



View of “Are my hands clean?” 2019–20.
BERLIN

Rajkamal Kahlon

GALERIE WEDDING

Müllerstraße 146/147

December 6, 2019–January 25, 2020

The South-Asian American artist Rajkamal Kahlon has populated the entrance to “Are my hands clean?” with a multitude of small drawings, hung salon-style. *Die Völker der Erde / People of the Earth*, 2017–19, comprises three hundred pages ripped from the eponymous 1902 ethnographic tome by Dr. Kurt Lampert, whose photographs the artist altered to include a Guantánamo inmate, an American flag, and a squad of Black Panthers.

Kahlon’s subjects are the nexus between epistemic and material violence and the difficulty of representing the subaltern—those who didn’t make it into the proletariat after experiencing colonial dispossession, remaining as a residue of a world undone. In the series of life-size wood cutouts “Blowback,” 2013, the subaltern may not speak, but comes bearing gifts: a bazooka and a missile thrower. The figure in *Woman with Grenades*, 2013, wears a serene expression, festive garb, and a flower crown, palms facing outward as if saying “*Aloha*,” “*Namaste*,” or another variant of region-specific racial kitsch. She cradles a grenade in each hand. Behind her, in *Vetruvian Man or how I learned to love the bomb*, 2013, is a Papuan native, whose limbs have been supplemented with heavy weaponry. He mimics the pose of Leonardo’s drawing but lacks the steely resolve of the Vitruvian Man, who knows he stands at the center of the

discursive apparatus that produces the distinction between the modern West and the non-modern rest.

In a text so apt it could have been written with Kahlon's work in mind, the postcolonial scholar David Lloyd argues that the subaltern is "haunted with the spectre of violence"—not the violence done by or to the subaltern, but the violence inherent to the West's self-representation as the universal under which every particular can be subsumed. What Kahlon's subjects seem to say without saying it is that wherever necropower is deployed against human life, the body transmogrifies into a weapon and death becomes the ultimate form of resistance.

— Ana Teixeira Pinto

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