

## Hiding Out

Perminder Kaur's exhibition *Hiding Out* isn't as cuddly as it first appears.

Shariff Ibrahim

*Hiding Out*, the new exhibition by British artist Perminder Kaur, is an expansive collection of her works touching on camouflage, childhood and cultural identity and with more fleece on offer than a sale in a camping shop. The first thing you'll see as you enter is *Untitled* (2014), a new work commissioned especially for the show. This features around half a dozen person-sized black steel silhouettes in the middle of the gallery space, doubled over like anti-tank barricades. It's complemented by *Floor Mats* (2014), where the humanoid silhouettes are now rubber mats, as if the man from the gents toilet sign had slipped off and crumpled on the floor. A major theme running through Kaur's show is that of childhood, and there's a definite fairytale/playtime feel to a lot of it. With *We Are All Animals* (2010), she has created a charismatic bunch of dolls which draw obvious inspiration from one of her favourite books (and mine, and probably everyone born after its publication in 1963), Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. These are not merely plush playthings for kids though – the cuteness and softness of the material (Kaur employs the very underused medium of polar fleece or PET a lot in her work) is offset by razor sharp claws and horns made from copper - Just as Max's mythical monsters are tempered by their essential good hearts. Following in this style is the stand-out piece of the show, and also the earliest, *Independence* (1998), which is on loan from Nottingham Castle. It's the darkest too, with 27 orange felt dolls ceremoniously and independently impaled into the gallery wall on long copper pike-like poles. Where the previous subjects had a sense of life and animation to them, these figures just hang lifelessly, their copper-helmeted heads and fleece shoulders lolling, and their little copper booties dangling powerlessly. Next to them, a podium is adorned with a pile of beheaded blue bonces, still with their horned helmets intact (*Off with Their Heads* (2012)).

There's something eerie about seeing the plush fleece dolls childishly abused like this – cruelly but meticulously – as if a tyrant toddler had had a sadistic session with his medieval toy set (I immediately pictured what playtime with a young King Joffrey from *Game of Thrones* would be like). Perminder Kaur was born and raised here in Nottingham, with Indian heritage. While her work references cultural identity, she's a bit more subtle than some artists, who can be a bit heavy-handed with the colonialism cosh. It speaks more of her personal experiences than a wider cultural diaspora. She's a global artist who has lived all over the world, but the only time you see any direct nods to actual places is in her *Camouflage* (2012-13) triptych. These three pieces are composed of a different fabric from three of the different countries she's lived – 'Spain' a swirling floral yellow, 'Sweden' a minimal blue Gingham and 'India' a shimmering gold with rich red roses, each with a clawed character hewn from the same material sinking camouflaged into the background. The

camouflage that the title of the exhibition alludes to is explored further with works like *Hidden* (2013), where a copper-antlered figure cheekily peeks out from behind a forest of green and blue strings, and *Grey* (2012) a series that sees Kaur ditching her rich colour palette in favour of a dull grey. This time the figure is slumped over, seemingly drained of life as well as colour. It's quite remarkable how Kaur manages to imbue all these little dolls and big silhouettes with a sense of movement and individual character. The show is definitely worth checking out - especially for those of us still in touch with their inner children. Hiding Out, Djanogly Art Gallery, University Park, runs until Sunday 15 June. Admission is free.

Review by Shariff Ibrahim for Leftlion, June 2014

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