

[International Review]

DOT MATRIX

In many of Radhika Khimji's works shown in London, **Lucy Soutter** finds an engaging confusion between figure and ground.

RADHIKA KHIMJI'S ELEGANT INSTALLATION, MOUNTED FROM THE 4th to the 19th of October 2008, appeared as part of *The Wharf Road Project*, an eclectic mix of exhibitions hosted in a disused London office building by the arts organisation V22. Khimji's most ambitious project to date offered a celebration of hybrid processes.

Viewers entered the spacious room to find themselves surrounded by a ring of semi-abstract figures – painted plywood cutouts leaning against the wall singly and in small groups. Khimji's truncated human-sized figures offered glimpses of recognisable gestures. Deprived of mouths to speak, or words to represent them, the figures were mute. However, they expressed sexuality, exuberance and menace. A dancer pointed her toe. The silhouette of a kneeling figure recalled the hooded torture victims at Guantanamo Bay.

The figures also maintained their status as abstractions, suspended between sculpture, painting, drawing and decoration. Some were displayed alongside the sheets of plywood from which they had been cut. Some leant against mural-sized abstract paintings on canvas or perforated paper. Some featured a wooden outline around a semi-transparent plexiglass centre. The pleasurable confusion of figure and ground was heightened by the extravagant use of colour and pattern. Bright pink, orange, red and green popped out against scumbled earth tones. Jewel-like dots created a formal unity. They also linked Khimji's work to a number of art historical precedents ranging from Nathdwara miniatures and Australian Aboriginal painting to the work of Western artists such as Eva Hesse and Sigmar Polke.

Many elements of the installation were double-sided, contributing to the flexible, performative nature of the work. At a moment when the London art world has been dominated by discrete art objects presented for easy purchase, Khimji's installation possessed a refreshing fluidity. Like a director taking a cast of characters through a series of improvisations, the artist moved various elements into different relationships over the course of the exhibition. This particular project evolved in collaboration with the David Roberts Art Foundation, a private organisation that supports partnerships between artists and curators. The binders on plinths in the space featured colour reproductions of works from the foundation's collection – ranging from Damien Hirst to Louise Bourgeois. There was an attempt here at proposing a conceptual group show as the reproductions in the binders hoped to illuminate the different strands of Khimji's practice. Despite the eminence of the artists included, the flat reproductions could not quite compete with the intense opticality and presence of the actual work in the gallery.



Radhika Khimji. *Leg Over.* Acrylic on plywood. Height: 170 cms. 2008.



Radhika Khimji. *Standing, Lift Leg And Kneeling Down With Yellow And Purple Backdrop.* Oil and acrylic on plywood, perspex and digital print. Dimensions variable. 2008. IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST.