

GARAGE



Huma Bhabha, *We Come in Peace*, 2018. Installation view, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018. © Huma Bhabha, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94. Image credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Photograph by Hyla Skopitz.

[ART](#) | By [JANE URSULA HARRIS](#) | June 15 2018, 10:41am

Monsters on the Roof of The Met? Huma Bhabha Explains it All

It's all golems, aliens, and never-ending war. Bring your folks!

In Huma Bhabha's sculptural installation [*We Come in Peace*](#), two giant figures dominate The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden, and both appear to have come from another world. One is a half-blue, half-brown golem-like creature with five faces that stands twelve-feet-tall. Marred by cuts and graffiti, this alien body's color divisions mirror the separation of sky from earth. The other beast, supplicant yet monstrous, lies prostrate before this alien goliath. Named *Benaam* (which in Urdu translates roughly as "nameless"), its eighteen-foot-long form is covered in what looks like a burqa, or a shiny black tarp. *Benaam*'s roughly hewn and attenuated hands reach for the block-like feet of the towering golem while a tail of rubble protrudes from its own backside. The exact nature of their interaction, while deliberately left vague, reads like a post-apocalyptic scene of characters part extraterrestrial, and part prehistoric.

This collision of the futuristic and the primitive is one of the most intriguing aspects of Bhabha's work. The artist typically works with found and ephemeral materials such as plastic bags, chicken wire, wood, clay, Styrofoam, cork, spray paint, and nail polish to imbue her figural assemblages with a visceral quality of decay and pathos. And while the works here were cast in bronze, there's a mash-up of stylistic and cultural associations that add texture, ranging from Greek [kouroi](#), Cambodian statuary, and African art by way of Picasso, to B movies and science fiction films à la [David](#)

[Cronenberg](#) or [Andrei Tarkovsky](#). “I’ve always loved sci-fi,” Bhabha tells me. “Especially the concept, repeated often in movies and novels, of the extreme future combined with the extreme past. The [notion of the] [pyramids being created by extraterrestrials or mutants](#), for example.”

The artist, who was born in Pakistan, admits that the figures in *We Come in Peace* were not only conceived as an “anti-war narrative,” but also speak directly to the contemporary political situation in the Middle East. “The world has been in a state of continuous war since 1991 when the US first invaded Iraq and then again in 2001 and 2003 when the US invaded Afghanistan and Iraq,” she explains. “And now 17 years later the war continues into Syria and Yemen with hundreds of thousands dead and displaced. I cannot ignore this, and have to bear witness to it.” How do the two figures reveal this?

“The standing figure can be seen as a victor or defender while the garbage bag-praying corpse is a symbol of the conquered, of victims,” she offers, while insisting, “I want to avoid becoming too self-righteous and one dimensional,” likely alluding to the campy title, *We Come in Peace* (a phrase lifted from the 1951 sci-fi film [The Day the Earth Stood Still](#)). “Art should be entertaining on a certain level,” she argues, and the epic alien encounter she’s staged here delivers on that promise, and more.



Huma Bhabha, Benaam, 2018. Installation view for the Roof Garden Commission: Huma Bhabha, *We Come in Peace*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018. © Huma Bhabha, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94. Image credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Photograph by Hyla Skopitz.

[We Come in Peace](#) is installed in the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden at The Met Fifth Avenue through October 28, 2018.