

# Hello Girls, Hiya Sisters

Deborah Cherry

A riotous, radiant abundance of brassieres filled the wall at the Andrew Mummery Gallery in London in summer 1999. From afar the bras blurred into abstract forms, patterning the wall with bursts of white and shots of brilliant colour (see p.24). What at first seems a clamorous and witty feminist address to a familiar item of women's daily wear is, on a closer look, a complex investigation of the artist's central theme of 'exploring the experiences and aesthetics of South Asian femininity'.<sup>1</sup> Chila Burman is an endlessly inventive, experimental and innovative artist whose creative journey has shaped and navigated crosscurrents in contemporary art and feminism.

*Hello Girls!* subverts one of the most debated images of the 1990s: the Wonderbra advertisement of 1994, a campaign on six by three metre outdoor hoardings that propelled the promotion of women's lingerie into public space.<sup>2</sup> The original monochrome poster shows supermodel Eva Herzigová wearing black knickers and a black lacy bra, the ultimate in sexy underwear. Herzigová smiles flirtatiously as she admires her well-rounded curves, alongside the slogan 'Hello Boys'. The Wonderbra's 'push-up and plunge' promises maximum uplift and deep cleavage. In *Hello Girls!* Burman's rebellion is at every level. The blonde, white model is pushed aside for glimpses of brown bodies and a profusion of bra styles: strapped and strapless, plain and patterned, lacy and embroidered, padded and underwired, soft and formed, a long-bodied laced corset, occasional bikini tops. New and worn, the bras are laid out singly or in multiples, sidebands extended, straps tangling outwards. Some are inside out, exposing their internal upholstery. Block colours jostle with sumptuous paisleys, embellished textiles, jazzy patterns, dainty florals, bold stripes, chunky knits. The artist pressed her materials against the reprographic surface of an A3 laser photocopier to make the prints. She explains:

*Auto Portrait* 2012-18  
Mixed media on Hanemulhe  
photo rag  
118.9 x 84

