

# HOME

Permindar Kaur



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# HOME

Permindar Kaur

Perminder Kaur: Home

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*Perminder Kaur: Home*  
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## Contents

5	<i>Introduction</i> by HS Projects
9	<i>At Home (in a Pandemic)</i> Dr. Alice Correia
29	<i>Home: The Place Where We Dwell</i> Dr. Eddie Chambers
43	List of Works

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# Introduction

We first met Perminder Kaur during the opening of Kara Walker's Turbine Hall commission at Tate Modern, in early October 2019. It was there amongst discussions around different histories, cultures and origins that we found a commonality and started discussing an exhibition of her work. Kaur was understated but keen to make work and exhibit, explaining she had taken some time off from making art to look after her family. We were captured by her genuine enthusiasm; she was intrigued by the space we curate an exhibition programme for – a non-gallery alternative space, the foyer of a multi-tenanted office building in Victoria, London.

The exhibition is titled *Home* – the artist converting a foyer into a home, re-configuring the meaning of domesticity, a considered subversion of the domestic into the new territory of the workplace. This undoing of the traditional associations of public and private space takes on a greater significance in our covid-induced times – even though the exhibition was conceived before the pandemic – where boundaries are blurred as our home becomes our place of work. With our perceived sense of normality challenged and nothing as it seems, exploring the dialectic between public and private has never been more relevant as one merges into the other. Kaur offers an existential statement for our times.

*Overgrown House*, 2020, a large steel sculpture, over 3 metres high with steel sprouts growing randomly around the fully formed house, invites the viewer's imagination to wander to realms beyond, to a childlike world that has no boundaries and offers endless possibilities. Are the



offshoots an extension of the house or are they going to eventually consume it? References to *Sleeping Beauty* and the overgrown garden around the palace that makes passage prohibitive, come to mind. Beneath *Untitled – Bed*, 2020, a world of brightly coloured curious creatures ‘lurks’, a conception of private thoughts and dreams, insecurities and vulnerabilities, the surrealist abyss of the subconscious. And yet the cosy feeling of the home and bedroom is juxtaposed with the cold, uninviting element of the steel bed and, on closer inspection, the copper claws of the soft, fleecy creatures; the inherent hidden ambiguity and violence in fairy tales and childhood toys. In *Small Table*,

**Overgrown House (detail),  
2020**



2020, the artist removes these renderings of domestic furniture from their familiar context to challenge perceived notions of settlement and security associated with home. Overall, a rampant ambivalence that equates with the uncertainty of our unnerving reality.

All works are beautifully made with immaculate precision and sophisticated composition. Scale is critical in subverting hierarchies and the status quo at home and at work, revealing the unspoken, often hidden, positions of power and raising questions about conformity. *Small Tower* 2014-19, a stack of seven chairs, each one smaller than the one on which it rests, form a tower over two meters high, reflecting on how we have a ‘place’ in society. An earlier work *Tall Chairs*, 1996 consists of two steel chairs fabricated with monumentally tall legs with bizarre, seemingly mischievous yellow creatures sitting, folded in on themselves upon each chair.

*Home* invokes feelings of belonging, solace, refuge turned on their head. Playful as Kaur’s work might seem at first sight, it is also simultaneously capable of eliciting feelings of disquiet, unsettlement and vulnerability into our social consciousness, especially at a time of widening inequalities between the haves and have nots, the privileged and the disadvantaged, the discriminated, the ones who have lost their jobs and their homes, the mentally vulnerable, the women with the ever-increased work and home load. Kaur’s work reflects the human condition and offers unique and individual narratives in an era of profound change.

We are ever so grateful to Perminder Kaur for her incessant energy and unfaltering commitment and to Dr Eddie Chambers and Dr Alice Correia for their insightful texts that offer invaluable perspectives of Kaur’s artistic practice.

**HS Projects, 2021**

*Exhibition Curators*

## At Home (in a Pandemic)

The question, “Where is home?”, has long preoccupied Perminder Kaur.<sup>1</sup> It is a deceptively simple question, which on reflection is multi-layered and holds within it a hint of dislocation. You would not ask “where is home?” if you were already there. The question implies that ‘home’ is a place elsewhere, with an expectation that it can be located; and that the person asking for directions has an ambition to get there. In addition, the question seems to contain a wistful sense of desire. From an early age, we are encouraged to believe that home is a site of safety and shelter; that the space of home is intimate and comforting, a place where you can be yourself. After all, there is no place like home.

Yet, ‘home’ operates on a number of registers that are rife with conflicts and contradictions. Throughout the Twentieth century and into our current era, artists as varied as Mary Cassatt, Martha Rosler and Mona Hatoum have challenged nostalgic or cozy notions of home as a place of safety and security. Home, especially for women, can be a place of confinement, prohibition, stricture and violence. The trope of the home as a fractured, unsettled, and unsettling site has gained widespread recognition as war, genocide, mass migration, and the global proliferation of refugee camps have shattered the myths of home as site of comfort and shelter.

Since the 1990s, Perminder Kaur has engaged with the conflicting conceptions of home as site of nurture and danger to consider both personal identity and socio-political themes. Her early student works such as *Glass Houses*, 1991, engaged with experiences of migration, the difficulties of establishing homes in the place of relocation, and





meditated on an attachment to distant homelands. In this large-scale sculptural installation, home, or more specifically six scaled-down sculptural houses were presented as sites where family relations, personal identities and cultural affiliations are negotiated. In this work home is addressed through reference to her Indian-Sikh heritage, but in more recent installations such as *Ten Teddies & Barrier*, 2017, themes of migration and dislocation emerge in Kaur's sculptures less as autobiography, than as broader meditations on the experience of violence and the traumatic loss of home.

For her exhibition curated by HS Projects at 5 Howick Place, London, Perminder Kaur has installed five sculptures made between 1996 and 2020 that further test and probe our understanding of home. Installed in the lobby of a mixed-use office building in central London, Kaur has arranged her sculptures as though in a private bedroom. Blurring the line between public and private space, the siting of Kaur's intervention prompts a consideration of behaviours and activities that occur behind

*Glass Houses*, 1991  
*Ten Teddies & Barrier*, 2017



closed doors. Would we do in public what we do in the privacy of our own home?

Although initiated earlier, preparations for the exhibition took place during 2020 under conditions of Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown, when the distinction between public and private space was forcibly dismantled. Suddenly, homes became workplaces, and once private spaces were invaded by on-line meetings and homeschooling. Simultaneously, for many, forced confinement transformed homely spaces into sites of entrapment; our relationships with our own homes were challenged, while the privileges of having a home were made starkly acute. The government's dictate, "Stay home, Save lives", assumed a home to stay in. So, what does it mean to stage an exhibition titled *Home*, which is populated with uncanny renderings of household furniture and a house-like structure, during a pandemic? Seen in this context Permindar Kaur's sculptures challenge us to think critically about the concept of 'home' – its structures, systems, and biases.

As an arrangement of vertical, horizontal, and angled lines in space, Kaur's most recent work, *Overgrown House*, 2020, could be described as a three-dimensional drawing. The simplified outline of a rectangular space capped with a triangular roof is familiar to those of us who grew up in standardized housing in Britain, and recalls childhood drawing of houses and homes. But to this structure Kaur had made a significant intervention: the welded steel bars are sprouting, and not only that, the house/structure is surrounded by short upright bars emerging from the floor. The overall effect is to suggest that this is some form of hybrid metallic tree house, and that the adjacent shoots will grow and merge into similar dwellings. In keeping with Kaur's works from the mid-1990s which referred to children's fairytales, and her reference to Maurice Sendak's 1963 illustrated story *Where The Wild Things Are* in the multi-part soft sculpture, *We Are All Animals*, 2010, it is tempting to make connections between *Overgrown House* and imagined cottages in the woods, or the vines that encased Sleeping Beauty's castle. Yet, another look reveals that the sprouts are uniform in length – they have been pruned, managed. As such, any gesture towards a fantastical house in an enchanted forest coexists with more sinister references to

***We Are All Animals*, 2010**

**Overleaf:  
*Overgrown House*, 2020**









inhospitable dwellings, of homes stripped back, to barbed wire, and danger. *Overgrown House* with its shoots may offer up the house as a site of nurture and growth, yet those same shoots have the potential to maim, to overpower.

