ANISH KAPOOR’S MATERIAL VALUES

The wildly successful sculptor, whose works incorporate everything from reflective steel to gooey wax, has turned an enormous palazzo in Venice into a showcase for his work. It’s a statement of power—and a bid for his legacy.

By Rebecca Mead
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The Palazzo Priuli Manfrin, in Venice, was bought four years ago by the artist Anish Kapoor. It was constructed in the sixteenth century for the aristocratic Priuli family, but it is thanks to the efforts of a later owner, Girolamo Manfrin, that the palazzo has its storied place in Venetian art history. Manfrin was an outsider from Dalmatia—born “in the midst of mud and shit,” as one detractor put it—who amassed a fortune in the tobacco trade. He bought the palazzo, which featured a ballroom with a thirty-foot-high frescoed ceiling, in the late seventeen-eighties. Manfrin wanted to decorate his new home with “pictures of the highest quality,” but, not being a connoisseur, he had advisers find him paintings by such masters as Mantegna, Giorgione, and Tiepolo. Manfrin boasted of acquiring masterpieces “without paying any attention to the expense involved,” and his expenditures had the desired result: the palazzo became a required destination for any cultivated visitor to Venice, and remained so after his death, in 1801. Three decades later, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley wrote that “the collection is in every respect magnificent, and deserves many visits.”

Manfrin’s art was sold off in the late nineteenth century, with many works going to Venice’s Gallerie dell’Accademia. Thereafter, the palazzo changed hands repeatedly, and eventually fell into dilapidation. By the end of the twentieth century, the building was serving as a convent for a community of nuns, who had converted its upper floors into monastic cells. By 2012, it was deserted and on the market for twenty million euros: a crumbling fixer-upper with faded frescoes and a courtyard that, if not quite filled with mud and shit, was prone to frequent flooding.

Kapoor, who was born in Mumbai in 1954, and has lived in Britain since the early seventies, is the kind of blue-chip artist who, had he been working in the eighteenth century, might have sold some pieces to Manfrin’s advisers. Kapoor is best known for works that explore the interplay of mass and void, and for beguiling experiments with optics. His sculptures induce both awe and disquiet. His mirrored works—in particular, concave disks that measure several feet across and cast complex patterns of reflection—have regularly been snapped up by collectors at art fairs ever since he started making them, in the late eighties. The mirror sculptures not only create a destabilizing aura; they reflect light and sound in ways that tend to enhance whatever room they are displayed in. Museums and foundations have an equally large appetite for what Kapoor calls “non-objects”—such as twisted stainless-steel works so reflective that their shapes are hard to discern—and also for sculptures, made from natural materials like sandstone or alabaster, that are punctured with mysterious holes.

Although these signature pieces are alluring, some of Kapoor’s work is alarming, even repulsive. For an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, in London, in 2009—the first solo show there by a living artist—he presented “Grayman Cries, Shaman Dies, Billowing Smoke, Beauty Evoked,” an array of lumpy forms made from coils of concrete extruded from a 3-D printer. Kapoor’s working title for this installation was “Between Shit and Architecture.” In 2015, the Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam, displayed his “Internal Object in Three Parts,” a triptych of canvases thickly encrusted with red and white silicone that evoked freshly slaughtered viscera. One of his most celebrated works, “Shooting Into the Corner,” consists of a cannon that fires off bucket-size canisters of blood-colored wax at regularly timed intervals; Kapoor has scattered the walls of many a museum with his gory goop.

Kapoor has often embraced the challenge of working on an enormous scale. In 2002, he became the third artist to receive a commission from the Tate Modern, in London, to create an installation for the gigantic Turbine Hall, part of a former power station. In collaboration with the architect and engineer Cecil Balmond, Kapoor installed a vast red membrane—manufactured in France, by a company that usually makes coverings for sports stadiums—then stretched it over and between three giant steel rings. The work, which fully occupied the daunting space, was titled “Marsyas”—an allusion to the myth, also depicted by Titian, in which a satyr is flayed for defying Apollo. Even for those visitors for whom the reference was unfamiliar, the work still packed a wallop. “It looked like some part of the body, except you were not really sure what it was,” Donna De Salvo, who curated the installation, and is now at the Dia Foundation, in New York, told me. “Anish’s view of things is deeply rooted in the physical, the bodily, the psychological,
“Dismemberment, Site I,” into a hilly landscape; shaped like a double-sided trumpet, the work, which is more than eighty feet tall, resonates with the wind.

These large pieces were praised for creating in the viewer an almost terrifying sense of immersion—and an inescapable confrontation with mortality. Some of Kapoor’s creations, however, can tip over into bombast. In 2010, in preparation for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, he was commissioned to make the U.K.’s tallest public work of sculpture: the ArcelorMittal Tower, named for the steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal, who helped finance its construction. Designed in concert with Balmond, and three hundred and seventy-six feet in height, it is a swirling network of red-painted steel tubes that might, poetically, be said to resemble the arterial system of the flayed Marsyas; the sculpture was more commonly compared to a tangled hookah pipe. One wit dubbed it the Eyeful Tower. In 2015, in the gardens of the Palace of Versailles, Kapoor installed a colossal structure, resembling a funnel laid on its side, fabricated from Corten steel. He declared that the work, titled “Dirty Corner,” was “very sexual”—something that could be said of much of his output. The sculpture appalled rather than seduced many onlookers, though, and vandals repeatedly covered it in graffiti. The French press renamed the work “le vagin de la reine.”

The truth of the matter is that I sell a good bit of work each year, and that allows me to keep going with ambition, and to do stupid things like buy a bloody palazzo,” Kapoor told me when we met in Venice, in early April. Bureaucracy and the pandemic had hampered efforts, initiated last fall, to ready the Palazzo Manfrin for its new incarnation: the home of the Anish Kapoor Foundation. The Omicron variant sickened various people working on the restoration, and a small earthquake had revealed the frescoes’ fragility. Though the palazzo remained in a raw state, in mid-April Kapoor was planning to open it to the public for the first time in more than a century, as part of an expansive project curated by Taco Dibbits, the general director of the Rijksmuseum: an exhibition spread across two venues, with works shown at the Palazzo Manfrin and also at the Accademia, where Kapoor would be the first British artist to be honored with a solo show.

A few weeks before the exhibition was to open, the Palazzo Manfrin was mired in construction, so I met Kapoor at the Accademia. He is slight of build and light on his feet, with a boyish demeanor and smooth, unlined skin belied by silvery, swept-back hair. He wore sneakers, black pants, and a turquoise cashmere sweater. Around us, Venetian workmen were making slow progress on the exhibition. “I’m worried, because the lighting guys have got to get their bloody equipment in here,” Kapoor told me, casting a wary eye up to the antiquated beams overhead. He has a sonorous voice, with the kind of English accent that echoes in the halls of private schools and in the upper reaches of the Foreign Office. When he laughs, which is quite often, he verbalizes the act: “Ha–ha–ha!” Addressing the workers, Kapoor was upbeat: “Formidabile! Ho visto che cambia totalmente.” Turning back to me, he confided, “I’m fearless—I’ll speak any bloody language. Ha–ha–ha!”

“Shooting Into the Corner” was once again being exhibited, though without ongoing shooting into any corners: Kapoor had decided that the work should be set up with an already discharged arsenal, the cannon’s barrel aimed toward a small room that was knee-deep with gloppy red deposits, as though it were Bluebeard’s chamber. So indelibly is Kapoor’s name associated with the wax’s hue—a dark red, more purple than orange—that the Ford Motor Company offers vehicles sprayed with what it calls, without his permission, Kapoor Red. (He’s suing. “Artists are continually being plagiarized by capitalism in its various forms,” he said. “We must fight back at every turn.”) Kapoor said that “Shooting Into the Corner” was “obviously very, very phallic, male in conversation with female,” adding, “It’s also throwing paint—so Pollock and Abstract Expressionism. And, obviously, it refers to Goya”—whose “The Third of May 1808,” at the Prado, depicts Spanish loyalists facing a Napoleonic firing squad.

Displayed on the opposite wall was “Pregnant White Within Me,” a scaled-up iteration of a groundbreaking work from 1992, “When I Am Pregnant.” Approached from the side, it was evidently a large ovoid bulge that extended seamlessly from the wall, at head height. Seen from the front, the bulge was much harder to detect: it seemed to have been absorbed back into the wall. “We’re in the middle of lighting it, trying to make it disappear,” Kapoor explained. The walls of a neighboring gallery were hung with various oil paintings: kinetic, angry abstractions in which a few figurative elements—a severed artery?—could be discerned. Kapoor has made paintings throughout his career, though he has rarely shown them. When the Modern Art Oxford recently mounted a show of Kapoor’s paintings alongside some viscera-inspired sculptural works, one visitor became so overwhelmed that he fainted.
For decades, Kapoor explained, he has been drawn to the symbolic potency of blood. “Men have no access to blood, and women do,” he said. “Menstruation is the way that blood and earth connect—how do men have access to blood? War, circumcision, and hunting. Those are the only ways.” He is persuaded by the conclusions of the British anthropologist Chris Knight, who thirty years ago argued that the first acts of culture—dance, song—were created by women who were isolating from men while menstruating together and smearing themselves ritually with red ochre. Kapoor said of Knight, “He’s bonkers, but I love him.” The paintings were concerned with sacrifice, he explained: in several of the works, a craggy form alluded to Mt. Sinai. “Moses performed the sacrifice, so to speak, on the golden calf, and then we have the dismantling of polytheism, and then we end up with this monotheistic patriarchy,” he said. At the far end of the gallery, Kapoor had smeared black and red pigment up the wall, and, at the base, collected a pile of dirt and rubble in which it was possible to identify the crumpled, soiled remains of a garment. “It’s another dirty corner,” he said. “It’s called ‘Death of the Artist’—and there are my overalls. Ha-ha-ha!” The title, he added, was far from a joke. “These works are all obviously sacrificial, let’s say,” he went on. “So why not me?”

