



Huma Bhabha

Artist of the week 119: Huma Bhabha
The Guardian, December 2010
(author: Skye Sherwin)
1/2

theguardian



📷 Huma Bhabha at the Stephen Friedman Gallery, to 15 January 2011. Photograph: Stephen Friedman Gallery / Huma Bhabha

Drawing together influences spanning millennia, this Pakistan-born sculptor's work speaks loudly to our own times

Huma Bhabha's sooty statues built from cork or Styrofoam look like lost treasures from an ancient civilisation. Then again, her lumpy skins of clay built over half-exposed chicken-wire frames like shattered, melting bodies might just as easily be left over from a nuclear blast. Sometimes these sculptures are simply outsize heads with giant eyes and gaping mouths; other times they resemble tribal deities or comic-book space creatures. Monster faces stare out from Bhabha's drawings too, while her ink drawings over photographs conjure dark phantoms.

Artist of the week 119: Huma Bhabha
The Guardian, December 2010
(author: Skye Sherwin)
2/2

Born in Pakistan in 1962, Bhabha emigrated to the US in the 1980s, where she studied print-making, discovering sculpture after graduating from art school. In recent years she's become one of a new generation of artists exploring figurative sculpture, with a couple of knockout solo shows in New York and inclusion in the Whitney Biennial. The references feeding into her alien forms span the globe and stretch over centuries: from the sci-fi novels of [Philip K Dick](#) to the gnarled flesh of [Giacometti's](#) existential nomads, the masks of Picasso or African art and ancient works like the Greek [Kouros](#) whose parted, advancing feet heralded a giant step for sculpture. Yet Bhabha's hybrids, limping along or with legs missing, also speak to concerns that are very much our own.

Though the artist rarely makes specific political references, she described one of her very first works with clay, *Untitled* (2002), as a kind of memorial to the victims of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars: a lump of clay shrouded with a black plastic sack, perhaps a burka covering a praying figure, perhaps a body bag.

Bumps In the Road, the centrepiece of her current London show, sets two figures on a stage-like plinth - a square of charred landscaped. One is a head of clay and wire whose melted lip hangs pathetically over giant teeth, while eyes extend from dark sockets. Though static, it seems to hobble. The other is but a pair of legs built from wooden planks with railings for feet. Although this couple stand side-by-side, they seem lost to each other, intent on a singular, inscrutable journey.

Why we like her: Bhabha's 2009 sculpture, *Do Not Expect Too Much of the End of the World*, gave wood and Styrofoam a post-apocalyptic makeover, transforming them into a kind of blackened, blasted Pharaoh.

Foot fetish: There are plentiful feet in Bhabha's work, bursting out of shoes in drawings or as clumpy sculptures. She puts it down to three influences: the feet of the *Kouros*, [Van Gogh's paintings of his shoes](#) and a violent film she saw as a child, in which a man was blown up, leaving just his trainers.