*Small Tower*, 2014-19, may be described as a tower of chairs; an oversized steel chair at the base supports a series of six progressively smaller hand-made chairs, each standing on the seat of the chair beneath. In its linear, vertical form, with the incorporation of space into its gridded structure, in one interpretation the sculpture has a lightness and optimism, perhaps recalling the Eiffel Tower (1889) or Vladimir Tatlin's model for the Monument to the Third International (1919-20). From another perspective, Kaur's *Small Tower*, and indeed, *Overgrown House*, recalls the formal characteristics and conceptual tactics associated with the large-scale Minimalist sculptures of (for example) Tony Smith or Dan Graham. Like much Minimalist sculpture from 1960s, Kaur uses industrial materials, and repeated geometric and modular forms in *Small Tower*, creating a work that is neither small enough to be an object, nor large enough to be architecture. Yet, like many women artists of her generation, Kaur creatively adapts and reconfigures Minimalism according to her own artistic agenda and inter-subjective concerns.<sup>2</sup> She has stated that she conceived *Small Tower* as a meditation on hierarchical systems of power.<sup>3</sup> Those at the 'top' usually wield the most power, while those below whether willingly or not, hold up that power. Importantly, for the sculpture – and hierarchical power structures – to 'work', the components have to be placed in the 'correct' order, perhaps reflecting the seemingly insurmountable challenge of changing structural inequalities. Here, it is possible to see the ways in which Kaur has refigured Minimalism to suit a more socially conscious, feminist agenda.

Although many of Kaur's sculptures take the form of household furniture – beds, chairs, tables – they are non-functioning objects; she doesn't use real furniture, but rather she makes sculptures, playing with size and scale to describe a situation, feeling or system. Reading the domestic furniture of *Small Tower* as a metaphor for patriarchal power and oppression within the home, Kaur perhaps anticipates the

***Small Tower*, 2014-19**

**Overleaf:  
*Small Table*, 2020**











*Untitled – Bed, 2020*

unequal division of domestic labour during the Covid-19 pandemic: a precarious balancing act in which “women are bearing the brunt of childcare responsibilities, household chores and homeschooling during lockdown, irrespective of whether they are working or not”.<sup>4</sup> And although women might want a ‘seat at the table’, one reading of *Small Table*, 2020, might suggest that on attaining or claiming that place, another table and another set of systems and challenges, have to be negotiated.

Yet, throughout Kaur’s work there is a resistance to unitary or didactic interpretation. Her sculptures solicit an intersubjective dialogue with their audiences, so that multiple interpretations of individual works might co-exist. ‘Simultaneity’ may thus be identified as a central characteristic of Kaur’s sculptural practice. In her sculptures there is often a concurrent and disorientating sense of familiarity, attraction,



discomfort, and peril. In *Untitled – Bed*, 2020, a flock of small, soft, brightly coloured oval balls huddle beneath a black, metallic bed-like frame. The material contrast between the dark, stark, steel slats above and the soft appealing blobs huddling below creates a sense of empathy for the colourful creatures. Are these little creatures frightened, hiding, or trapped? One brave red blob seems to venture out, perhaps to see if it is safe for the others to follow. Moving closer though, we can see that these blobs have copper prickles all over their backs; are these strange hedgehog-like creatures benevolent? Perhaps they have been put away under the bed in order to keep others in the house safe. Are they multiplying under there? Perhaps like the Tribbles in *Star Trek* the threat lies not in any overt violence, but in their over-reproduction. Or maybe they are more like the cute Mogwai, which spawns destructive Gremlins. The frisson contained within these fuchsia, sunshine-yellow, bottle-green and rusty-orange blobs is both appealing and anxiety-inducing.

