

MUSEUM FRIEDER BURDA
SALON BERLIN

Press Release

Bharti Kher, Dark Matter MM

Exhibition, Museum Frieder Burda | Salon Berlin
October 13, 2017–February 17, 2018



Salon Berlin presents Bharti Kher's first solo exhibition in Germany, which will be on view from October 13, 2017, until February 17, 2018. Kher, who was born in London in 1969 and has lived and worked in Delhi since the early 1990s, is one of the most outstanding international contemporary artists of her generation.

Bharti Kher's work not only blends different techniques, materials, and media, it also fuses the male and the female, animal and human, the sacred and the profane, tradition and technology. Inviting associations with alchemical or magical processes, her art at once conveys the idea that human identity, too, is always transforming and perpetually under construction. The core of her work, she emphasizes, is "the body hybridized, defied, glorified, questioned and often even completely absent."

Against the backdrop of a globalized world in which civilization and nature are increasingly out of balance, Kher's works impart a positively physical experience of convulsion, uncertainty, and sweeping change. At the same time, they portray the continuous quest for conciliation and union. Kher is interested in that moment when ostensibly antagonistic forces enter a state of equilibrium and engender novel experiences and meanings. In creating her sculptures, installations, and pictures, she experiments with highly divergent materials: fiberglass, wood, steel, shattered mirrors, but also bindis, the dots Hindu women paint or stick on their foreheads—between the eyebrows, at the location of the "third eye"—as a spiritual symbol.

Kher employs bindis as an artistic device, covering the surfaces of sculptures and readymades with a shimmering all-over, a kind of second skin, or constructing paintings with abstract patterns out of countless individual dots. Originally associated with femininity and religious devotion, bindis are now also a mass product and fashionable accessory. Kher's bindi pieces emphasize both aspects: the material as much as the spiritual dimension.

The artist rose to international renown in 2006 with *The skin speaks a language not its own*, a life-size fiberglass sculpture representing a dying cow elephant. The animal's skin is covered with thousands of bindis in the shape of spermatozoa. In this work and other pieces charged with psychological and mythological energy, Kher alludes to prevailing power structures—the devastation of the environment, the erasure of heritage and tradition, the oppression of women in India and around the world—while also addressing perennial inward and outward change, the eternal cycle of life.

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“Bharti Kher’s art plays with sometimes extreme antitheses, her works swing back and forth between the ostensibly “feminine” and the “masculine,” between the “Indian” and “Western” registers. Like the conjunction of yin and yang, they librate antagonistic relationships, uniting their two sides—and eventually harmonizing them to allow something utterly new and perhaps even ‘greater’ to come into being,” Patricia Kamp, curator of the exhibition, observes.

A case in point is the sculpture *Chimera2* with which the exhibition at Salon Berlin opens. An impression of a face coated with layers of various materials, it might be the petrified interior of a mysterious crystal in which an alien life-form has come into being. Composed of mirror shards and covered with bindis, the wall installation *What can I tell you that you don’t know already* (2013) similarly renders a splintered kaleidoscopic universe that reflects the beholder’s image. Combining the aggressive act of destruction with intimations of creation and healing, the cracks in the glass are the birthplace of a world, containing the seeds of microcosmic as well as macrocosmic renewal.

A central series of sculptures in the exhibition playfully stages the continual interplay of antagonistic forces that nonetheless at a certain point achieve equilibrium. The sculptures literally maintain a fragile equipoise: in *When darkness becomes light* (2016), it is an archaic hammer; in other works, a rod and two earthen jugs or a suspended wooden construction reminiscent of a surreal writing instrument. We may see these austere readymade pieces as metaphors of Kher’s art as a whole, which strikes a precarious balance between widely different and mutually contradictory contexts of meaning and systems of thought.

Conceived specifically for Salon Berlin, the installation *Virus VIII* interweaves conceptual and magical thinking. The artist launched *Virus* series in 2010 as a long-term project to be completed in 2039, the year she will turn seventy. Each year Kher produces an artist’s edition that she implants as a virus of sorts in the particular space in which it is displayed. A mahogany box contains bindis to be applied to the wall in the shape of an enormous monochrome spiral. The piece is accompanied by a certificate that chronicles historic events, developments in technology, and moments in the artist’s own life, but also makes predictions for the future. From one piece to the next, the chronology is adapted to match reality, gradually building a coordinate system of simultaneously existing places, events, times interconnected by the viruses acting as magical markings.

For Salon Berlin, Kher has created a virus in gray, a color about which she noted in 2013: “What color is silence? I think it’s gray. Neither black nor white, just gray. Like ash, like an elephant and a whale; like the pallor of a dead man, and depression; it’s the color of the umbilical cord and the moment before silence becomes the scream. Words help me describe it, but art also makes the gray matter light up again. So we have to make more art.”

At Salon Berlin, Kher’s virus enters into a dialogue with a work from the Frieder Burda Collection: one of Gerhard Richter’s famous “Gray Paintings” from 1974. Like Kher, Richter was ambivalent about the color gray: he saw it as the equivalent of “indifference, the refusal to speak up, the lack of a standpoint, formlessness.” His series of monochrome canvases painted in varying shades of gray grew out of a “negative motivation,” as the artist put it. Still, he discerned beauty in the finished paintings—“a grave rather than serene beauty.” This overcoming of positive and negative polarization is something the two artists’ very different works share.

As “Dark Matter,” the title of the motif that appears on the poster advertising the exhibition, suggests, Kher’s art dissolves such polarization in a paradoxical

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experience. Her works possess an exceptionally powerful physical presence and yet remain intangible. In physics, dark matter is a postulated form of matter that cannot be seen as such but interacts with the visible universe through gravity. Similarly, Kher's art ultimately comes into being by virtue of the forces of attraction sparked between the beholder and her work.

More information and images: www.museum-frieder-burda.de

Opening Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 10am–6pm, open on all public holidays

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