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FEATURE REVIEW

SYDNEY

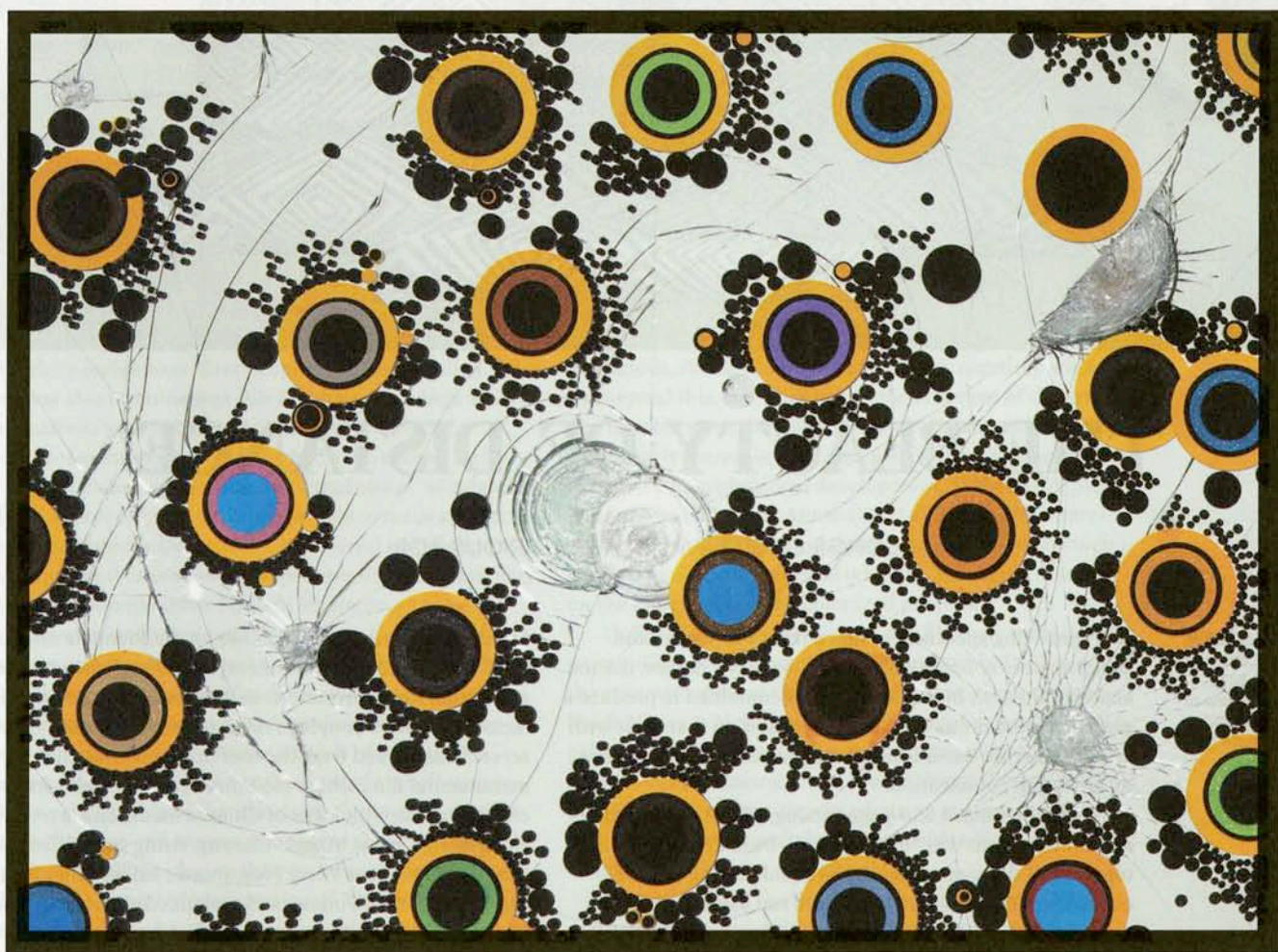
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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

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REPORTING FROM A REGIONAL SCENE

REVIEWS



BHARTI KHER, *Indra's Net Mirror I* (detail), 2010, binds on broken glass mirror, 192 x 109 x 6.4 cm. Photo by Mike Bruce. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, London.