It was in Venice that Kapoor first came to international prominence. At the 1990 Biennale, when he was thirty-six, he was selected to represent Britain. Among the sculptural works that he showed were “Void Field”—a room filled with rough-hewn blocks of Northumbrian sandstone, each of which had been bored with a hole lined with Prussian-blue pigment—and “A Wing at the Heart of Things,” which consisted of two massive, flattish pieces of slate that were similarly coated with blue pigment, like pieces of sky that had fallen to earth. (“A Wing at the Heart of Things” is now in the collection of the Tate.) More immediately understated, if hardly less technically complicated, was “The Healing of Saint Thomas,” a bloody gash in the gallery’s white wall which suggested not just the wound of Christ but also the minimalism of Lucio Fontana. (It has been reprinted at the Accademia; as an experiment, Kapoor added a drip of blood from the wound, but he rejected the notion, and ten coats of paint were required to eliminate the mark.) At the Biennale, installing the sculptures demanded the costly reinforcing of not one but two floors of the British pavilion, after Kapoor changed his mind about the arrangement of his work, then changed it back. Despite the sculptures’ heft, they had a numinous quality, seeming to have arisen in place almost without the artist’s intervention. Photographers at the opening captured Giulio Andreotti, the Italian Prime
Minister, leaning over one of the blocks in “Void Field” and peering into the cavity.

Critics praised Kapoor’s work for continuing the formal explorations of modernist sculpture while also citing his capacity for unironic spiritual suggestiveness. At a Biennale where the attention-getting gestures included pornographic sculptures in which Jeff Koons depicted himself having sex with his partner Ilona Staller, Kapoor’s work won plaudits both for its weightiness and for its ethereality. “I remember a sense in 1990 of people telling me what I was doing,” Kapoor recalled. “I thought that was most interesting, because it means that something I had been up to is out there, if you like, in the public psyche. So something shifted. That was perhaps most important.” Kapoor received commentators’ insights with equanimity: “Mostly, I thought, Yeah, I know what I am doing. How nice of you to recognize it.” In 1991, Kapoor won the Turner Prize, the U.K.’s most prestigious honor for contemporary art. Having renounced his Indian citizenship for British citizenship—his birth nation does not recognize dual nationality, and a British passport is a more convenient document for international travel—he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, in 2003, and knighted, a decade later, for services to culture.

Unlike Koons—with whom Kapoor shares, if nothing else, a predilection for flawless, shiny surfaces that are devilishly complex to fabricate—Kapoor’s themes are unapologetically sober, even old-school: God, man, woman, birth, death. “I do believe we are deeply religious beings,” Kapoor, who has practiced Zen Buddhist meditation for decades, told me. “The profound mystery of life—it’s banal to say it—is: ‘What happens when I die? Where was I before I was born?’ I think those are daft but actually bloody important questions.” He ranges freely among religious, mythological, and intellectual traditions; his work invokes Christian, Jewish, and Hindu symbolism. Sigmund Freud is never very far away. Kapoor is impatient with what he sees as the restrictive ethic of identity politics—a framework that might deem problematic a male artist’s attempt to inhabit or represent the feminine, or that might question the expression of an artist whose subject matter appears to be at odds with his own heritage or lived experience. “I have a huge problem with it,” he told me. “Black art can only be made by Black artists? Phooey! The whole point of being an artist is this ability, or will, to project psychically into other ways of being, seeing, thinking. The banal political correctness of, if you like, ‘the origin of the author’? Oh, how tedious!”

Kapoor grew up in a prosperous neighborhood of Mumbai. He was the eldest of three boys. His father, who came from a Hindu Punjabi family, was a hydrographer in the Indian Navy. “When we were young children, he was often at sea, making maps,” Kapoor told me. “There were literally lines let down to measure the depths—making the invisible visible.” His mother, who painted in her spare time, also had her own business. “To say she was a clothes designer is going too far, but to call her a seamstress is too simple,” he said. She had emigrated from Iraq as an infant with her parents, who were Jewish refugees; her father became a cantor in a synagogue in Mumbai. Kapoor’s parents were cosmopolitan and modern. Ilan Kapoor, five years Anish’s junior, who is now a professor of development studies at York University in Toronto, told me, “We always had the sense that we were outsiders.” At home, the family spoke English rather than a local language, as the families of the boys’ classmates tended to do. “My father absolutely hated Hinduism, and we rarely went to a synagogue,” Kapoor said. In contrast, he was drawn to the diverse and ancient traditions that he saw around him. “Hinduism is deeply to do with ritual, with faith and belief,” he told me. “I thought it was fascinating to go to the temple and see all these innocent and not-so-innocent Indians with awe in their faces.”

In 1965, Kapoor’s father was promoted to the position of the Navy’s chief hydrographer, and the family moved from Mumbai to Dehradun, close to the foothills of the Himalayas. (The dry climate in Dehradun meant that map pages would not be warped by moisture, insuring more accurate renderings.) The city was the location of one of India’s most elite boarding schools, the Doon School. Kapoor and his brother Roy, who is a year younger, attended as day students; Kapoor, who is dyslexic, struggled with his studies, and loathed the place. “It was all about sports and seniority,” he said. “We had to get up at the crack of dawn and go and do gym, and my heart was not in one second of it. I was deeply disinterested, and not motivated. And I was, as I still am, deeply anti-authoritarian. My father, the admiral—we were at war with each other.” His mother was warm and loving, but he felt underestimated by her. “My mother once said to me, ‘Anish, you’d be a good deputy to someone,’” he told me. “She didn’t say it nastily, but it really offended me.”
When Anish was sixteen, he and Roy were sent to Israel to live on a kibbutz. Anish’s job was to look after the community’s ducks. “We were still children, really—naïve, innocent Indian boys,” he recalled. In India, the brothers’ Jewish identity had marked them as outsiders; in Israel, Anish discovered that their Indian heritage marked them as not Jewish enough. On the streets of Tel Aviv, they were subjected to racist chants. While in Israel, Anish suffered what he later recognized as a nervous breakdown. “I just became completely dysfunctional,” he told me. Roy, who is now an executive at a technology company in Toronto, told me, “We would be walking along the street, and he would say he didn’t know what was real and what was not real. He would gaze around, and shake, and start to cry.” It was then that Kapoor first went into psychoanalysis. (He now has weekly rather than daily sessions.) But he also received help from other sources. “I had an aunt who lived in Israel, and she had these weird, shamanistic predilections,” he recalled. When Kapoor’s mother went to Israel to visit her sons, the aunt commanded her, “Go back to India and get some earth, come back, and put it under Anish’s bed.” Kapoor told me, “I could cry, honestly—my mother, bless her, went to India, got some earth, and put it under my bed. And, in a way, it’s that ritual material that I have been working with ever since.”

Kapoor’s parents hoped that he would study to become an engineer in Israel; instead, he decided to become an artist, renting a studio and starting to make paintings. When he applied to Bezalel, the noted art school in Jerusalem, he was turned down, and he left the country in 1973, just before the Yom Kippur War. Kapoor hitchhiked across Europe, stopping in Monaco, where his parents had moved for his father’s work. In the principality, he told me, “I was getting stopped by the police for being dark-skinned and having long hair every five minutes—I’m sorry, but that’s just a fact.” (A few years ago, he returned to Monaco to receive an honor, and took the opportunity to inform Prince Albert II about the long-ago harassment.) Kapoor ended up in London, where he enrolled at the Hornsey College of Art—an environment that was both idealistic and radically leftist. “Artists would hang out, get stoned, chill out, go to the pub, go to the studio,” Kapoor recalled. “It was a completely different atmosphere, in terms of what it meant to do something in the world. It wasn’t a job. It was a mission. It was a thing you filled your life with.” London was cheap and increasingly cosmopolitan. Kapoor rented a studio for five pounds a month and made money, at Camden Lock Market, by selling jewelry made from bent spoons and forks.
Kapoor had imagined himself having a modest, bohemian existence, but this plan was undermined by his growing critical and commercial success. In the late seventies, he began sculpting biomorphic, convoluted forms that looked as if they were made entirely from heaps of bright-colored pigment. The series, titled “1000 Names,” was partly inspired by Kapoor’s first return visit to India, a decade after his departure; the sculptures’ colors and textures evoked the sacks of pigments sold in Mumbai markets for ritual use, and their powdery edges were formally innovative, bringing into question the boundary between painting and sculpture. In the course of Kapoor’s career, his pigment works have sometimes raised other questions: once, on the way to a show in Sicily, airport security guards briefly detained him, suspicious of his claim that the bags of white powder found in his luggage were paint.

In 1982, he was taken on by the influential Lisson Gallery, which already represented several British sculptors of his generation, including Tony Cragg and Richard Deacon. Like them, Kapoor often fabricated works from commonplace materials, such as Styrofoam and wood. But his use of powdered pigment was distinctive. Nicholas Logsdail, the gallery’s founder, told me, “The form was not necessarily that original, but the way he used the form was. His use of color pigment, and this very casual way of just letting it drop to the floor, rather than making it neat and tidy—I thought this had the potential to be some sort of art-historical breakthrough.” In 1984, a show of pigment works at the Gladstone Gallery, in Manhattan, sold out before it had even opened. John Russell, who reviewed the show for the Times, noted that Kapoor “has something of his native country in his use of deep and brilliant color,” adding, “The mustard yellows, the Yves Klein blue, the bright, sharp reds and the luxurious blacks remind us at once of a country in which color comes in the form of a dye, and not out of a tube.”

