

IMMA
MAIN GALLERIES WEST WING

Bharti Kher A Consummate Joy



A Consummate Joy, is a solo exhibition by acclaimed British-Indian artist Bharti Kher (b. 1969 London). The exhibition comprises sculpture, installation, watercolours, and the latest annual edition of a 30 year project which began in 2010, Virus XI (2020). Kher's use of found objects is informed by the rich social and geographic contents of her current home city of New Delhi. The artist'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.

When you encounter the artwork **Virus XI** (2020) in Room 1, you are greeted by a vortex, inviting you into a free fall towards a hypnotic swirl of bindis applied directly to the wall. Kher describes the piece "It's a vortex. It's a peephole. It's an entrance. It's an exit. It's a womb". A time-based work, this is the latest in the artist'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". The artist installs beside the bindi spiral, a curation of texts that describe the journey of the work and its potential over 30 years. This text includes personal updates, historical events, diary entries and predictions. Journalist Harriet Lloyd-Smith in an article for **Wallpaper** magazine revealed

“At times, this is a terrifying, dystopian commentary that ranges from plausible to absurd. She forecasts that next year (Virus XI) texting will be made possible through ‘thought power alone’; in 2029 (Virus XX) ‘artificial intelligence in a computer will pass the Turing Test’ and in 2035 (Virus XXVI), ‘holographic recreations of dead people will become a possibility’. Much of this is informed speculation; the only thing Kher knows for certain is that with each Virus, her age will increase by one.”

Monster Moon (2012) is another work featuring thousands of ready-made coloured felt bindis, a vital component in Bharti Kher’s work. The bindi takes its name from the Sanskrit word “bindu,” or dot. A conceptual sign for inner consciousness, the bindi is both secular and ritualistic, a motif with symbolic significance and a third eye in Indian spiritual traditions. Kher discovered stalls of mass produced bindis in the markets of East Delhi after she moved there from London at the age of 23, and they first appeared in her work in 1995. Visitors may recall the bindi painting **Blind matter dark night** (2017) featured in the exhibition **Desire: A Revision from the 20th Century to the Digital Age** (at IMMA until 22 March 2020).

Kher chose the title for the exhibition from the artwork **Consummate joy and a Sisyphean task** (2019), deliberately excluding the latter element of endless and ineffective anxiety, to give us an optimistic and celebratory proposition, something the artist feels we

need for the year of 2020. In the main hall of the gallery space **Consummate Joy and a Sisyphean task** hangs, falls and balances delicately, a joyous formalism from anarchic chaos. The term **Sisyphean** is derived from Greek mythology, where Sisyphus was punished in Hades for his misdeeds in life by being condemned eternally to roll a heavy stone up a hill. As he reached the top, the stone rolled back down again and his labour in a loop, was everlasting and futile. This endless ritual translates for the artist as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of life and finding joy and humour in the banal cycles of the everyday. Kher's sculptures assert that every object has its perfect point of balance, as is also notable in the work **equilibrium** (2014) at the opposite end of the main hall. A gargantuan compass of wood and brass, this work strikes a heavy masculine contrast to the opposing femininity of **Consummate joy and a Sisyphean task**.

Another hanging sculpture **Equilibrium 1** (2014) in Room One features more of Kher's found objects, the elements assembled in a hazardous manner, suspended from the ceiling. The only stability in the ensemble is a triangle, in which a single point of contact holds everything together in perfect equilibrium. Kher said "It is a mobile that naturally finds balance or a point that marks the place and time and coordinates of where the world can stand still for a minute or a second of a degree. By both defying and accepting gravitational forces all objects can find perfect equilibrium, poise and meaning."

The artist is constantly conjuring ancient metaphors and weaving them into contemporary narratives, clashing, conjoining, questioning and claiming cultural and social identities. The series of sculptures we see in Room 2 known as 'the intermediaries' create an amazing cacophony of amassed oppositions. The sculptures are made from clay fired figurines that are created for yearly festivals which Kher collected over 3 years from markets in South India. Navigating the titles of these pieces we uncover intense research, acute thought and elegant poetry in Kher's work; **Talisman for September** (2019), **Homonym** (2019), **Echidna** (2019) to name a few, reference and encompass Greek mythologies, global psychologies and personal reflection. "These are the avatars of human existence; they are the avatars of the gods and goddesses and the myth-making of what it is to be human" says Kher, "When I break them down I fashion new life". We are reminded of Kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer mixed with powdered gold or silver. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object rather than something to disguise.

The exhibition explores Kher's interest in myth and the narrative in the work **Artemis** (2019), also inspired by ancient Greek mythology. Artemis is the goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, animals and the moon. She was the patron and protector of young girls and was believed to bring disease upon women and relieve them of it. Kher portrays her as the 'many breasted' goddess

and her many heads represent her plurality. She is the archetype mother goddess and is also its antithesis, a death-bringing goddess whose arrows fell young maidens and women. She gives life and takes life away. Artemis, along with Kali and other female Indian goddesses that feature in Bharti Kher's sculptural works, remain for the artist essentially transformative beings, whose equivocal natures both nourish and destroy.

Kher is an artist who never stops working - always making, collecting, researching, morning, noon and night. In her recent residency in Hauser & Wirth Somerset, Kher occupied two studios, one downstairs where she worked on sculptures during the day, and in the studio upstairs she made drawings at night. The three drawings here **Space curves undulates flexes twists around itself 1, 2 & 3** (2019) were created during these nocturnal sessions. The title has a rhythm that reflects Kher's practice as a whole, a continuous contorting of objects, language and narrative that barely draws a breath because it must keep going, continuously creating and reflecting on itself. For Kher, her drawings serve as "tokens to remind us that there is an elemental power in what the drawing hand knows."

On the significance of showing her work in Ireland, Bharti said **"Ireland has always been an interest for me in its similarities to ancient Indian history and mythologies; from the worship of pagan goddesses to the practice of oral storytelling and song."**

Bharti Kher was awarded the YFLO Woman Achiever of the Year in 2007, the ARKEN prize in 2010, and was conferred with the **Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres** (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) in 2015. IMMA is extremely grateful to Kher for her generosity and creativity in working with us to bring this exhibition to Dublin.

Associated Talks and Events

Preview Artist Discussion

Bharti Kher and Dr Lisa Godson

Thursday 12 March 2020, 5.30pm, Lecture Room.

Bharti Kher joined Dr Lisa Godson (Lecturer, NCAD) in conversation to discuss the artist's new solo exhibition **A Consummate Joy**. Together they trace key tenets that inform Kher's longstanding sculptural practice that combines hybrid beings that unite contradictions of gender, race, ecology, labour and politics, juxtaposed with the material histories of found objects. Post-colonial interests in Indian and Irish mythologies, the worship of pagan goddesses, oral storytelling and song, are amongst the topics explored with the artist.

Listen to the discussion on SoundCloud here [**https://soundcloud.com/imma-ireland/artist-discussion-with-bharti-kher-a-consummate-joy**](https://soundcloud.com/imma-ireland/artist-discussion-with-bharti-kher-a-consummate-joy)

Preview the exhibition on YouTube here. [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEsKMLHx-W4&feature=youtu.be**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEsKMLHx-W4&feature=youtu.be)

Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask a member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable by their blue lanyards.

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Bharti Kher, Artemis, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

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