BHARTI KHER

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BHARTI KHER,
Indra's Net Mirror
1, 2010, bindis on
mirror, wooden
frame,
192 x 109 x 6.4 cm.

Photo by Mike Bruce.
Courtesy Bharti Kher
and Hauser & Wirth,
London.

The tactile, craft-oriented sculpture of New Delhi-based Bharti Kher has had a significant impact on the global art world since the artist moved to India from England in 1993. For her first solo exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, the artist examined themes of subtle opposition and conflict that have grown to define her practice.

Upon entry into the main gallery, the viewer was faced with *Contents* (2010), a sequence of 21 slightly arcane but still-accurate medical diagrams depicting the process of childbirth, from delivery to potential abnormalities and their first hours. These found charts, brown with age, are awash with small, often bright adhesive bindis (the forehead decoration prevalent among South Asian women) in shapes resembling wiggling sperm. They swim, at certain points, in sweeping waves over the surface, oblivious to the imagery, while in other areas they subtly interact with it,

gathering in a swirl around a nipple or avoiding the ear of a baby born with a squashed skull as if to avoid disturbing it. With remarkable metaphorical tenderness, *Contents* addresses the father's relationship with his child in its earliest moments, a period when its physical relationship with its mother is unbreachably powerful.

Adjacent to these charts sat *Confess* (2009–10), a nearly eight-foot-tall cubic structure in dark wood. Its architectural detail is lightly ornate and lacks specific religious connotations; the work appears to speak primarily of privacy and cool separation. Its interior, however, seen through a window, is a psychedelic frieze of brightly colored bindis, gleaming in the half-light. This space for seemingly austere contemplation reveals itself, from the inside, also to be one of euphoria and discovery.

Confess' spatial and metaphorical availability to the viewer was offset by the presence of a hollow sculpture in white-painted resin of a craggy, mountainous form with a large crack down one side. This giant work, entitled *Inevitable Undeniable Necessary* (2010), is at once monolithic and vulnerable, organic in feel yet of oddly unclear origins. Through the dark crack the viewer is offered, then denied, the opportunity to understand its physical armature and emotional soul. All that is clear, in the end, is the “undeniable” nature of its bulk.

The Great Chase (2009–10) takes the shape of a motorized, gently rocking horse in patinated fiberglass, with a preposterously long ribbed horn, unlike any animal's, in place of its right ear. Perhaps hermaphroditic, but not off-balance, this new creature picks up on the artist's ongoing theme of animals as stages for complex emotional arrangements, previously seen in works such as *Misdemeanors* (2006), in which a wild dog has another beast's pelt draped across its back.

In an upstairs gallery, the series *Indra's Net Mirrors* (1–16) (2010) formed the show's clearest statement. The 16 heavy wooden-framed mirrors making up the piece had been carefully smashed, creating dents and circular ripples akin to bullet damage, and the resulting surfaces were covered with decorative layers of bindis. Some designs eddy in a manner similar to the sperm-like shoals of *Contents*, while others form more graphic motifs, including an optically woozy diagonal grid reminiscent of the mutant Pop Art of Sigmar Polke. The superimposition of these patterns on the glass creates a mocking, tricky mirror in which the viewer is, at best, half-visible. Here, the efforts of the artist clearly thwart our desire to fully see or know ourselves. Kher interrupts, deftly, and gets in our way, and she does so without malice, but with a message applicable to all the works in the exhibition: “Inevitable Undeniable Necessary” suggests that the beauty of art cannot reconcile life's clashing forces—be they matters of religious belief, gender difference or the parent-child relationship—it can only illustrate and soften them. ●

SARA RAZA