Critical reception of Kapoor’s work often focussed on his Indian ancestry, while sometimes paying less attention to other aspects of his artistic inheritance. Homi K. Bhabha, the Harvard professor and critical theorist, who has been a close friend of Kapoor’s for decades, told me, “In the nineteen-eighties and nineties, there was an obsession—a kind of cultural anxiety—to put a name and a place to a post-colonial diasporic artist’s inventiveness by emphasizing the authenticity of his or her cultural provenance. Anish’s work is often given an over-the-top mystical and mythological reading which doesn’t engage with the more worldly tensions to which it calls attention.” Post-colonial, diasporic artists, Bhabha went on, have a global provenance rather than a national identity: “They are in dialogue with Western art and artists while also being deeply in conversation with arts and artists across the global, post-colonial South.”

Kapoor told me that he “refused to accept that I am an ‘Indian artist,’” and went on, “In the age of the individual, creative potential is attributed to background culture. And you rob the individual of their creative contribution.” His relationship with his land of origin has been further complicated by the rise of Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, of whom Kapoor has been consistently critical. Last year, he wrote in the Guardian that Modi’s regime “bears comparison with the Taliban in Afghanistan, who also attempted to rule with ideological fervor,” adding, “The fascist government in India today is doing what the British could not. Modi and his neo-colonial henchmen are forcing Hindu singularity on the country.” Kapoor is no fonder of the outgoing British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, whose politics he sees as part of a dispiriting global trend rightward. (When Johnson was the mayor of London, Kapoor expressed his displeasure with him after Johnson commissioned the construction of a slide on the frame of the ArcelorMittal Tower, in order to make it a more alluring tourist attraction.)

“You look at Brazil, India, on and on—the first thing they go for is culture,” Kapoor told me. “Because they don’t want freethinking, open-minded conversation, and because images matter. It’s sad to see Britain go in this direction.” Kapoor has leveraged his renown in England to criticize everything from Brexit to the British government’s treatment of Shamima Begum—a British-born woman who was stripped of her citizenship in 2019, four years after she decided, as a fifteen-year-old, to leave London to join its fighters in Syria. Now living in a refugee camp in northern Syria, Begum has borne and lost three children. “Here’s a sad young woman who was trafficked, effectively,” Kapoor told me. “Imagine a government that can arbitrarily remove your citizenship, if you have the wherewithal to get citizenship elsewhere, because you speak out against them. They could do the same to me tomorrow, frankly.”

"Are we never to find a place that doesn't have a spider?"
Kapoor’s pigment sculptures were the beginning of his efforts to push materials to unexpected, apparently reality-defying extremes. “It is said that what you see is what you get, and I think art is exactly the opposite,” Kapoor once told the curator Nicholas Baume. “For me, the illusionary is more poetically truthful than the ‘real.’” Greg Hilty, the curatorial director of the Lisson Gallery, told me, “There is a bit of a Wizard of Oz thing—Anish has never been afraid of fiction, and theatre.”

Over the years, the materials to which Kapoor has had access, and the transformative methods at his disposal, have become more sophisticated and extreme. He enlisted workers at a shipyard in Holland to manufacture “Hive,” a giant curved sculpture made from Corten steel. For “Svayambhu”—a Sanskrit word that means “self-generated”—Kapoor placed a huge, motor-propelled block of blood-colored wax on a track that passed through three identically sized doorways; the wax block squeezed through and splattered the doorways, suggesting that it had been “carved” into shape while moving back and forth. At an online roundtable last year, Nigel Schofield of MDM Props, the fabricator who helped Kapoor realize the work, said of the wax vehicle, “There’s a train underneath that, so you need engineering skills.”

An exploration of technological possibility underlies some of Kapoor’s works. Sometimes the results can seem merely slick; in other cases, novel tools help him reach for the sublime. The coils of concrete in “Grayman Cries, Shaman Dies, Billowing Smoke, Beauty Evoked” were inspired by a heady conversation with Adam Lowe, the founder of Factum Arte, a Madrid studio that specializes in digitization. “Adam Lowe and I wondered if it were possible to make a machine that could generate form,” Kapoor wrote in “Unconformity and Entropy,” a 2009 book about the collaboration. “Once we had started making objects, a new reality began to emerge. These were objects like no others; they seemed to obscure the border between artifice and event. They are objects more akin to natural things than to those made by design.” In Kapoor’s studio, wet concrete was placed at predetermined coordinates via an elaborately programmed 3-D printer; in the book, Lowe describes the device as “a shit machine that farts and craps its way along its ordained path.” Eventually, Kapoor decided that computerizing the creative process was unnecessary; dressed in white overalls and surgical gloves, he wielded the nozzle himself.

Other Kapoor works display such exquisite technical refinement that they seem otherworldly. These are often achieved in collaboration with the thirteen technicians who work at Kapoor’s studio. Greg Hilty, of the Lisson Gallery, described the studio to me as a special atelier: many of Kapoor’s employees, including administrative staff, make and show art in their own right. “He has a group of people he has worked with for a really long time,” Hilty said. “And they know what he wants, and think what he thinks, to a certain degree. They have evolved with him, and they have helped him evolve his language.” Even when Kapoor’s works look as if they have been digitally manufactured or created with imaging software, they are often entirely analog—first sketched by Kapoor on paper or on the studio walls, then sculpted by hand, or by a variety of hands. Kapoor employs three stone carvers whose expertise can be imaginatively harnessed. Within the past two years, his studio has produced a trio of sculptures in which a wafer-thin rectangle or triangle of alabaster appears to be hovering, impossibly, in front of a rough-hewn block of the stone. In fact, each geometric figure has been painstakingly carved, by hand, from the solid block, to which it remains connected by a stem that is visible only if you peer at the sculpture from the side. Each piece in the series took between four and six months to make; conceptually, the works are on a continuum with earlier Kapoor sculptures in which forms are carved from the inside out, but the new pieces emerged from conversations with his team about the technical limits of stone carving. “They told me that you can just about get your hand in a seven-centimetre space—they could carve between the stone and the form in front,” Kapoor explained to me. “Can you believe it? Seven centimetres! We found tools that can do it. They found, we found. It’s a feat of patience and love and care.”
Other works achieve their mysterious effect through the construction of faux walls and floors. Kapoor once set a giant chromed-bronze sinkhole into a gallery floor, like a bathtub drain of the gods. A particularly notorious work is “Descent Into Limbo,” which was first displayed in 1992, and which gallerygoers have lined up to experience whenever it has been shown. It consists of a black hole on the floor of a small room to which several visitors at a time are admitted. Kapoor believes that “Descent Into Limbo” is his best work. In Venice, he told me, “It looks like a black carpet on the ground, not like a hole, but it is a space completely brimmed full of darkness.” (The work is fiendishly difficult to install, and is not being shown either at the Accademia or at the Palazzo Manfrin.) “It is frightening,” he continued. “Very frightening, because it’s a bloody deep, dark hole, but it’s also an object and not an object. ‘Descent Into Limbo’ is literally doing, if you like, what Apollinaire dares the artist to do—to go to the edge, fly or die.” Some visitors have taken this injunction literally: a few years ago, when “Descent Into Limbo” was shown at a gallery in Portugal, a man in his sixties fell in. “Poor fellow, he must have hurt himself so badly,” Kapoor said. “He spent three or four days in hospital.” How deep does the hole go? “To the center of the earth!” Kapoor told me. “Ha-ha-ha!”

“Come this way!” Kapoor called out, stepping lightly along the pavement outside his vast studio, in the Camberwell district of South London. It was a morning in early March, with six weeks to go before the opening of the shows in Venice, and members of the art-world press had been invited for a preview of some works that were to be exhibited. Having at first occupied a single warehouse on the street, Kapoor’s domain has extended to include all but one of the buildings on the block. Each structure is dedicated to a different fabrication process: mirrors in one, silicone works in the next. Nicholas Logsdail told me, “Each one is like a different compartment of his brain.”
Kapoor told his guests, “Now, this is a huge room with a very, very big object in it—come in one by one.” He opened a door to reveal a hangar-like space, the floor of which was almost entirely covered by what looked like an enormous mountain ridge formed of a material that resembled raw meat. His visitors, walking in single file along the narrow margin, stepped gingerly, like “Squid Game” contestants trying to avoid a gruesome fate. “Be careful of your backs—everything is covered in sticky red,” Kapoor cried. The warning came too late for a reporter from an Italian newspaper, whose overcoat already bore gooey evidence of a too close encounter with Kapoor’s œuvre.

The work had been created in less than three months. First, Kapoor made various sketches, four of which had been turned into models by his lead technician, Pablo Smidt, who has worked with him for nineteen years, and who stood by in the studio during Kapoor’s presentation, his white overalls stained with gore. (One member of Kapoor’s team told me that the sight of his technicians at work suggested “a production of Julius Caesar after the assassination.”) After Kapoor was shown the models, he selected his chosen form, which Smidt had built by hand, working solo for about six weeks to make a fibreglass substructure, then applying blocks of color. The ultimate surface, which was made of resin mixed with paint, had been applied by Kapoor. “He is not someone coming in here and giving directions and going away,” Smidt told me later. “When it is the moment to work, he works like anybody else—or more.”

