinks otherwise. So what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness? Evidently none of the features which I arrive at by means of the senses; for whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered – yet the wax remains... I must therefore conclude that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone." [1] [1] [\[http://www.shmoop.com/descartes/quotes.html\]](http://www.shmoop.com/descartes/quotes.html) Rene Descartes from Meditations on First Philosophy]

**How would you describe your understanding and engagement with the figure, particularly the female nude, as rendered in the works in "The Laws of Reversed Effort" ?**

My engagement with the figure is a long project. It refers to art history and not. It's about experience and memory of skin as a carrier of experience through the process of casting. Plaster casting is one of the oldest forms of making real the body. It was used by the Egyptians 4000 years ago to cast the death mask. They believed that the soul of the departed could be captured in essence through the pores of the skin, and as plaster impregnates the skin, this was the way of doing so using materials. I'm doing the same. But my models are alive and I want to know them, I want them to tell you who they are and for you to pay attention to their voice.

**What role does your ongoing interest and dialogue with Indian and European classical mythology play in the exhibition?**

It's my learning so I share what I know. I try to learn more about the things I don't know and I make up the rest. Its mythology and so you have license to play.

**What do you want to express and convey with the works in "The Laws of Reversed Effort" ?**

When the art comes to me, it does so as a message or image or sounds. I just turn it round in my head, filter it out, send it back out like I'm a transmitter. Sometimes what you get is a warning, sometimes it just says "watch". Sometimes I predict myself. Sometimes it makes me sad and I have to exorcise this through the next work.

