Beyond two cultures

Anna Mclay meets desi scouser
Chila Kumari Burman

A sculptor and a designer, a Hindu Purple, Chila Kumari Burman, who grew up helping her dad with his ice cream van on Freshfields Beach, went on to become one of the first British South Asian women to study art at the Slade. Her work – which she describes as challenging the notion of the Asian woman “caught between two cultures” – is now held in collections belonging to the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate and Richard Branson.

Among her influences, Burman lists Bollywood, Dada and Surrealism, Hindu philosophy, Indian comic pop culture and her mum. She works a lot with преис, layering and re-laying, pruning and repeating, and texture is unimportant; the focus is on colour. The initial image becomes a blur, Burman likes to work with “girly-junk” – bindis, make-up, hair accessories, flowers, buttons and beads – as well as pictures of Bollywood stars and Hindu goddesses. Words are superimposed from sources as diverse as an erotic fridge magnet set and the New Internationalist magazine.

Sexuality and forms of female sexual desire are intrinsic to Burman’s work, all of which might be seen as a series of self-portraits, even the larger-than-life ice cream cone sculptures. Everywhere there is a story of glitter and sparkle – and there couldn’t really be a better reflection of the artist’s effervescent personality. One glinting black and white photograph of a young Burman is scribbled over with the thought bubble: “Gonna be an artist, y’know? Well, girl, you certainly made it.”

Middle Left: Gonna be an artist, Soft Portrait, 1994
Bottom Left: Richard Lowther Centre
Leicester Road, Leicester LE1 7HA
Until 19 April 2015
chila-kumari-burman.co.uk
enquiries.co.uk

Clockwise from top left:
Gonna be an artist, Soft Portrait, 1994
Blue Aprons with family, mixed media, 2000 (left)
Head of Gold 2 (detail), mixed media, 2001 (medium)
Acy Mutt, mixed media, 2000-2005 (right)
Corrosion and Screwhulls Shrine, glitter, plastic and rust, 2002

Charles Church, 1967-1968
Richard Lowther Centre, Leicester LE1 7HA
Until 19 April 2015
www.charleschurch.org.uk
www.richardlowthercentre.co.uk