The work was to be installed in the entryway of the Palazzo Manfrin—though there it would be positioned on the ceiling, upside down, with the mountain’s peak almost touching the floor. Given the challenges of the space, which is divided by columns, Kapoor had decided that it would be more effective to attach a sculpture to the rafters than to place it on the floor. He had conceived of an upside-down mountain, thus “inverting the great Italian tradition of the painted ceiling.” The mountain, Kapoor admitted, was an act of bravado—one that he was not entirely sure would work at the Venice site. “As a general rule, I say that a work should not leave the studio for at least six months after it’s made,” he told me. “You just sit with it, watch it, look at it, understand whether it has a voice or not.” The meaty mountain would not have time to marinate, however: within a few days, it was to be sliced into thirteen more manageable blocks, which would be reassembled at the palazzo. Would it ultimately produce in its viewers the desired sense of dread and awe? “You’ll tell me when we get there,” he said.

In another studio was a body of work that had already made headlines without having ever been unveiled to the public: a series of objects coated with a substance called Vantablack. Several years ago, the British technology company Surrey NanoSystems announced that it had created the coating, which the company described as the darkest substance yet made by man; it is formed of very long, very narrow nanotubes of carbon that absorb virtually all the light falling on them. Although Vantablack was developed for use in space technology, hundreds of artists around the world approached Surrey NanoSystems about the coating, Kapoor among them. In 2016, Ben Jensen, the company’s founder and chief technology officer, made an exclusive deal with Kapoor for its artistic use. “Anish had some amazingly grand ideas on how to deliver and execute his art,” Jensen told me. “But we are governed somewhat by the capability in the laws of physics, and what we can actually do at the time. In the beginning, it was a learning process—what can Vantablack do, and how does that fit with his vision?” The deal did not further Kapoor’s popularity in the artistic community. “This black is like dynamite in the art world,” the artist Christian Furr said at the time. “It isn’t right that it belongs to one man.” Stuart Semple, a British artist whose practice includes manufacturing his own pigments, drew attention to Kapoor’s monopoly by marketing a “pinkest pink” pigment. You could buy it online, but only after confirming that “you are not Anish Kapoor, you are in no way affiliated with Anish Kapoor, you are not purchasing this item on behalf of Anish Kapoor or an associate of Anish Kapoor.” More than one person I spoke with about Kapoor told me that he is not “an artists’ artist”—a reputation secured by the Vantablack affair.

The controversy had misrepresented the product, Kapoor wearily explained to his visitors. It was not a paint that could be squeezed from a tube or bought in a can; making Vantablack was a complex and expensive technological process. He led the group to the first of several glass cases—necessary protection, he explained, because Vantablack was both fragile and toxic. Inside the first case, mounted on a white background, was what looked at first sight like a velvety black square. The work, Kapoor explained, owed an obvious debt to Kazimir Malevich’s “Black Square”—a painting that was first exhibited in 1915—but it also referred to innovations in painting developed during the Renaissance. “There were two great discoveries in the Renaissance,” he said. “There’s the one we all hear about—perspective, which places the human being in the center, and the whole world recedes away. The other, just as important, is the fold: all those Renaissance paintings have endless folds.” He was referring to the intricately
rendered fabrics in such paintings, which deepen the illusion of three-dimensionality. “What is the fold? It is, of course, a definition of being. It says being. It says person. Now, the strange thing about this material is that you put it on a fold, and you can't see the fold.” He went on, “My proposition is that this material is therefore beyond being.”

When Kapoor’s visitors moved to the side of the glass case, what had appeared to be flat materialized into a three-dimensional, diamond-shaped geometric form. In other cases, black squares mysteriously puffed up into domes, or irregular bulbous growths, or, in one case, what looked faintly like a stovepipe hat hung on a peg. “It’s a trick, and it’s not a trick,” Kapoor said. “Isn’t art always about tricks? The whole endeavor of painting is to give appearance to objects.” On one of the glass cases, the side views of the object had been blocked off. “You can’t see it—it is a truly invisible object,” Kapoor declared, to uneasy chuckles from the onlookers. The only way the three-dimensionality of the object could be discerned—as the besmirched Italian reporter was the first to notice—was in its reflection in the glass. “There you go—using your eyes,” Kapoor said. “Ha-ha-ha!”

Sheena Wagstaff, the Leonard A. Lauder Chair for Modern and Contemporary Art at the Metropolitan Museum, later told me that these works—fabricated in what the artist has renamed Kapoor Black—“go straight to the heart of the matter, of the void.” She continued, “That series of work really undermines and shapes our assumptions of our own perception. The material is incredibly difficult to work with—it is literally zero sum—and he says, very candidly, ‘I am still working it out.’” Wagstaff went on, “That is kind of analogous to what all of us are doing in our lives—we’re all working it out. It sounds flippant, but it’s actually super-profound. He touches on the uncertainty we all feel about the tangibility of our existence.”

The black works were another iteration of Kapoor’s long-standing investigation of what he calls “the space of painting”—a project on which he elaborated after leading his audience into another giant studio. The room was filled with the works with which he is most firmly identified: the mirrored disks of stainless steel. Sotheby’s auctioned off one model, finished with copper alloy and lacquer, for upward of a million dollars. “It’s something he does incessantly,” Greg Hilty, of the Lisson Gallery, told me, estimating that Kapoor’s studio produces perhaps thirty of the disks a year. (Kapoor later disputed this number, but he did not provide a correction, calling it “completely irrelevant.”) They are fabricated off-site, steel-working being one of the few processes involved in making Kapoor’s œuvre which cannot be done at his studio. Once manufactured, the mirrors are sent to the studio and painted or treated with the assistance of a technician who has worked for years with Kapoor in developing finishing techniques.
The surfaces of the mirrors on display had been treated to achieve various unusual effects. One had been gauzed with a ghostly greenish gray. Another shimmered with golden light. All of them did peculiar things to whoever or whatever was reflected in them, with the images flipping and reversing at unexpected moments. “Think about painting,” Kapoor said. “The space of painting is always, without exception, from the picture frame, deep beyond.” The mirrors created “a confused double space between image and concavity.” He went on, “My idea is that it’s deeply radical—that it looks at painting in a completely different way. Who knows? If it is, it is. If it isn’t, it isn’t.”

Kapoor’s mirrored pieces are the primary source of his considerable personal fortune. In addition to the Palazzo Manfrin, Kapoor owns an apartment in Venice; a place in the Bahamas; a fourteen-and-a-half-thousand-square-foot town house in central London, which is currently on the market for twenty-three million dollars; and a country house outside Oxford, which is where he spent most of the pandemic. (Kapoor has three children: a son and a daughter, both in their twenties, from his first marriage, to Susanne Kapoor, an art historian; and a toddler daughter with his second wife, Sophie Walker, a garden designer.)

“Artists have to be sophisticated about two things—one is so-called fame, and the other is money,” Kapoor told me in Venice. “The art world is an arm of the capitalist machine. It is very, very hard for us artists, successful artists especially, to live on that fine line between what money makes possible, and not to be seduced into making works that sell.” Had he ever been seduced? “I am going to be so bold as to say no, even though I have bodies of work that are extremely successful,” Kapoor told me. “However, I also have these huge other bodies of work that never sell, rarely sell—that take much more commitment, that are much, much more difficult. I have always had these two sides to my practice.” He sounded a bit like a Hollywood actor who alternates Marvel movies with indie dramas. Kapoor continued, “I have to be realistic about it and say, ‘All right, that’s what happens. I can do it, so long as I am exploring real new territory. If it is just repeating what I have done before—boring.’ It is a hard line to remain clear about.”
The distracting and beguiling surfaces of Kapoor’s mirrors are recapitulated at bravura scale in “Cloud Gate,” at Chicago’s Millennium Park. Kapoor’s most celebrated public work, the sculpture, which is popularly known as the Bean, cost twenty-three million dollars to make, and consists of more than a hundred tons of highly polished steel that, despite its weight, seems to hover above the ground like a drop of mercury that is about to splatter. When it debuted officially, in 2006, it was immediately acclaimed. The work predates Instagram but seems made for it: hundreds of thousands of images of it exist on the platform, many of them featuring a grinning selfie-taker. Not every critic is transported by “Cloud Gate.” Hal Foster, the Princeton art historian and critic, told me, “When I walk by, I feel like one of those apes in ’2001,’ before the monolith—all excited, but by what, exactly?” He added, “There’s no spaceship after the jump cut. It’s seductive, spectacular, then poof! Nothing, except a gawking crowd.”

Kapoor told me that he was initially dismayed by the crowds the Bean attracted: “I saw all these pictures with all these people, and I thought, Oh, no, bloody Disneyland! Is that what I have done?” He went to Chicago and spent several days in the orbit of the sculpture, looking at it and watching the reactions of fascinated visitors. “I wondered, What is it?” he said. “Then I realized it is something about its scale. When you are standing near it, it looks like a really big thing. When you are not so near it, it doesn’t look like such a big thing at all. You don’t have to be very far away, and suddenly the scale shifts.” The absence of visible joints means that there is nothing by which a viewer can gauge the object’s size, “so it does this strange thing of shifting scale—I thought, Phew, that saves it.” Kapoor went on, “I hope it retains a certain mystery, in spite of being touched and photographed endlessly. I think that, in the end, is the key. It is worth spending your life making an object or two that are truly mysterious. Wow! There aren’t many—even in art, there aren’t many. In the universe, there are a few.”

There may shortly be one more: a mini-Bean is soon to be unveiled in New York. Work started on it three years ago, but the process was delayed, in part, by pandemic restrictions—for a year and a half, a travel ban on foreign visitors prevented Kapoor’s specialized technicians from entering the country. The new sculpture, which is about half the size of the Chicago version, has not been placed in a public plaza. The work has been squeezed, with not a millimetre to spare, under the awning of the so-called Jenga Tower—Herzog and de Meuron’s luxury residential tower in Tribeca. It is a “Cloud Gate” for the Manhattan equivalent of a gated community.

