

TANMAYA BINGHAM: I GOT MY MOM'S BOOBS

JAY ETKIN GALLERY
703 CAMINO DE LA FAMILIA, SANTA FE

WHEN I WENT TO SEE *I GOT MY MOM'S BOOBS*, TANMAYA BINGHAM'S RECENT SHOW

at Jay Etkin Gallery, the artist was sitting cross-legged on the floor, eyes focused on the screen of her MacBook. Commanding, life-sized paintings of mothers and daughters surrounded her. Like twenty-first century Mona Lisas, they smile quietly and dreamily; they are protective and open; they are triumphantly, archetypally feminine. Bingham looked up at me with a puzzled smile and asked, "What do I name these?" She was preparing an e-mail and realized she'd not yet decided on titles. Lithe, energetic, bubbly, and assertive, Bingham's multifaceted personality complements her work, which has varied thematically over the years, but retained its essential Bingham-esque verve; it's virtuosic in its precision, and it's also unselfconsciously strange. One's immediate and abiding impression is that Bingham's riveting creative practice is very much her own.

Bingham says her relationship to her late mother "was touchy," a dynamic that perhaps informs this emotionally charged series. Mothers and daughters, rendered in colored pencil and watercolor, are separated across individual compositions—and all of them are topless, gazing at the viewer frankly and assuredly, as if daring us to flinch at their nakedness. The women in these portraits have breasts that are elongated and aged and often multitudinous, and radically, exultantly unsexy. Draped over arms or tangled together, they are unexpected and shocking. The elderly subject of *My Breast Tartar Makes My Body Scrumptious* is positioned in odalisque repose, her mouth curved into a knowing smile, her eyes twinkling in good humor. Three shafts of neon orange light blaze from her forehead. It's impossible not to gawk at her breasts, which are wrinkled and lumpy and separated by a gaping area over her heart that oozes tissue or organs. While she subscribes to a particularly meticulous strain of realism, Bingham also explores slippery, less recognizable realms, places of partially remembered dreams and whispered bedtime stories. In *I See*

For My Cat and My Cat Eats for Me, a turquoise-shawled woman with handsome, magnificently detailed features is posed with a large cat, whose eyes she covers with large, outspread hands. Of course this appears absurd and silly, but these traits exist just above a rushing—if inexplicable—undercurrent of gravitas.

Bingham doesn't spend a lot of energy trying to bolster her work with theory or exposition. This uninterest in explanation occurs as a sort of absentminded nonchalance that's unaffected and endearing. *I am the Queen of Cyber* depicts a woman with pert, brown-nippled breasts, full lips, and slender arms. Perched on her left shoulder is

a tiny white dog, his scruffy head illuminated by a bright yellow halo. Odd as it sounds, the little animal is a perfectly natural accessory for this regal woman. In the center of her throat is a crop of nipples, a surprise against so much pretty flesh. Lower down, her stomach appears cut away or partially dissolved; these sort of rude visual awakenings appear in other works, too. The subject of *Don't Mess With My Light Saber and Me* has piercing eyes and a wizened, smirking visage, countered with irregular patches of hair and mottled skin—the weather of life, made bluntly, marvelously relatable and visceral. She meets the viewer's eyes like a confidante, amiable and engaged.

Her flesh transitions abruptly from wrinkles and whiskers into pools of matte tan that bear none of the phenomenal detail and precision of the figure's upper portion. Multiple breasts emerge from her neck; low and lined, they form an unseemly rest for her folded arms. Skinny rays of black and electric blue appear as sparks of color and light around her head, forming a dynamic crown. A dog poses at its owner's feet, and though its face and torso are hyper-realistic, its grey paws blur into uniform, gauzy pewter.

What's next for Tanmaya Bingham? When last we spoke, she was headed to Berlin, where she'll continue to work; she's unsure where she'll go from there. Her future is wide open, and for now she is happily peripatetic. What we can be sure of is that Bingham will continue to uproot and transform our expectations. Her series of mothers and daughters, so mesmerizing and so finely wrought, suggests an artist whose mind is ablaze with possibilities and adventure, who creates works of exquisite, gorgeous realism that anticipate and eschew interpretation. Her work is rife with quirk and wit, rife with the qualities that make us so mysteriously and exquisitely human.

—IRIS MCLISTER



Tanmaya Bingham, *I am the Queen of Cyber*, colored pencil and mixed media on panel, 72" x 48", 2013