

by Ana Luiza Varella

radhika KHIMJI

Black Collage, Collage as Black



Untitled, 2009.



Ana Luiza Varella, completed a Master of Arts degree from UCL (University College London) in History of Art in 2007. After a brief spell in New York at The Drawing Center she finally settled down in Rio de Janeiro. Since then she has been working as a freelance writer and as a consultant for the Museum of Modern Art (MAM-RJ).

Radhika Khimji was born in Oman in 1979. After completing her BFA at the Slade School of Fine Art, she went on to do post-graduate studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Art in London. Khimji has shown widely in the UK and Europe. She has exhibited with Bose Pacia / Nature Morte at several international art fairs and at Nature Morte New Delhi. Radhika Khimji lives and works in Muscat and London.

Left Page Image *Untitled*, 2009.

RADHIKA KHIMJI: BLACK COLLAGE, COLLAGE AS BLACK

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The arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible.¹

Jacques Rancière

'Black' or 'feminine' are terms often used to describe and simultaneously calculate the impact of an artwork based on the race or gender context in which it was made. What determines the 'blackness' of an art object, for instance, lies beyond its form, the skin colour of its maker and its place in society. 'Black' art reveals the differences, ruptures and discontinuities of our culture; it offers us an experience of otherness and not a spectacle of the other. Simply put, 'Black' is a means of reaching out to the world and one that may be deployed by any artist who wishes to actively engage with the public. Now Black is the theme of TAKE's inaugural issue.

I have taken a group of collages by artist Radhika Khimji (a few of which are printed on these pages) as my starting point in addressing this theme. They were made using newspapers, magazines, ink, pen, lots of glue and small (A5) papers for support. In one of them, we see an athlete jumping in the foreground, while officers rally in the background. In another, a crying woman with scratches and blood on her face occupies most of the paper, while rescue workers are loom over its

bottom. Yet another collage shows military officers degrading a prisoner by kicking his 'rear end'. In all these pieces the human figure is ubiquitous, what changes are its shapes, forms and expressions. The strong colours such as the vivid pink on a woman's shirt, or the pumpkin orange 'blob' stuck atop a man's face though naturally occurring in the day-to-day, make a stronger impression against the predominantly white background adopted by the artist. Her method of cropping, assembling and pasting together documentary images she carefully selects may have a far-reaching impact, insofar as it gives visibility to alternative perceptions of reality.

As a matter of fact, Khimji's extended practice skilfully strings together aspects of drawing, painting and sculpture to create a collage of sorts. For instance, the three-dimensional pieces she nicknames 'cut-outs' may hardly be called sculptures. They are usually shown leaning against a wall, like a painting. However, similar to a drawing, the line is a crucial element of their composition. The series entitled *Hitchhikers* consists of several large-scale figures framed in action sitting down, getting up, walking, etc. They are made from a mix of wood, sheets of glass and layers of paint. For an added sense of physical mobility and sheer chaos, the *Hitchhikers* appear in front of different backgrounds and are given different names each time. The 'cut-outs' are not that different from the figures we see in newspapers and magazines, whose presence we are forced to acknowledge and whose actions we attempt to empathise with.

To be sure, art making and the exercise of art viewing/experiencing

are equally important processes for negotiating and overcoming the boundaries and limitations of both individuals and art itself. Art challenges the neutrality of the seamless fabric of visual language binding us. Spectators should feel empowered by their appreciation of art, even when such practice proves to be unsettling and demands a radical reassessment of one's core beliefs. Art creates subjects, as well as objects. And it does so by bridging the gap between different ways of being and belonging in the world, placing an emphasis on 'becoming'. This is precisely what the best Black art does, Radhika Khimji's collages are an example of that.

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1. Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. by Rockhill, Gabriel, pp. 19, London: Continuum, 2004.



Untitled, 2009.



Untitled, 2009.

Image Courtesy: Artist and the Nature Morte Gallery, New Delhi.