With just two weeks before the official opening of the exhibition in Venice, the Palazzo Manfrin still resembled a construction site, and Kapoor and his team had the frantic aspect of homeowners undergoing a renovation whose contractor has informed them that the kitchen countertops will not, after all, be installed before Thanksgiving. At least the work on the façade had been completed, making it look as pristine as one of Kapoor’s mirror works. But around the back, where scaffolding had been erected, a hole had been punched into a wall two stories up, to permit the installation of several large works with a crane. The only other entrance to the building was through a decrepit lavatory with stinking urinals, evoking that darker, filthier dimension of Kapoor’s work: shit and architecture.

The lead architect of the renovation, Giulia Foscari, whose firm, UNA, had been responsible for the palazzo’s renaissance, was circling. Kapoor’s team, accustomed to working under extreme circumstances, were doing their best amid the chaos. Pablo Smidt was on a ladder in the entrance hall, attaching sections of Kapoor’s inverted mountain to the ceiling, its fibreglass inners temporarily on display. The thirteen chunks of sculpture had been ferried to the palazzo by boat, under the cover of night. At 3 a.m., when one section was found to be fractionally too large to fit through the front door, Smidt reluctantly left it outside, so that a slice could be slivered off. An adjoining ground-floor room was filled with piles of dun-colored sand. Upstairs, on the piano nobile, Kapoor’s triptych “Internal Object in Three Parts” had been mounted on the dilapidated walls of a salon overlooking the canal; the piece’s silicone slabs, still wrapped in plastic, resembled prepackaged cuts of meat at a supermarket.

In the palazzo’s southern wing, restoration work had been completed some weeks earlier on the frescoed ceiling, where eighteenth-century cherubs and scantily robed goddesses gallivant on high. But the marble floors were grubby, and the installation of works that needed to be kept scrupulously dust-free had been held up by workmen, hammering and drilling. In Girolamo Manfrin’s spectacular ballroom, a vast circular canvas had been elevated on a scaffold; the cloth, part of a work called “Symphony for a Beloved Sun,” was yet to be covered with red paint, thus undergoing the transubstantiation from hardware to art. A team of cleaners who had been contracted to quell the mess had been struck by covid. When Kapoor arrived at the site that day, he was horrified by the state of progress, his voice quivering with anger, all bonhomie dispelled. There was the wrong kind of dirt in all the wrong corners.
By opening day, however, the magic trick had been pulled off. When the palazzo's front door opened to its first twenty-first-century visitors, all the sweat and struggle that it had taken to put the art works in place had evaporated. Kapoor's resin mountain—now given a proper name, “Mount Moriah at the Gate of the Ghetto”—loomed ominously downward from the rafters of the entrance hall—almost, but not quite, touching the concrete floor. Only the very youngest visitor, a grade schooler brought by his parents, detected the trapdoor concealed within the inverted peak; the aperture would allow a technician to climb inside the sculpture and, if necessary, adjust its positioning.

In the neighboring gallery, the brown sand had become a desolate, blood-red landscape. Mounted on top of it was a mechanical digger that had been coated in blue pigment. The work, titled “Destierro”—Spanish for “exile”—was a metaphor for displacement that harked back to Kapoor's formative preoccupations. At the Palazzo Manfrin, it could be compared with one of his earliest works, a pigment piece from 1982 called “White Sand, Red Millet, Many Flowers.” Displayed in an unrestored salon upstairs, its vivid piles of color created a thrilling contrast to the room's dingy, water-damaged walls.

The hole at the rear of the palazzo was now concealed by drywall, making it impossible to tell how “Vertigo”—a curved slice of mirrored steel from 2006—had shouldered its way into an adjacent room, which it almost entirely filled. In another room, a new work—an angled hunk, almost twenty feet in length, of what appeared to be Corten steel—looked so massive that it was hard to figure out how the floor beneath it hadn't given way. (In fact, it was made from painted fibreglass: another theatrical trick.) Its form was divided by a deep crevice shaped like a vulva, around the opening of which were gobs and smears of blood-colored silicone. The piece was titled “Split in Two Like a Fish for Drying,” but it might equally have been called “When I Am on My Period.”

Some of the infamous black works were on display for the first time—and, surprisingly, they were among the least arresting objects in the palazzo. They had trouble holding their own amid the dramatically decayed galleries showing the more violent and grotesque products of Kapoor's imagination. In their glass cases, the black works brought to mind the velvet busts that are displayed in a jeweller's window—but the sparkle of diamonds was missing. (At the Accademia, a chapel-like space had been dedicated to other black works, and they were arranged more powerfully there, suggesting in their mysterious depth the concentrated power of the gilded medieval icons on display elsewhere in the museum.)

The installation at the Palazzo Manfrin would remain in place for six months, after which restoration of the mansion would resume, under the eye of Mario Codognato, the Kapoor Foundation's director. A bookshop and a café were planned, alongside gallery space that could be used for temporary exhibitions. Space on the upper floors might be shared with an academic institution.

Despite having made the grand gesture of acquiring a Venetian palazzo to house a foundation in his name—an impressive answer to the question “Where do I go when I die?”—Kapoor insisted that he was not preoccupied with posterity. “Legacy is such a problematic, ego-driven thing—I've got a big-enough ego already,” he told me a few days after the opening, when we met for coffee at a café in Venice's ghetto. An artist's work has to fight its own space, he argued: “It has to go out in the world and survive whatever it is—criticism, adoration, whatever else. I don't believe that artists can falsely make that happen. So that's the problem with projects like this”—he gestured in the direction of his palazzo, across the canal. What did give him satisfaction, he acknowledged, was the irrefutable statement that his possession of the Palazzo Manfrin made about his cultural power in the present. “I think it's important to say, if you like, that an artist of nonwhite origin can do something as bold as this,” he said. “Whether it's legacy, or not legacy, who cares?”

In the grand ballroom where Girolamo Manfrin had once entertained the cream of Venetian society, the looming, elevated disk had finally been colored red. The floor beneath it was ankle-deep in yet more gory lumps of blood-colored wax. In a corner, incongruous amid the faux carnage, stood a battered Madonna painted in plaster. When Kapoor showed me around the palazzo, he explained that the statue had formerly been displayed on a pedestal between the ballroom's grand windows, having been set there by the nuns who inherited the space after the Palazzo Manfrin's guests had departed forever.
Stroking the Madonna’s chipped hand, Kapoor told me that the statue had been retrieved from storage and put in place only a few days earlier. Her presence, he felt, completed the show. The Madonna’s face was serene and haloed by a ring of stars, like the perfect circle of one of Kapoor’s celestial mirrors. But Kapoor directed my attention, instead, to her feet. She appeared to be balanced atop a globe, with one bare foot positioned on the neck of a snake with gaping red jaws. “Here she is, the lady of benevolence, if you like, standing on the neck of—squeezing to death—the old world, the world of the shaman, the creature from the earth,” he said. “Which is what all these works are about. A snake! What else? Ha-ha-ha!”

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Anish Kapoor, in mostra a Venezia, ci racconta le sue opere “piene di sangue, di buio” (e di bellezza)

Il significato delle installazioni svelato dall’artista, attraverso le sue radici indiane. La sua duplice esposizione, a Palazzo Manfrin e alle Gallerie dell’Accademia, è la più visitata di Venezia con una sessantina di opere che raccontano in modo esaustivo la sua estetica.

DI GIUSEPPE FANTASIA
29 aprile 2022
Anish Kapoor: l'intervista di Vogue

«Amo Venezia e tutto ciò che questa città rappresenta: è un villaggio cosmopolita che racchiude un vero spirito internazionale al suo interno e la Biennale è il simbolo e la realizzazione delle culture che si uniscono. È molto importante che ci sia, è un gran segnale di ripartenza».

Quando ci parla, ad Anish Kapoor si illuminano gli occhi e il suo sorriso «non è mai una pura formalità» – tiene a precisare – «ma la manifestazione coerente di un insieme di emozioni» che sta provando in questi giorni. Il merito è proprio della città lagunare, la sua preferita in Italia, quella dove ha deciso di acquistare un palazzo - Palazzo Manfrin - e di trasformarlo nella sede della sua Fondazione. Lì, a Sestriere Cannaregio, è ospitata, inoltre, una delle due mostre a lui dedicata e aperta nei giorni frenetici della 59esima Biennale d’Arte.

L'altra è alle Gallerie dell'Accademia, a Sestriere Dorsoduro, che fa registrare quotidianamente lunghe file all'ingresso che arrivano fino al ponte che Eugenio Miczki progettò nel 1933 in legno (e non in pietra), pensando fosse provvisorio, ma che invece oggi è ancora lì, in perfetto stato dopo un attento restauro. Sono circa una sessantina le opere che troverete nelle due mostre visitabili fino al 9 ottobre prossimo, “opere che potrebbero sembrare attuali - aggiunge l'artista, tra i più importanti, richiesti e quotati della sua generazione - ma in realtà sono state quasi tutte realizzate una quindicina di anni fa e già esposte”. Ad esempio White Sand Red Millet Many Flowers (1982) - con le sue eteree geometriche, perfette e algide, ricavate nei grandi massi di alabastro bianco - o l’altrettanto iconico Shotting into the corner (2008-2009), protagonista alle Gallerie e già visto alla Royal Academy of Arts di Londra, impressionante con quel gigantesco cannone che sui muri spara micidiali pallottole di cera rossa.

