

Press Announcement

Bharti Kher. A Wonderful Anarchy

Hauser & Wirth Somerset

28 September 2019 – 5 January 2020

Opening: Friday 27 September 2019, 6 – 8 pm



Hauser & Wirth Somerset is proud to present 'A Wonderful Anarchy', an exhibition of new work by Bharti Kher, following her three-month residency with the gallery in 2017. This is the artist's first solo exhibition at Hauser & Wirth Somerset and marks a return to the most elemental themes within her practice. Kher, who works across a multitude of forms, will present a body of sculpture, installation and paintings. In the process of transforming found objects, and continually experimenting with materials, she layers references: to the mythological and scientific, secular and ritualistic, physical and psychological. At the centre of all works is the abstraction of shape and confluence of time in a provocative meeting of materials. This act of making and creating sculpture is borne through the act of drawing. Kher will be the first artist to continue a residency in conjunction with their exhibition and will remain in Somerset until December.

As visitors arrive at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, they will encounter the exhibition's largest sculpture, 'Half-woman' (2019), a monumental 3.5 metre cast bronze figure which was conceived from the artist's series of smaller sculptures, 'The intermediaries' (2019). Like 'The Intermediary Family' (2018) that came before it and featured in Frieze Sculpture Park 2018, 'Half-woman' (2019) invokes themes of female multiplicity. This time however, Kher presents the potency of her goddess through negative space. She is hollowed-out, becoming a product of excavation, with an ornate half-circle exploding from her depths – a formalistic intervention of shapes that visitors will see recurring throughout the show. The sculpture was produced locally at the Morris Singer Foundry in Hampshire and developed during Kher's first residency period in Somerset.

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The exhibition continues into the Threshing Barn, where visitors see Kher exploring the notion of accretion in a style that goes beyond the idiosyncratic tendencies of a hobbyist collector, and into the intention of art-making with the exhibition namesake – ‘A wonderful anarchy’ (2018). Acting as a dynamic counterpoint to the outdoor bronze, this new balance work, brings together her vast curation of personal belongings, heirlooms, and found or collected pedestrian objects. Kher weaves this detritus of the studio in a manner so rapidly that she says the moment of making was ‘of synchronicity and rhyme’. Dysfunctional staircases, yarns of wool, rusted urns, and the remnants of ominous black lace are pushed up against chains, scales, horns and hooks, even the most pristine of miniature figurines – suspending the domestic and the captive, in perfect stillness. The anchor of this supposed serenity is not just the ropes and pulleys, but also the pillar that stands at a distance from the entropy it holds together, representing a state of resilience and counterbalance in a world constantly in flux.

Alongside ‘A wonderful anarchy’ (2018) in the Threshing Barn, Kher presents ‘Algorithm for time travel’ (2018), one of her latest bindi panels. The bindi first appeared in her work in 1995 and is a ‘raw material’ that crosses many axis – both cartographic and psychological, in its twin use as material and motif. As they travel between the cellular and the cosmic, the Cartesian and the algorithmic, the superficial and the sublime, Kher’s finely executed bindi works create their own distinctive language.

In the same gallery we see ‘The whole is greater’ (2017) – a series of drawings on pages of old ledger notebooks. Kher’s fascination with instruments of record-keeping is not new, neither is her penchant for creating from them a newer mathematics. Abstraction via shape is a recurring gesture, even a primal return. Kher says ‘if I could remake my artistic career, I think I would be a minimalist painter. All the art that I love comes from the tradition of reduction. When I think about the purest form, it really goes back to the intention of the object and the integrity of the object with its narrative and name’. For an artist who creates as much poetry with her naming as she does with her making, Kher’s works demand that we ‘read’ these drawings as much as we ‘look’ at them. Her geometric gestures across the words ‘avoir’ and ‘doit’ lend the phrase a metaphysical register that invokes the ‘space’ between owning and owing, between where one is and where one is meant to go.

Occupying similar intellectual ground are her ‘family of in-betweens’ – ‘The intermediaries’ (2019), on view in the Workshop Gallery. In true fashion of a practice that brings visually contradictory motifs together, these mosaic of clay forms are mounted on cement and neatly delineated layers of wax. In this series, which was developed during the artist’s residency in Somerset, Kher collects, conjoins, and breaks disparate clay figures in order to create a self-fashioned mythology. Mutating female energies come to us with heads as fruits, intertwined with lace, and bellies birthing several disembodied faces.

Extracting these found objects from the scenes of South Indian domesticity and placing them within a site of consciously curated chaos, is her way of not only refusing the quasi-iconographic connotations associated with them, but also actively refurbishing the inherited histories of those objects to construct new narratives. In a practice where rupture and repair come together repeatedly, these hybrid bodies appear to exist in a transitional space between reality and illusion, between decay and material, balance and weight, and questions of the passage of time.

These points of inquiry seep into the Pigsty gallery, where the artist has installed her second balance piece of the exhibition – ‘Consummate joy and a Sisyphean task’ (2019), marking the convergence of what began as anarchic chaos into a joyous formalism. The suspended menagerie of collectibles remains a consistent idea deployed by Kher, however this time the elements are precise and few in number – each recalling a shape that is a cornerstone of other works throughout the exhibition. Kher builds this arc of meta narrativity by displaying in conjunction with this piece, a selection from her Axis series. These drawings, made by the artist in 2014, formed similarly the starting point for her grandiose geometric sculptures that followed in the later years. For Kher, they serve as tokens to remind us that there is an elemental power in ‘what the (drawing) hand knows’.

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As a bookend to this coterie of mediums, the exhibition concludes with 'Virus X' (2019) in the Pigsty gallery – the latest in Kher's ongoing 30-year project, beginning in 2010 and ending in 2039, that the artist describes as her entry into time and space. The Virus series involves the creation of a bindi painting each year, accompanied by a pre-dated description of our predicted human encounters and observations on life. When viewed in conjunction with the earlier 'Algorithm for time travel' (2018), these works create an unmistakable sense of free fall – of beguiling forms and colour constellations as wildly tethered as the coming together of lace with pulleys, of gods with animals, and of shapes with numeric codes.

In a fitting bow to these disparate assemblages, the gallery screens in the final room a film about the very space these forms emerge from – the artist's studio. As visitors virtually navigate Kher's centre of creation, they are lead to also navigate their own space in the world. 'A Wonderful Anarchy' reminds the viewer that such navigation is not different from the navigation of time; that it is equally chaotic and equally still.

About the artist

Bharti Kher was born in London in 1969. Kher's art gives form to quotidian life and its daily rituals in a way that reassesses and transforms their meaning to yield an air of magical realism. Now living in New Delhi, India, her use of found objects is informed by her own position as an artist located between geographic and social milieus. Kher's way of working is exploratory: surveying, looking, collecting, and transforming, as she repositions the viewer's relationship with the object and initiates a dialogue between metaphysical and material pursuits.

Kher has exhibited at numerous museums and institutions internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include: Museum Freider Burda, Baden Baden, Germany (2018) and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA, USA (2018). Kher's work featured in the Sydney Biennale in 2016. Past exhibitions include Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada, (2016); Freud Museum, London, UK (2016); Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth, Australia (2016); the Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2014); and Parasol Unit Foundation For Contemporary Art, London, UK (2012). Bharti Kher was awarded the Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2015.

Bharti Kher is participating in the following exhibitions, running throughout Autumn/Winter 2019/20: Desire: A Revision from the 20th Century to the Digital Age, IMMA, Dublin, Ireland, on display from 21 September 2019 until 22 March 2020. The Intermediary Family, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA, USA, on display currently until 31 March 2020.

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Gallery hours:
Tuesday – Sunday
10 am – 5 pm (March – October)
10 am – 4 pm (November – February)

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Bharti Kher
Artemis
2019
Clay, cement, wax, brass
157.2 x 40.6 x 48.2 cm / 61 7/8 x 16 x 19 inches

Bharti Kher
A wonderful anarchy
2018
Mixed media
398 x 171 cm / 156 3/4 x 67 3/8 in