

The eyes that wander

Indian artist Bharti Kher explores depths of femininity

By Kwon Mee-yoo
meeyoo@ktimes.co.kr

The bindi, the traditional dot on the forehead of Indian women, is a symbol of many things — faith, marital status, racial pride and even fashion.

But for Indian artist Bharti Kher, the ornamental marks are the language for conveying her thoughts about society, culture and women. The small dots are used extensively to create a variety of patterns in her paintings and sculptures, some of which are currently on display at the Kukje Gallery K2's "Square a Circle" series.

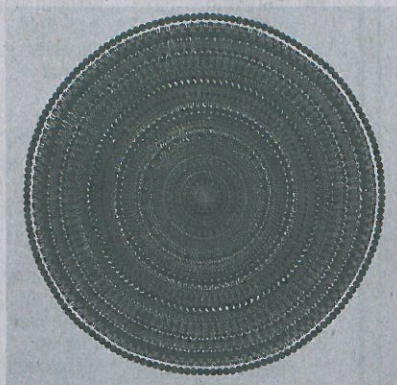
The bindi-inspired works are an important part of Kher's larger solo exhibition, titled "Anomalies." The swirling shapes created by the black, white, green and glittering dots combine as a striking display of her imagination.

Kher began her bindi series in 1995 when she saw a woman wearing a bindi that was creatively decorated to look like a serpent. She has been interested in the cultural meaning of the bindi, calling them the "third eye" that forges a link between the real and spiritual worlds.

Kher's interest in tradition is balanced with her interpretation of the realities of modern women, seen in the context of society, culture and religion. Kher was born to Indian parents in Britain, but moved to India after marrying Indian artist Subodh Gupta. The couple now lives and works in New Delhi.

Femininity and the life of women at home have been frequent subjects of Kher's works. "A Vegetarian Lion, a Slippery Fish" is composed of a series of small statues on a table, most of them figures of mothers and Buddha, intended as a commentary on the purpose of religion.

Her sculpture "Time Lag" has a door and pillar, with bindis applied on



Bharti Kher's "Square a Circle 3"

them, clashing into each other.

"I understand time lag as the moment between cause and effect in a causal relationship and this is my visual representation of the moment," Kher said.

"In Asia and India, the house and domestic space constitute a female domain, and this is where women are able to truly assert more 'self' within a space. But a house is also fraught with social, economic and sexual excesses that can obscure or even threaten to obliterate the spiritual connections that are our greatest resource."

Her other works provide a more straightforward attack on the place of women in culture and social hierarchy.

"Cloud Walker," a half-man-half-beast sculpture wearing the Indian traditional costume saree, is Kher's interpretation of the modern, urban woman. The female body portrayed here is beautiful, secular and unmistakably violent.

"The Waq Tree," a tree with numerous animal heads, is inspired by mythologies. She derived the idea from a 17th century Persian sculpture and the old story of Alexander the Great of Macedon seeking advice from a talking tree.

Kher's exhibit at Kukje Gallery runs through Oct. 5. Admission is free. For more information, visit www.kukje-gallery.com or call (02) 735-8449.



Bharti Kher's "Cloud Walker" is one of her definitive works displayed at Kukje Gallery K2 in Seoul.

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery



Bharti Kher poses with her works at Kukje Gallery K3.