Shotting into the corner  Atilio Maranzano
«Quello che mi auguro è che siano atti ad essere reinterpretate anche oggi, facendoci interrogare su questioni quotidiane. Non sono opere realizzate per questo tempo, ma in qualche maniera, lo condizionano. Del resto, ciò accade anche nella cultura che è importantissima oggi come lo era in passato».

«Oggi viviamo in tempi e spazi strani - continua - ci troviamo nel mezzo, tra quello che c’è stato e quello che ci potrà essere. È uno spazio di confusione, non c’è dubbio, e la pandemia l’ha dimostrato. Eravamo tutti molto confusi e impreparati. Lo siamo ancora oggi, visto che non possiamo sapere cosa ci attenderà in futuro. La guerra in Ucraina ci mette di nuovo davanti a situazioni di questo tipo. L’arte e la cultura in particolare ci ricordano quanto la nostra umanità sia di dimensioni ridotte e quali siano le divisioni che ci sono fra noi, questioni fondamentali a mio parere. In questi tempi viviamo e subiamo etno-nazionalismi che non vedevamo dagli anni Trenta del secolo scorso e dalla Seconda Guerra Mondiale. C’è un neo fascismo che pervade tutto ed è preoccupante. La cultura può aiutarci a colmare queste differenze, ma dobbiamo essere anche noi a volerlo e credere in un divenire in cui nulla è scontato». 
Sono l'esempio perfetto di un divenire continuo le sue opere di cui lo spettatore è reso partecipe, una generazione e de-generazione in cui l'evoluzione stessa e il tempo sono si in mostra, ma soprattutto in atto, visto che si realizzano nel momento stesso in cui le osserviamo e, quindi, le sperimentiamo.
“La maggior parte di questi lavori - continua l’artista nato a Bombay nel 1954 da padre indù del Punjab e da madre ebrea irachena – sono pieni di sangue e di buio e a dominare sono il rosso e il nero”. Il cosiddetto Kapoor Black, un colore “altro” e un rosso, “che si caratterizza per la sua nerezza”. A 17 anni andai a studiare Ingegneria Elettrica in Israele ed ebbi un esaurimento nervoso”, ci racconta. Vivevo con una zia che era una sorta di sciamana e fu proprio lei a chiamare mia madre dicendole che sarebbe dovuta andare in India per prendere una terra da mettere sotto il mio letto. Da quel momento, le disse, Anish potrà sognare bene grazie a quel materiale. E così andò. Se ci penso, mi viene la pelle d’oca”.
Quella terra era di colore rosso ed è anche questo uno dei motivi per cui adora quel colore. Quando decise di fare l'artista e di tornare in India, prima di trasferirsi definitivamente a Londra, le prime opere degne di nota sono stati i cumuli di pigmento incandescente che richiamano in maniera entusiasta le bancarelle di Mumbai e le loro offerte rituali.
“Riequilibrano a loro modo un’equazione, perché sottolineano le mie radici indù e richiamano estaticamente il potere del colore”. Con il suo nero, invece, esplora quello che definisce “il non oggetto”, l’oggetto cioè – come ci spiega il curatore Taco Dibbits, autore anche del prezioso catalogo pubblicato da Marsilio – “che è fisico e non fisico, i cui confini non possono contenerne l’interno”.

Attilio Morandzano
Il suo nero però, è più complesso: "è un'innovazione tecnologica, è un nero che assorbe il 99,9 per cento della luce permettendo di modificare la natura degli oggetti che non diventano completamente reali, lasciando quel senso di irrealità che attrae e conquista". Il rosso diventa quasi un suo 'sottoposto' anche se gode di vita propria, ma si fonde con il nero come la violenza insita in queste opere che va ad intrecciarsi con una bellezza capace di creare, in quel mélange, un qualcosa di sublime e di terrificante insieme. Il nero è quindi un limen, una vera e propria soglia da cui affacciarsi sull'abisso del non senso. Che è poi (anche) il senso dell'arte, che abita questa sortile linea di frontiera e mira a metterci in contatto con il vuoto, senza però farsi precipitare in esso e rendendoci così più liberi.
Shows & Exhibitions

Into the Void: Anish Kapoor Reveals His First Works Using Vantablack, the World’s Darkest Color, in Venice

The highly anticipated works are on view in two historic locations.

Dorian Batycka, April 21, 2022

What do you get when you combine the Baroque interior of a Venetian palazzo with the bottomless void of the blackest material in the world?

Ask Anish Kapoor, the British-Indian artist who is unveiling the first sculptures he has made using Vantablack, casting an illustrious shadow across this year’s Venice Biennale.
The material in question, which Kapoor has called more of a technology than a paint, was initially developed by the U.K.-based Surrey NanoSystems for military-grade stealth weaponry. The coating, which refracts light and transforms it into heat, consists of millions of carbon nanotubes, which are “grown” in a chamber under powerful lamps.

Now, Vantablack’s first aesthetic applications are on display in an exhibition that unfurls across two venues—the Gallerie dell’Accademia, one of Venice’s most iconic venues for experiencing the art of Old Masters—and a palazzo acquired by Kapoor himself.

Swallowing 99.8 percent of visible light, Vantablack is akin to a void of darkness or a black hole, and Kapoor has produced several circular-shaped objects clad in the coating. The works are finally coming to proverbial light after a long and public feud with artist Stuart Semple, who openly criticized Kapoor’s studio being given exclusive license to use it.

“There’s been this ridiculous controversy about me having control over the color,” Kapoor told Wallpaper. He added, “It’s perfectly straightforward: it’s not a color. It’s a technology. And it’s extremely complicated and sophisticated.”
The debut of the artist’s Vantablack works also marks the first phase of the establishment of the Anish Kapoor Foundation in the Palazzo Manfrin Venier. Previously a popular gallery among 19th-century literati—including Lord Bryon and Édouard Manet—with many of its original paintings now housed in the the Accademia’s collection, the 18th-century mansion in Cannaregio had in recent decades fallen into disrepair. Upon completion of a full renovation, the palazzo will become the artist’s headquarters and consist of an exhibition venue, studio, and archive for his previous works. “I feel a deep commitment to Venice, its architecture and its support for the contemporary arts,” the artist said in a statement.
The dual-venue exhibition, on view through October 9 and curated by Rijksmuseum director Taco Dibbits, also features a selection of Kapoor’s other iconic works beyond Vantablack. Dibbits said in a statement: “All artists, however cutting edge and contemporary, are in debate with those who have gone before. The Gallerie dell’Accademia is the perfect site for a modern master to explore the themes that have always engaged sculptors and painters. Kapoor’s latest works, using the most advanced nanotechnology, promise to be a revelation.”
The artist learned of the technology that absorbs nearly all visible light in the Guardian. As two shows featuring it open, he talks of a ‘stupid’ spat, his new foundation and dismای with England

“T...his fucking place!” The voice of the artist rang out through the elegant halls of the Accademia, Venice’s most important gallery, home of masterpieces by Titian, Veronese and Giorgione. Frustrated, Anish Kapoor gathered up a bucket and other detritus left over from the technicians’ last-minute adjustments and tidied them away.

He was nervous, he said, as he apologised for his outburst. Kapoor - perhaps best known internationally for his wildly popular reflective sculpture in Chicago’s Millennium Park, Cloud Gate - had reason for a little anxiety: he was preparing to open not one but two major exhibitions.

Aside from the show at the Accademia, there is the small matter of an exhibition in the palazzo that he has bought on Venice’s Canale di Cannaregio - the Palazzo Manfrin, a vast space with a particularly grandiose, double-height, frescoed ballroom, currently filled with the red wax-and-steel of his installation Symphony for a Beloved Sun. The palazzo, which is partway through extensive renovation works, is intended to open fully in 2024 as the headquarters of the Anish Kapoor Foundation.
Mount Moriah at the Gate of the Ghetto (2022) in the Palazzo Manfrin. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

But now, in both venues, Kapoor is debuting a body of sculptural work coated in what has been called “Kapoor black”.

Vantablack, as it is officially known, is a nanotechnology that absorbs 99.96% of visible light - the world’s most intense black, as it has been described. It is produced by a British company, Surrey Nanosystems, with which the artist has working since he read about it and its founder, Ben Jensen, in the Guardian eight years ago. “I wrote to him asking if we could work together. He said Vantablack had been developed for the defence industry.” Nevertheless, Jensen agreed.

The effect of the light-absorbing coating is uncanny. Seen head on, the blacker-than-black sculptures appear two-dimensional. Then, when the angle of view is changed, they reveal themselves to be solid shapes.

“It is a material sprayed on a surface at a nano scale,” explained Kapoor, “then put in a reactor - they won’t tell me precisely what this reactor is - but anyway, it is raised to a very high temperature. The particles are raised upright and the light get trapped between them.”

Aside from the new black works, both exhibitions are currently filled with Kapoor’s instantly recognisable works: enormous heaps of bright pigment; rooms choked with enormous globs of scarlet wax; chambers in which are hung his strange, distorting mirror-sculptures; ceilings appearing to drip or ooze with scarlet, fleshy innards.

Mirror Mirror (2017) in the Palazzo Manfrin, Venice, Italy. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian
As asked if the foundation was the means of securing his legacy - as is generally the way with artists' foundations - Kapoor, who is 68, replied: “Fucking legacy! Who gives a shit? The work will do what it does. Securing a legacy? That's daft. It's somewhere for me to play. That's how I see it.”

The story of Kapoor’s adventures in black has not been without controversy in the art world. The artist Stuart Semple, for example, poked fun at the fact that Kapoor was exclusively licensed to use the Vantablack technology by declaring that he would make available the world’s “pinkest pink” to anyone who could definitively prove they were not Anish Kapoor.