Seen in the context of 2021, Covid-19 and lockdown, *Untitled – Bed* prompts other readings too. Do Kaur's unicellular organisms spread disease, are they parasitic? Do they threaten the homes, the beds, to which we have been confined? The metal structure of *Untitled – Bed* is recognizable as a bed, but in Kaur's rendering has been defamiliarized. The bed frame is narrower than a standard single bed so that it becomes a precarious site for sleeping, and devoid of a mattress is unwelcoming. An uncomfortable sleep is proffered, while rolling off and falling into the realm of the blobs below becomes an unnerving possibility. Here the bed is not a site of respite and recuperation; sleep may not bring rejuvenation. As such, *Untitled – Bed* encourages a reflection on the privilege that comes with safe sleep, in contrast to the dangerous conditions many are forced to endure, whether in abusive households, immigration detention centres, or prison.<sup>5</sup>

At over 2 meters tall, the title of *Tall Chairs*, 1996, seems like an understatement. In this multi-part sculpture, the legs of two chairs have been stretched in order to elevate the seats, while its other proportions remain unchanged. Sitting on each chair is a yellow fleece figure; although each has a large, rounded belly, the limbs and head

*Tall Chairs*, 1996



are limp. The head shape flops between the folded knees and legs, while the arms wrap around the legs and body. Each conveys a sense of deflation and isolation, exacerbated by the fact that the figures do not touch or interact. As each seated figure hugs and holds itself, the sculpture conveys a sense of being alone despite the proximity of its protagonists. Although created in 1996, seen at a moment when social distancing has become a new-normal, Kaur's sculpture has an immediate and contemporary resonance. While the need for human contact – the security of a warm embrace – may have been understood previously, from the position of 2021, there is an urgency in that need, combined with a sense of despair and loss. As thousands upon thousands of people grieve the death of loved ones, many do so alone. In this exhibition, *Tall Chairs* seems to express the precarity of life, where proximity fails to mitigate the essential aloneness of grief. Here, we are encouraged to think deeply about human vulnerability and are invited to project ourselves into the vertiginous domestic environs that Kaur creates. In that moment of encounter, we are forced to recognize what Judith Butler has called the "universality of human precariousness".<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, Kaur's choice of bright yellow fabric allows the figures to act as balls of sunshine emanating from above.

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1. See Rose Finn-Kelcey, 'Questionnaire', in *British Art Show 4*, London: The South Bank Centre, 1995, 86.

2. See Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994.

3. Permindar Kaur in conversation with the author, 14 December 2020.

4. Maya Oppenheim, "Lockdown burnout: Women face mental exhaustion as they juggle childcare, housework and jobs", *Independent*, Sunday 31 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-lockdown-women-exhaustion-burnout-homeschool-children-work-a9538991.html> Accessed 26 January 2021.

5. See Alyosxa Tudor, "Racism, Migratism, Covid", *Feminist Review Blog*, 26 May 2020, <https://femrev.wordpress.com/2020/05/26/racism-migratism-covid/> Accessed 26 January 2021.

6. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London: Verso, 2004, 40.

### ***Growing a House, 2019***

#### **Overleaf:**

#### **Installation view of Home exhibition**









## Home: The Place Where We Dwell

British sculptor Permindar Kaur occupies a special and important place in narratives of British art from the late 20th century to the present. She emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, a decade preceded by the 1980s. I make mention of this obvious chronological fact as it has an art historical bearing on how we might read particular – and I would suggest, widely underappreciated – aspects of Kaur's work. While being careful not to caricature art practices of the 1980s, it is very much the case that the decade produced, and is remembered as producing, a new body of British artists whose work was characterized by new articulations of cogent messages oriented towards the social sphere. Artists beyond number, including painters, sculptors, printmakers and others produced compelling bodies of work that spoke of and to a slew of questions and concerns. Chief among those were matters relating to identity politics, manifestations of diaspora, cultural heritage and the challenges of artists, many of whom came of age and developed their respective practices at a time when they and the communities from which they emerged believed themselves to be particularly vulnerable to the worst of what the 1980s had to throw at them. The nature of that decade brought forth a range of innovative artist practices that above all, spoke of and to, the nature of the times.

Kaur's work from the early 1990s onwards was however decidedly different from the practices that it had in many respects come to dominate. There was in her work a pronounced, determined and we might even say refreshing sense of play that existed in marked contrast

to the earnest, serious and worthy aesthetics with which many artists of that period were associated. While large numbers of artists were seemingly intent on ensuring that social messaging was a pronounced aspect of their practice, Kaur, in evident dissimilarity, was instead responsible for producing work of altogether contrasting orientations. It is difficult to do justice to descriptions of Kaur's work, as to describe it as playful, or other than serious, implies that a certain frivolity or mannered amusement lay at its heart. This was most assuredly not the case. Its playfulness, if indeed the word is appropriate, relates to its profoundly open-ended yet simultaneously highly charged social and cultural readings. Certain manifestations of humour and wit distinguished Kaur's practice, although again, language might let us down, as humour and its associations with merriment are decidedly not what her work evoked. Not then and not now. The subjects of Kaur's work must of course be appreciated as being particularly entwined with the technically challenging and highly skillful ways in which she made her work. Thus, Kaur's work achieved the improbable: nuanced, open-ended cultural, visual and aesthetic enquiries made tactile by breathtaking, challenging and almost audacious technical skill and resolve. In sum, a certain enigmatic, intriguing and boundary-pushing use of materials and subject matter was what set Kaur's work apart from so many of her contemporaries.

One of a number of key works that declared, as well as defined, Kaur's singular sculptural unorthodoxy was the scaled-down community or village of six plate glass, cubed homes she constructed and exhibited in 1991. Measuring in the region of 180 x 150 x 150cm, these were structures (each one structurally differentiated from the other) that could be seen into, as well as seen through, and which elicited no end of fascinating readings. Much more than a collection of modernist, architecturally fascinating structures, these sculptural forms exuded a profound sense of both cultural and familial identity. Each build contained an assortment of terracotta objects and implements that we might associate with the domestic sphere – cooking utensils, pots and other earthenware that spoke to viewers of the ways in which lives, families and people are nurtured and sustained. Yet Kaur does not so much present as re-present the domestic objects that we

*Glass Houses, 1991*

identify with 'home' or the family. At times, her intensely considered placing of objects points to, and animates, a pronounced sense of disquiet, unsettlement and insecurity, even as on other occasions her work exudes the antithesis of these things – quiet, settlement and security. It is a measure of Kaur's profound skill as an artist that her work is able to simultaneously manifest an unsettling duality – because just as much of Kaur's work gives original and unusual sculptural form to our comforting notions of sanctuary, safety, solace and domestic contentment, it might in equal measure, disabuse us of our inclination to reach for these associations. As sportive as Kaur's work might be, when we are confronted by it, it is simultaneously capable of arousing







*Innocence, 1993*

the previously mentioned associations with, and feelings of, disquiet, unsettlement and insecurity. For the past three decades I have been intrigued about the ways in which Kaur's work could be described as playful yet unsettling.

Tellingly, a number of the objects that transformed Kaur's otherwise clinical plate glass structures into homes pointed most enigmatically to the artist's own cultural heritage and identity. Symbols and signifiers of faith and its expression were a recurring feature within these cubes, seen most intently and recognizably, through the Khanda, the widely identifiable emblem of Sikhism. Seen most frequently adorning the gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship, the Khanda represented a vertical double-edged sword with its blade surrounded by a circle and its hilt intersected by the crossing hilts of two single-edged swords. Thus, within *Glass Houses* Kaur declared herself adept at creating the nuanced, open-ended cultural, visual and aesthetic enquiries referred to earlier, and such elements continue to characterize her practice.

Time and again, Kaur finds herself drawn to investigations of the domestic sphere, and each new body of her work contains pointers to enduring signifiers of the home. Indeed, as *Home* is the title of this new exhibition, there are multiple manifestations within the show of the symbolism and the objects we associate with the place where one might live permanently, especially as a member of a family or household. As such, Kaur's work reflects and embodies a preoccupation that takes the form of her renderings of beds, chairs and tables – the sorts of objects without which a home might not really be thought to exist. In an email communication to me several months ago, Kaur stated succinctly: 'Most of the work is going to be furniture or about sleeping.' The artist has a particular gift for poignant understatement, even as from time to time her work reaches ambitious manifestations of scale and is oversized, or bigger than the usual size.

Perhaps one of the most consistent ways in which Kaur's work improbably yet consistently achieves its nuanced and open-ended cultural, visual and aesthetic enquiries is through her use of scale, which has occasionally become a dominant manifestation in her practice.



While some of her sculptures are imposingly grand in scale and others are intriguingly diminutive, she has made manifestations of scale an important aspect of her work. This exhibition gives its audience an opportunity to see again, or perhaps see for the first time, work such as *Tall Chairs* from 1996, which consists of two fabricated steel chairs, both well over two metres in height. And while chairs for one tend to be taller than their width and depth, Kaur takes the dimensions of her *Tall Chairs* to sculpturally exaggerated degrees. Their 225 cm height is further accentuated by their 35 x 35 cm width and depth, and yet what gives a work like *Tall Chairs* its decisive singularity are the curious, bizarre creatures sitting, gathered in on themselves, at the top of each chair. It is delightful to read the ways in which art critics and other people describe the creatures that regularly make a variety of appearances in Kaur's work.

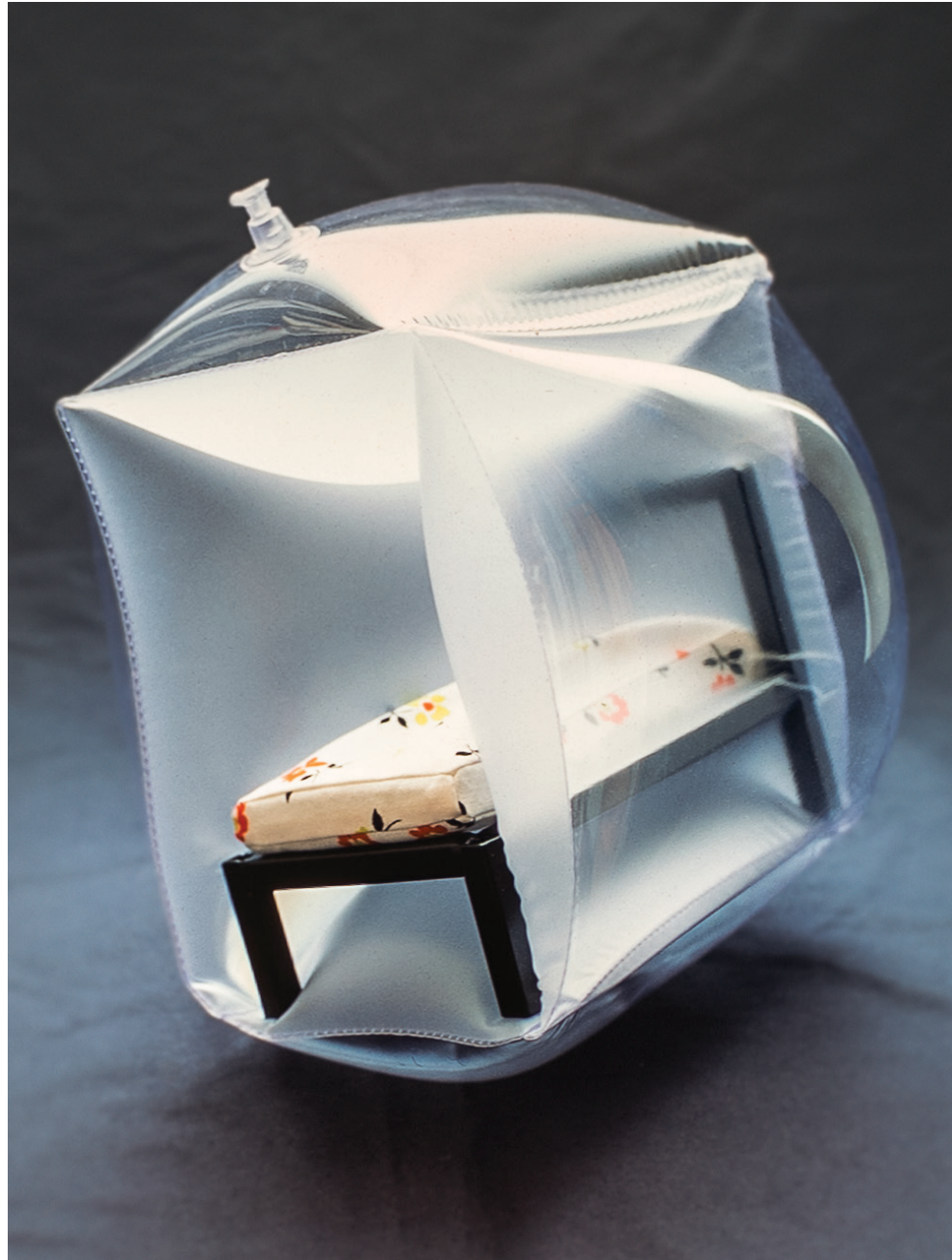
They vary of course from piece to piece, or from installation to installation, but they share a particular constant of embodying the unsettling and disturbing characteristics we might apply to toys we believe are capable of wayward, independent and deviant actions and behaviour. There is though, nothing the least bit conventional about these forms. Some resemble 'small creatures, teddy bear-ish or catlike, with pointy ears and a soft fleece.' Others are described by another critic as 'small vagabonds.' The forms that sit atop Kaur's *Tall Chairs* fit neither of these descriptions but are instead yellow, mischievous constructions with rounded ball-like bodies and limp, flat heads, arms and legs, folded in on themselves. It is perhaps a measure of her skill as an artist that in looking at the work I find myself asking, not 'why has Kaur created and placed these structures on the top of her *Tall Chairs*?' but instead, 'how did they get up there?' or 'how will they get down?' In this regard and others, Kaur achieves that which is as remarkable as it is improbable: she sees to it that we transfer our feelings of insecurity and vulnerability or associations of naughtiness, to creatures that have taken on lives of their own, even though we know or ought to know fine well that the artist has fabricated them in her studio.

In writing about the creatures that populated Kaur's *Interlopers* exhibition at the University of Hertfordshire School of Creative Arts in

*Tall Chairs*, 1996







***Dream Container, 1998***

2016, Richard Cork wrote:

*Wherever we glance in this surprisingly lofty location, teddies seem to have taken over. But they appear to be far removed from the cuddly playthings so loved by little children. All black, they are devoid of facial features apart from inquisitive ears curving upwards. Instead of lying back and waiting to be fondled, they look surprisingly active. None more so than the teddies visible in a very large piece installed near the panoramic gallery window. All attached to gleaming copper chains, they seem to pause in space before resuming their epic climb. Resolute, plucky and united by this group endeavour, they could hardly be more different from passive toys.*

*As we make our way round this fascinating and unpredictable show, Kaur makes sure that the teddies convey a very wide range of emotions. Take the narrow gap in a wall, reminding us of a tiny cupboard and stacked with teddies who appear to be climbing on each other. Although they might be involved in a game, these creatures could equally well feel claustrophobic. The teddies at the base of the cupboard look as if they are in danger of being injured or even crushed. Kaur invites us to explore the ambiguity nourishing this work, caught halfway between the bleak possibility of imprisonment and a far more reassuring sense of fun.*

Thus, the artist who fabricated steel and plate glass structures is the same artist who stitched bizarre-looking felt creatures that were so effective in their construction and resonance that they pretty much took on lives, characteristics and associations of their own. Perhaps Kaur herself wishes us to comprehend her creatures not so much, if at all, as inanimate objects, but rather as things capable of assuming verb-like or human-like characteristics. Perhaps that's why the exhibition described above by Cork was titled *Interlopers*, and an earlier outing of Kaur's figures was called *Dudes*. The artist was certainly on to something when she gave her cohort of teddies the plural name of people who become involved in a place or situation where they are not wanted or are considered not to belong. Or when she described her advancing blue and red crowned figures (an installation made for the Port of Tyne International Ferry Terminal, Royal Quays, North Shields in 2002) as *Dudes*. The colloquial expression, an informal, somewhat admiring term for a stylish, urbane male individual seemed to encapsulate very





*ShadowPlay, 2016*

well the figures' human-esque attributes. Furthermore, there is a wondrous attachment to materiality in her work. It has about it copious evidence of the highly skilled use of her materials and it is this, which in part at least, accentuates the unnerving, disconcerting and above all, highly engaging dimensions of her pieces. From stitching to welding, from carpentry to fabrication, her processes of production ensure a profoundly transformative gallery experience for her audience.

