

**PRESSBOOK**

Bharti KHER

*Vie des Arts*

*August 2018*



*An absence of assignable cause, 2007*  
Fibreglass, bindis  
173 x 300 x 116 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin  
Photo: Maegan Hill-Carroll

Bharti Kher

# Bindis Create a **CONVERSATION**

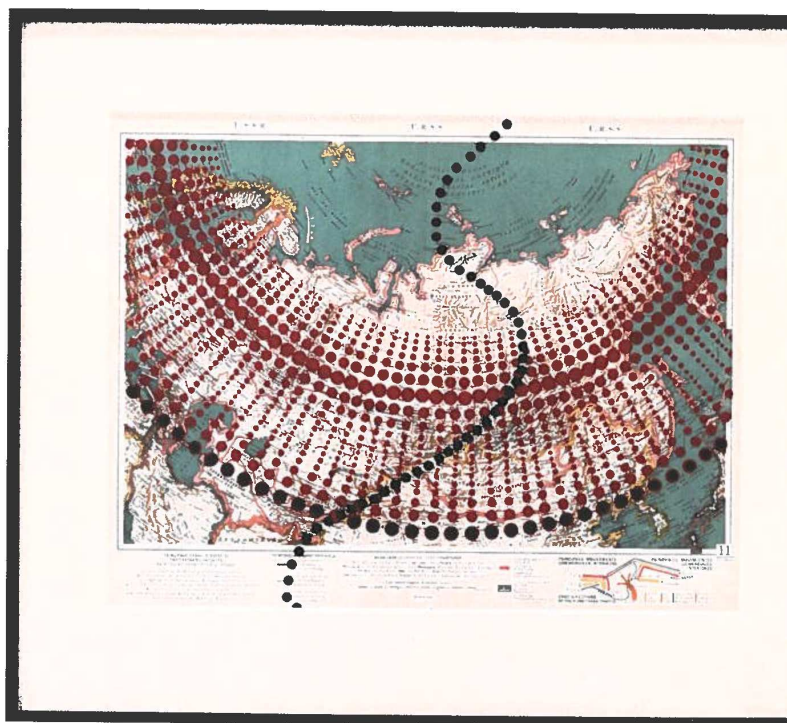
By Veronica Redgrave

In reviewing the current show of work by Bharti Kher at DHC/ART Foundation, one doesn't know where to begin. Although the artist is internationally renowned for her use of bindi – the tiny red dot worn by Hindu women on their forehead – the exhibition also showed life-size concrete figures, sari-sculptures, and a colossal blue whale's heart. Her intellectually seductive work is an invitation to discover; from the microcosmic to the macro, from the spiritual to the material, and from the flatness of mapped worlds to multidimensional installations.



The first floor at DHC is charmingly elegant. Light from the tall turn-of-the-century windows caresses colourful saris enclosed in resin. A presence of absence, their graceful flowing shapes suggest a social gesture – “the remembered movement of throwing the garment off. They are like amber; an object that carries memories.” They are a kind of portraiture. Some refer to Ovid’s *The Heroides*, a collection of poems about Greek and Roman heroines. Others have titles evoking a narrative back-story with suggestive titles such as *The night she left* (2011), or *The day they met* (2011). Here Kher explores the sense of identity. Not only is each one her own approximate weight, the saris also recall her past: “memories of my childhood where my father worked in textiles and my mother was a dressmaker with a fabric store.” On the walls facing these amorphous yet sensual shapes is a series of framed bindi abstractions. Thousands in varying sizes have been hand-glued on top of each other forming hypnotically beautiful geometric shapes: a kind of op art. The dots are not only decorative; they are “a deliberate sign of the feminine.” Rooted in ritual, they are worn as a representation of a spiritual third eye; a sacred symbol. “Remember also that the work looks back at you.”

The second floor gallery has one of the exhibit’s most powerful pieces. A ready made using found objects, *Mother and child* (2014) refers to the 2012 notorious gang rape case that took place in India. It arouses an immediate feeling of unease while inviting attention to decipher the surrealism. The mother’s severed breast extends from the boy’s back; an apparent association with maternity. Her body is decorticated; missing part of her leg. Created from a 60’s plaster window mannequin, she reaches out to the young child. Made from a wooden puppet found in Southern India, he carries a harvest stick-cum-weapon raised at her. Behind the mother stands a second female figure, exactly the same plaster mannequin but whole, and painted black; a type of alter ego.



*I've seen more things than I dare to remember 4, 2015*  
Bindis on paper  
70.3 x 83 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin  
Photo: Claire Dorn

The mother and son and her doppelganger are interconnected in the disconcerting group.

After the masses of bindis, the artist’s grouping of nude sex workers hand-cast in concrete is an abrupt sea change. *Six Women* (2013-2015) sit side by side, “too tired to stand.” They have a stoic similarity: a rigid submissiveness. Far from erotic, there is no carnality in their immobility. Drooping breasts and tummies suggest a poignant resignation. From Calcutta, the “largest red light area in Asia”, their undemanding gazes recall death masks. Their heavy presence is jarring amidst the more esoteric narratives.

The cerebral yet playful exhibition is seemingly simple but deeply complex. The voyage that begins with a dot ends with a whale. The largest creature on earth quite naturally has the largest heart. Kher’s life-size cast resin piece is “about the nature of love.” The provocative piece has a “bindi-skin”: clusters accurately portray veins and membranes. The fibreglass sculpture resonates with power. Yet the delicate little bindis suggest fragility. Their repurposing adds a mysterious dimension to the provocative piece. They add a delicate dynamism to the weighty piece. As throughout the show, their juxtapositions create a conversation. It is up to the viewer to interpret the ciphers. ●

**Bharti Kher**  
*Points de départ, points qui lient*

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April 20 – September 9, 2018