In return, Kapoor got hold of some anyway, dunked his middle finger in it, and posted an image online with the caption, “Up yours #pink”.

“It’s too stupid for words,” said Kapoor of the spat. “This is not something that comes out of a tube. It’s incredibly complicated. I’ve been working for seven or eight years on it and made 10 to 12 works.”

Kapoor said that the use of the intense black continues his long-term interest in the idea of being and non-being. Referring to the great collection of the Accademia, he said: “In the Renaissance there were two great discoveries: perspective and the fold.” Both them gave the illusion of depth, and the fold - in depictions of fabric, and as a characteristic of human flesh - gives the illusion of life, or of being. Using “Kapoor black” technology removes the fold, the crease, any hint of 3D, or of “being”.

“Painting is the giving of appearance to objects,” he said. “I’ve been giving objects disappearance.”

**England has changed from being inclusive to being exclusive. It makes me terribly sad**

As asked why he had decided to set up his foundation in Venice rather than the UK or the US, the artist said that he had always loved the city - in which he represented Great Britain at the 1990 Biennale. He was magnetised by this water-filled place where Stravinsky stipulated he must be buried, with its intimations of death and darkness via Thomas Mann and Luchino Visconti.

“I’m dismayed with England,” said the artist, who was born in Mumbai and moved to London to study at art school. “I’ve lived there for 40-something years, and it’s not just the politics and Brexit, it’s what’s happened to our spirit. We’ve changed from being inclusive to being exclusive. It makes me terribly sad.”

The exhibitions at the Accademia and Palazzo Manfrin are open to the public until 9 October.
Anish Kapoor leaves art rivals seeing red over ‘world’s blackest black’

Turner Prize winner unveils first artworks made with new light-absorbing material, but his monopoly on its use has stoked controversy

By Anita Singh, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
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When art prompts controversy, it is usually on account of the subject matter. In the case of Anish Kapoor’s latest works, it is all to do with the colour.

Kapoor has unveiled a series of sculptures coated in the world’s blackest black. The Turner Prize winner caused uproar when he signed an exclusive deal for its use, barring other artists from getting their hands on it.

The material - known as Vantablack - is said to be blacker than a black hole, absorbing 99.96 per cent of light.
It was developed in a Surrey laboratory for scientific purposes, but Kapoor secured a contract with its creators to be the only artist allowed to use it.

Six years on, Kapoor has unveiled the results at the Venice Biennale, where the colour is referred to as “Kapoor Black”.

Anish Kapoor has unveiled the results of his sculptures made using Vantablack at the Venice Biennale

Anish Kapoor’s artwork contains paint which absorbs 99.96 per cent of light
It is not a paint, but a material made of carbon nanotubes - Kapoor’s particular version is sprayable - that allows for no shadows or demarcations. According to its creators, if a watch were coated in Vantablack, it would appear as a black hole on one’s wrist.

“If you put it on a fold, you can’t see the fold. So my proposition is that this material is therefore beyond being,” Kapoor told Wallpaper magazine.

He also dismissed the row over its use as a “ridiculous controversy”.

However, it was a controversy that Kapoor seemed to delight in stoking.

**Kapoor accused of monopolising the material**

The creator of London’s ArcelorMittal Orbit and the “Bean” in Chicago enraged his fellow artists when he signed his exclusive deal in 2016.

Christian Furr, a British painter, said at the time: “I’ve never heard of an artist monopolising a material. This black is like dynamite in the art world.

“We should be able to use it. It isn’t right that it belongs to one man.”

Another British artist, Stuart Semple, went further. Likening Kapoor to “kids at school who wouldn’t share their colouring pencils, but then they ended up on their own with no friends”, he brought out a pigment that he described as “the world’s pinkest pink”.

It was available for sale online, priced at just £3.99, with buyers required to tick a box confirming that they were not Anish Kapoor or his affiliate, and “to the best of your knowledge, information and belief this paint will not make its way into the hands of Anish Kapoor”.

Kapoor then took the playground spat to another level by getting hold of the pink, posting a picture on Instagram of his middle finger dipped into the pigment, and captioning it: “Up yours.”

Semple responded by bringing out his own “blacker than black” acrylic paint, the latest version of which he sells for £99.99 per litre.

Vantablack was developed by Ben Jensen of Surrey Nanosystems. Scientists at Nasa were trying to create their own version, but Jensen beat them to the punch.
The dramatic artwork titled Shooting Into the Corner

The material’s ability to absorb light means that it can be used in only select circumstances. “People email in saying, ‘Can you coat my supercar?’” Jensen told GQ magazine. “And we always say, ‘Well, it’s possible, but when you’re driving and the sun comes out, it’s going to get incredibly hot, and people don’t generally want to cook themselves’.”

Jensen has also defended the Kapoor deal, explaining: “We can’t work with hundreds of artists. We don’t have that scale. Our business is to create engineering components for satellites. It’s not to create works of art.

“So we took the decision internally that to do this justice we’ll work with one person because we had enough time to make that work.”

Kapoor’s exhibition is being held in two Venice locations: the Accademia and the Palazzo Manfrin. The latter is a dilapidated 18th-century mansion which the Anish Kapoor Foundation is converting into his new headquarters, and was once a gallery visited by Lord Byron and Edouard Manet.
The Palazzo Manfrin, an 18th-century mansion being turned into Kapoor’s headquarters

The artist said he decided to buy the palazzo because he is drawn to Venice’s “dark, maternal waters”.

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

Anish Kapoor: «Creating is not like procreating, This is why I envy motherhood »

by Francesca Pini

In love with the lagoon city, the 68-year-old Anglo-Indian artist lives between London and Venice: here he bought a historic building in Cannaregio, to make it the seat of his foundation. Here he spent part of the lockdown and here he returned for the Biennale, with a solo exhibition at the Gallerie dell’Accademia

The fruit and vegetable barge has been anchored there in Dorsoduro for years, the natives go there to shop and not the strangers. And so, when Anish Kapoor is in Venice, he passes by there to buy castrare, the violet artichokes from the island of Sant’Erasmo. This is what is normal for this great Anglo-Indian artist, 68 years old, celebrated in the world, who has a home in London and San Polo, seduced by the maternal and stepmother water of Venice. Putting the foundations of his foundation right here, he bought the eighteenth-century Palazzo Manfrin in Cannaregio (which belonged to the count of the same name, entrepreneur and collector), the subject of an imposing renovation, with fresco ceilings and a spectacular ten-meter high music hall, which it will host some of his monumental sculptures as if it were the Turbine Hall of the Tate.
A great event that enhances the Accademia Galleries

«Palazzo Manfrin I don't know exactly what it will become, I hope there will be an interaction with the university. Certainly it is also madness. I love Venice, I love her for that maternally dark side of her, for these waters of her. I was here for a while also during the lockdown ». To then return now, during the Biennale, with a great event (curated by Taco Dibbits, from 20 April to 9 October, organized by Marsilio Arte, his catalog), at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, an important museum for Venetian art. and Venetian directed by Giulio Manieri Elia, with a unique collection in the world of Giovanni Bellini paintings. And then Titian, Veronese, about fifteen of Tiepolo. The museum began the dialogue with contemporaneity years earlier with Mario Merz, then with Philip Guston and Georg Baselitz. And now, together with Kapoor, he prepares this one personal, with new and other historical works, such as the one in which he uses a cannon to shoot red wax into a room. For the artist a symbol of fertility. “It's very phallic, it bombards color. Here in a room, but originally in a corner. Here is also the principle of the masculine and the feminine. The idea of violence and painting. Think of Jackson Pollock: he put the canvas on the floor covering it with colors as if they were bodily fluids . Then he hung these canvases making a fundamental gesture for their transformation. By saying that the earth became the sky. And I see, in this, the struggle of the body in its transformation ».
“PREGNANT WOMEN ARE VERY POWERFUL. I WOULD LIKE TO BE PREGNANT. I BELIEVE IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL STATE”

In his practice, the use of red has been a constant for at least thirty years, but in recent weeks we have seen a lot of blood flow on the snow in Ukraine, in the battered Mariupol and Bucha, mass graves, carnage ...

«It breaks your heart, breaks your heart. It is very revealing when art coincides with real life. Violence is always around us, even if we pretend that it does not exist, and it is the task of culture to make us think that it exists. Now we see it concentrated in the horror perpetrated by this Putin ».

With your new sculpture, *The Unremembered*, presented for the first time here at the Galleria dell’Accademia, you seem to have entered the incandescent magma of Etna. “I’ve never been there though! In the last three or four years I have tried to return to a richer, very physical practice and if we think about ritual it always has a lot to do with the body. Then there is the more transcendent part of what the body is and what it becomes, not only from the point of view of Catholic culture. And obviously the sacrifice is one of the most significant acts. So a way of seeing inside the body. This piece is like an anvil. It is made with very thick paint and silicone. Here it is as if everything collapses, and it is also what happens inside our organism. For years, years and years I have always looked inside things, and surprisingly the inside is bigger than the outside. It is a psychic reality, but we do not have this perception ».
The titles of his works sometimes have a romantic touch.
«I love poetry very much. But I don’t write it. The words are important and the title is another part of the work, and contextualizes it. We do not observe anything innocently. And words can influence us to see ».

