

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present its first solo exhibition of work by Huma Bhabha. Featuring new sculptures and drawings, the show opens on January 25 and will remain on view through March 14, 2020. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, January 25 from 6:00 pm until 8:00 pm.

Born in Karachi, Pakistan and based in Poughkeepsie, New York, Huma Bhabha has become increasingly recognized for the figurative and material vocabularies she has developed for over three decades. The humanoid subjects of her work bear the traces of numerous processes and traditions, embodying an otherworldly synthesis of the beauty, passion, and conflict that define our world.

Bhabha evokes archaic and contemporary sources alike, so that cycles of time, of life and its inevitable decay, are concretized as physical forms. In any given sculpture or drawing, the grotesque biomorphic distortions that characterize recent science fiction and horror movies exist alongside painterly passages of great sensitivity and tenderness. Proceeding by way of intuition and trial and error, she imbues her figures in two and three dimensions alike with palpable emotional charge.

The sculptures in this exhibition exemplify the range of Bhabha's experimentation and have been constructed from cork, foam, metal, wood, and paint, among other materials, some of them found. In Ground (2019), the body of a standing figure, positioned against the wall like the kind of architectural relief one might find in an ancient temple, has been fashioned from carved cork; a shredded tire provides the circle that defines its face, lending it a haunting openness, and transforming an instance of evident physical entropy into a focal point for psychological empathy. The artist's only other relief-based figure of this kind was a monumental example featured in the 57th Carnegie International. This new work, therefore, represents an important addition to her repertoire of sculptural typologies.

If Bhabha's figures can be grouped according to the largely traditional poses they assume (seated, standing, and supine bodies predominate), they can also be categorized by how they engage discourses associated with modernism and minimalism. Her work is notable for its

voracious and encyclopedic embrace of inspirations from throughout the histories of art, architecture, and design, as well as its willingness to take on formal puzzles from countless spheres of visual culture. The breadth of reference and use of found materials connect Bhabha's practice to the legacy of artists like Robert Rauschenberg, for instance; the wrought nature of her characters, and the acknowledgement of war and violence as pervasive forces find precedents in the paintings of Francis Bacon and the sculptures of Alberto Giacometti.

Mask of Dimitrios (2019), a startling new seated figure, draws from many of these traditions. The figure's body appears to emerge from a metal armature inspired by domestic chairs familiar to Bhabha from her upbringing in Karachi; plastic bags hover in the center of its torso like lungs; its limbs are covered with mottled clay; its ribs are made of rubber; and its spine is an undulating pipe that ends in a red rubber toy and resembles the vestigial appendage of a primate from another time or dimension. Such sculptures reveal how Bhabha constructs her objects, putting faith in her materials—in their innate beauty and energy in addition to their structural qualities and surface textures. Working directly at scale, she eschews modes of production that require maquettes and enlargement, favoring instead techniques that encourage tactility, and that elicit ongoing contact between maker and object.

Several other sculptures, including a group of imposing, kouroi-like standing figures, are filled with subtleties of color and painterly gesture that animate Bhabha's forms and further accentuate their sculpted contours. With faces on all four sides of their heads, each possessing its own shifting mood (hilarity, ferocity, astonishment, joy), these works are replete with surfaces on which painted marks can be inscribed. Cork, with its natural tones and pitted texture, performs differently as a substrate than do the bright pink and light blue of Styrofoam, for instance, though marks describing the creatures' musculature frequently move across materials, uniting them through the power of the artist's line.

Bhabha also employs this compositional boldness and adventurous approach to surface in the drawings, frequently large in scale, that have been an integral part of her project for many years. She begins by taking photographs, often of deserted landscapes, and collaging them with pages from magazines, calendars, and exhibition invitations; these become the grounds on which she

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then draws images of her looming creatures using a variety of pigments and mediums. While the majority of the drawings have focused on the heads of these beings, Bhabha has increasingly begun to sketch their entire bodies. Standing against lurid, iridescent skies, they seem to step forward out of the worlds they inhabit and into the spaces occupied by their viewers. Other drawings appear to be filled with multiple figures, layered on top of one another: mask-like facades hover before shifting cubist planes that suggest unexpected dimensionality. As worked as the sculptures, they share their paradoxical mixture of vulnerability and strength, their utter strangeness and all-too-close familiarity.

In 2019, Huma Bhabha (b. 1962, Karachi, Pakistan; lives and works in Poughkeepsie, New York) was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. We Come in Peace, a rooftop installation of her sculptures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was on view in 2018. She has also been the subject of museum shows at The Contemporary Austin, Texas (2018); David Roberts Art Foundation, London (2017); MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2013); Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy (2012); and Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2011). Recent group exhibitions include the Carnegie International, 57th Edition, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2018); Give Up the Ghost, Baltic Triennial 13, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia (2018); Fourth Plinth Shortlist Exhibition, National Gallery, London (2017); Stranger, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (2016); All the World's Futures, 56th Venice Biennale (2015); America Is Hard to See, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015); Atopolis, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2015); and Land Marks, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013).