

For Immediate Release

BHARTI KHER Matter

First North American Retrospective Highlights Two Decades of Art by UK-born, New Delhi-based Artist Bharti Kher

**Media is invited to a preview with the artist on Thursday, July 7, 9:00am at the Vancouver Art Gallery.
Please RSVP to Debra Zhou (dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca)**

June 28, 2016, Vancouver, BC – Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to present *BHARTI KHER Matter*, the first major retrospective in North America of internationally acclaimed artist Bharti Kher. Opening on July 9, this exhibition incorporates elements of painting, photography and sculpture that have been the hallmarks of her practice over the past two decades. Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis (Chief Curator/Associate Director) and Diana Freundl (Associate Curator, Asian Art), this exhibition is presented as part of the Gallery's Institute of Asian Art initiative which features historical, contemporary and emerging international and local Asian artists.

Born in 1969 in London, England, Bharti Kher moved to India in 1991 and continues to work and live in New Delhi. She has an extensive record of international exhibitions, and her work is held in many major collections around the world. Kher's iconographic bindi paintings reveal a personal, cultural and spiritual language that speaks eloquently about ritual and repetition. The bindi, a popular fashion accessory that was once a symbol of the third eye, is reclaimed by Kher as a deliberate sign of the resilience of women. Whether used on paper, mirror, board, cabinets or the giant heart of a whale, the bindis bring questions of identity and gender into the understanding of these works.

Ideas of hybridity and the female cyborg are also explored in Kher's art. These pieces merge classical stereotypes of beauty and domesticity with figures of female empowerment; in them, strength and empathy coexist, male and female are blurred, and human and animal are combined in her furniture and sari sculptures. Kher also investigates human relationships and the complexity of social norms.

"Bharti Kher's artworks are varied in material, sensibility and subject matter, yet are bound together by her piercing explorations into the meaning of human relationships, spirituality and femininity in today's society. This exhibition provides a unique opportunity for the viewers to reflect on perceptions and realities of being human at the present time," said Kathleen S. Bartels, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Highlighted artworks:



Bharti Kher references magical beasts, mythical monsters and allegorical tales in her works. Animals are also recurring subjects, often serving as metaphors for the human body and its transformation. *An absence of assignable cause*

(2007) is a life-size sculpture of a sperm whale's heart, its veins and arteries exposed, carved with countless circular bindis. Unable to find sufficient scientific documentation or a visual record of a whale's anatomy, Kher based her sculpture on sketches made by marine biologists. Thus this work is a combination of scientific research and artistic imagination. The disembodied heart is also exemplary of Kher's use of varying scale in her artworks. The monumentality of the sculpture suggests the importance of the subject in an age of environmental anxiety.
Image: Bharti Kher, *An absence of assignable cause*, 2007, bindis, resin, Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Perrotin, Photo: Bharti Kher Studio



Through her use of a particular body type or character, Kher's sculptures make reference to iconic figures from mythology and history. *And all the while the benevolent slept* (2008) references Chinnamasta, an Indian goddess Kali who, in traditional iconography, holds her own detached head in her hand, blood gushing from her neck, while she stands on top of a copulating couple. Through her self-sacrifice she awakens the awareness of spiritual energy while at the same time incarnating sexual energy.

Image: Bharti Kher, *And all the while the benevolent slept*, 2008, resin, porcelain, plastic, copper wires, pedestal in mahogany wood, Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Perrotin, Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



Bharti Kher's furniture and sari sculptures speaks to socially constructed ideals of femininity and domesticity. Any utilitarian function has been rendered useless, and instead these pieces of furniture become proxies for a body. The sari-draped chairs in *Absence* (2011) introduces the possibility of domestic narratives filled with mothers, daughters, wives and lovers, whose bodiless garments preserve a former presence. In *The day they met* (2011), vibrant and richly patterned saris are decisively placed on a staircase, effectively embalming the ritual act of sari unwrapping.

Images: (left) Bharti Kher, *Absence*, 2011, sari, resin, wooden chair, Private Collection, Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Perrotin, Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli (right) Bharti Kher, *The day they met*, 2011, sari, resin, wooden stairs, Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Perrotin, Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



Kher's most recent work *Six Women* (2013-15), cast from six female bodies. These figures provide not only a vivid representation of the aging female body as a counterpoint to social pressures to stay forever young, but they also serve as witnesses to the disregard for women who have obliged the patriarchy.

Image: Bharti Kher, *Six Women*, 2013-15, plaster, wood, resin, Courtesy of the Artist and Hauser & Wirth, Photo: Document Photography

BHARTI KHER Matter is accompanied by a major exhibition catalogue co-published with Black Dog Publishing, featuring eight texts by the following distinguished writers: Nancy Adajania, Daina Augaitis, Rebecca M. Brown, Diana Freundl, Shanay Jhaveri, Ashok Mathur, Achal Prabhala and Perna Singh. They expand on the literary, cultural and political interpretations of Kher's sculptures, paintings and installations.

In collaboration with the Indian Summer Festival, the Gallery also presents a special bus wrapped with Bharti Kher's artwork *Echo2*, showcasing how the artist incorporates bindi into her own visual language. The bus appears on regular scheduled public bus route in Vancouver throughout June and July.

About The Institute of Asian Art

Responding to the city's geographic location on the eastern edge of the Pacific Rim, the Vancouver Art Gallery has been committed to presenting contemporary art of the Asia Pacific region for more than two decades. Launched in 2014, the Gallery's Institute of Asian Art (IAA) is a comprehensive initiative committed to advancing scholarship and public appreciation of Asian art. This commitment is reflected in the major survey that explores the rigorous art of Bharti Kher.

Community Engagement Support:



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About the **Vancouver Art Gallery**: The Vancouver Art Gallery is a not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. We thank everyone for their continuing generosity.