The sense of vulnerability previously referred to is abundantly manifest in *Small Tower*, 2014-19 – a stack of seven chairs, each one smaller than the one on which it rests and that form a tower well over two metres high. The work strikes me as a sort of temporal Tower of Babel, the biblical tower built in an attempt to reach heaven. Perhaps not so much a structure through which to reach heaven, but more of a structure by which to escape some impending earthly calamity. But while God was said to have frustrated the tower by confusing the languages of its builders so that they could not understand one another, to me, Kaur's *Small Tower* evokes feelings of insecurity and perhaps vertigo. What starts off at ground level as being solid, secure and capable of bearing weight, arouses in me feelings of uncertainty with the addition of each subsequent, smaller-and-smaller chair. It is perhaps then, a measure of Kaur's skill as an artist that in looking at the work I find myself asking, not 'why or how has Kaur created this work?' but 'how will I get up there?' or (when or should I need to) 'how will I get down?'

Time and again, I find myself drawn to the belief that the more personally invested we are in our readings of Kaur's work, the more the work reveals itself to us. This alone makes Kaur one of the leading and most fascinating artists of her generation.



# List of Works

Cover	<i>Independence</i> , 1998, 27 copper & fabric figures with copper poles, size variable. Photo: Nick Dunmur
7	<i>Overgrown House</i> (detail), 2020, steel, 310 x 400 x 200 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
10	<i>Glass Houses</i> (detail), 1991, glass, steel & terracotta – 6 ‘glasshouses’. Each approx. 180 cm high. Photo: Perminder Kaur
11	<i>Ten Teddies &amp; Barrier</i> , 2017, fabric, stuffing & steel. Size variable. Each teddy approx. 100 cm tall, barrier 162 x 60 x 293 cm. Photo: Richard Davies
13	<i>We Are All Animals</i> , 2010, copper & fabric, 45 x 100 x 6.5 cm. Photo: Richard Davies
14	<i>Overgrown House</i> (detail), 2020, steel, 310 x 400 x 200 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
15	<i>Overgrown House</i> , 2020, steel, 310 x 400 x 200 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
17	<i>Small Tower</i> , 2014-19, steel, 234 x 54 x 54 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
18	<i>Small Table</i> , 2020, steel & fabric, 74 x 71 x 56 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
19	<i>Small Table</i> (detail), 2020, steel & fabric, 74 x 71 x 56 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal



20	<i>Untitled–Bed</i> (detail), 2020, steel, fabric, copper & stuffing, 86 x 177 x 80 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
21	<i>Untitled – Bed</i> , 2020, steel, fabric, copper & stuffing, 86 x 177 x 80 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
23	<i>Tall Chairs</i> , 1996, steel, fabric & stuffing. Each chair 235 x 35 x 35 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
25	<i>Growing a House</i> , 2019, steel, 210 x 400 x 300 cm. Photo: Richard Davies
26-27	Installation view of Home exhibition. Photo: Thierry Bal
31	<i>Glass Houses</i> (installation), 1991, glass, steel & terracotta – 6 ‘glasshouses’. Each approx. 180 cm high. Photo: Jon Baturin
32	<i>Innocence</i> , 1993, fabric & iron, 60 x 72 cm. Photo: Peter Lundh
35	<i>Tall Chairs</i> (detail), 1996, steel, fabric & stuffing. Each chair 235 x 35 x 35 cm. Photo: Thierry Bal
36	<i>Dream Container</i> , 1998, P.V.C., steel, fabric & foam, 20 x 20 x 25 cm. Photo: Gary Kirkham
38	<i>ShadowPlay</i> , 2016, copper, fabric & stuffing, 300 x 400 x 40 cm. Photo: Richard Davies
40-41	<i>ShadowPlay</i> (detail), 2016, copper, fabric & stuffing, 300 x 400 x 40 cm. Photo: Richard Davies