You say that sometimes, when a work is finished, observing it you wonder "what have I done?". Does a work always correspond to your initial creative idea or does it always have a life of its own in the end?
«A work always has a life of its own, always. And that has to do with a strange process. First, what I do is set up a situation, I built this sort of anvil with a crack in it. This took drawings and months of work, a very conscious process. Then, I develop another next idea, thinking about certain volumes, certain bodily references, color, and this process instead lasts two, three hours, no more. Very fast. Then I come back maybe days later, I look very intensely at the work, and this is the real work. I never show a creation until at least six months have passed before. And I ask myself: what is his life? If I explain something about it, she understands it and it all ends there. But the interesting is what happens despite the saying. Art is something that confuses, it is a conversation between sense and nonsense. This happens not only with my works but, for example, with one of my favorite paintings like The Punishment of Marsyas by Titian. The greatness of a work does not lie in what it expresses. Tiziano plays with matter, with history, with what he is hidden, he is not illustrating. There is something mysterious about it and something happens while looking at the painting, the observer is part of the work. And every time I scrutinize her to realize how Tiziano managed to do certain things. And it is always new in my eyes ».
This bulging wall appears as a reminder of the feminine. You hear a lot about the theme of motherhood, you have also done two specific jobs. “What you see is a form not a form, there is internal and external tension. I have two adult males, and a small girl. I have followed the transformation of the body of my companions closely. Pregnant women are very powerful. Man cannot be. I would like to be pregnant, I think it is a very fundamental state. I’ve spent my entire life creating works, giving birth to them, but generating a living being, wow, that would be fantastic. As a man, I participated only in half of this process, while the woman is in totality. But I witnessed the birth: really something very, very physical, with a lot of blood too. But very beautiful ».

Artists do not limit themselves to using colors on the market, they often invent and patent them: so did Yves Klein in the 60s with his typical blue. While Kapoor is obsessed with the deepest black. The use of pigments characterizes Kapoor’s work, but for some time he has gone beyond this material, he has fallen in love with Vantablack (a particular material composed of carbon nanotubes) of which he has acquired the rights, and with nanotechnologies. The peculiarity of this material, sometimes mistaken for a pigment, lies in its ability to absorb 99.96% light. And it is so absorbent that the object on which it is applied disappears.

Here on display we see a flat black square from the front, but as soon as we move to the side a protruding cone magically appears.

«For a long time I have been working on the concept of the non-object, of its negation. Reading a paragraph in a newspaper I discovered that a man named Ben Jensen invented the blackest matter in the universe. So I wrote to him and he immediately told me: “This is technology that has nothing to do with art”! But then we talked, he initially could only develop small pieces of 2 cm square. Then, together, for seven years, we did a lot of research. It is not a paint, nor a tube from which to squeeze the color. Working with this material is a nightmare, it is toxic, you have to wear special masks, which is why the black object is unfortunately exhibited inside a glass case ».
So with this nanotechnological procedure she makes the object disappear without completely denying the plasticity, on which the sculptor’s gesture is based.

“In the Renaissance there were at least two great discoveries: the perspective, which places the man at the center, and the drapery of the fabric, which reveals the essence of the body of a human being. Now if Vantablack, this black material, is put on the folds of a fabric, they disappear, so my proposal is that this material, applied in the right context, pushes the object beyond itself. Malevich’s black square is an icon, but he has always spoken of this as a fundamental object, we knew the three dimensions and the fourth is Suprematism, to go beyond form, beyond everything. For me it’s a bit the same, the object goes beyond its physical being. This research also reminds me of Robert Fludd, an alchemist who made beautiful, small works with black squares. Some are in the British Library.

And now not even the pigments you have been using for decades are more sustainable as they are extracted from minerals ....

“Yes, I know, it’s a disaster. Each of us must play a role towards the world, towards the people, towards the political system. Putin may be a bad man, but so is Boris Johnson. I am not joking. It’s the same stupid system that put Putin in that place and that idiot Johnson too. A system that gives one individual a ridiculous amount of power. We have a real idiot running England and I’m sorry to be so clear, but that’s what I think. And I would like to go even further, talk about how we educate our children. Our society marginalizes all those people it does not love. You are a bad boy, you are a bad girl, stand on the corner. Don’t do this, don’t do that. All those parts that are indomitable, dark, uncontrolled, must be purged, and this is really the worst. Being an artist means doing exactly the opposite of what one expects ».

«ONE OF THE GREATEST EVILS OF ART IS ITS CONSTANT LINK WITH GLOBAL CAPITALISM. NFT IS STILL ANOTHER TRADING, IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ART »

What did you base your children’s education on then?

“I taught them the freedom to do whatever they want (my wife doesn’t really agree, but oh well). This educational aspect, while it doesn’t seem like it, has a lot to do with global warming. We have banished everything that was wild on this Earth, turning everything into a beautiful little garden. Instead we must allow ourselves to experience this wild side, and our children are not economic tools made of flesh, they are beautiful creative human beings. Global capitalism is the worst of evils ».
And are NFTs art or a financial tool? She had an NFT work proposed on the OpenSea platform picked up, made without her knowledge, it was one of those Star Wars helmets customized by famous artists, including her.

"I'm old school, and I do physical things, why do them on a screen? One of the greatest evils of art is its constant link with global capitalism. NFT is yet another trading, it has nothing to do with art. This relationship between art and money is truly strange. Intrinsically the art object is completely useless, it is something psychic, mythological. While I work here at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, it is fantastic to linger in the rooms, see for example La Vecchia di Giorgione and of course his Tempesta, which is so wonderfully mysterious. In the cosmos there are objects that we do not understand, but in our world everything we observe we understand because it has a name, but only in art are there true mysteries, it is an intellectual, emotional, visual game."

Venice is also the city of the skies of Tiepolo, of Canaletto, of which we find admirable works in the Gallerie dell'Accademia. She never uses these light blues, but she still captures the sky with mirroring works such as Cloud Gate from 2004 or C Curve from 2009.

«The sky is very important. And that's why I try to work on transcendence, but the only one we know of is the one up there where my finger points. The Earth and the Sky are opposite but also in dialogue. I did some work using red for the sky like in At the Edge of the World. A very dark sky.»

What is his psyche processing now?

"Ah what an impossible question. But yes, many things. I have a very regular life, I get up early in the morning, at 6.30. I always eat the same things for breakfast. And this repetition gives me the freedom, once I'm in the studio, to be regular, very focused. I work until 6/6.30pm. But sometimes there is even a nap in between. I'm just like an employee. And the reason for being so regular is to open a space within the psyche. I try every day to do at least one work or even more than one. And then there is not once that I have set limits, I always go, always forward. To see what can happen. It is a psychoanalytic method of dealing with things. This is a constant concern, otherwise you are an amateur.»
Anish Kapoor: 'A population invested in the arts is the last thing a right-wing government wants'

The UK government's sinister dismantling of its creative sector is slowly but surely unfolding through cuts in funding and increased political control.
Britain it seems no longer sees any merit in what the humanities have to offer. Art, music, poetry, literature and history come after—no, a very long way after—science and maths. The Victorian education forced on our children looks only to their ability to participate in the global capitalist machine. It no longer looks at the sensible in the child. The idea that the arts and the humanities are an education is long lost.

The arts may give voice to our deeper selves but the current UK government’s sinister and systematic attempt to dismantle the Keynesian project which set up “arts for all” through organisations like the Arts Council, is slowly but surely unfolding through cuts in funding and political control. The overarching aim it seems is so-called economic ability, or the imagined future earning capacity of our children. This is to wilfully forget the £10bn that the arts currently contribute to the UK economy on a yearly basis. This politically motivated idiocy does our society a criminal disservice. The arts have been removed from the core curriculum in schools. The humanities are under assault in all our universities. Funding for the humanities is being cut and even subjects like history are now under assault—because they don’t show easy economic results?

The true effect of this will mean the belittling of our young people to roles of servitude to those at the top of the economy—as if economics is the only measure of value.

In a post-information age, which we must accept is upon us, what is the need to train hundreds of thousands to slave at facts and figures when the technologies we have invented do it so much better? A population invested in the arts is dangerous, likely to be less willing to tow the party line. A population that can think and perhaps even think with feeling is the last thing a right-wing government wants.

**Giving voice to the unspoken**

There is a strange truth about the arts and the humanities—they are the first to come under pressure when governments want tighter control. Recent history shows this well: Russia, Iran, Brazil—under its current government—India, China etc.

The arts give voice to the unspoken, known or half known in us. This is sometimes uncomfortable but also necessary. Free societies have until recently celebrated this. Is it that by articulating something of this human turmoil or human unresolvedness the arts can touch what is least governable in us? Are controlling governments afraid of this? Are they afraid of self-esteem and the will to look hard
at society and history and revise its hitherto accepted norms. Why else would they attempt to ban peaceful protest or make it illegal to touch public objects?

There is no question that the arts and an education in the arts is deeply connected to human rights, to Black Lives Matter and equal opportunity for all, irrespective of race or colour, and then, of course, the tragedy of global warming and the 80 million refugees in our world today. The government knowingly undermines the humanities while it is also in the business of excluding refugees at any cost. It pays lip service to Black Lives Matter while it remains secure that all its institutions are kept within the status quo of male white supremacy. It feeds nationalism by insisting that even the content of our airwaves, the BBC, Channel 4 and public radio, have 80% so-called “British” programming. It shamelessly disregards the arms-length principle and appoints right-wing apologists to sit as the head of the boards of museums across the land. It has decimated an organisation like the British Council with total disregard to the great work it has done for the arts and the humanities here and abroad.

This drift to small-nation, small-minded nationalism cannot be seen as separate from the assault on the arts in the school curriculum. It is a programmatic agenda set out to leave less space for those who disagree. It is reminiscent of fascist governments of recent times who attempted to control our imagined inner selves.

To exclude our young from the ability to participate in the sometimes-problematic human discourse that the arts prefigure is nothing short of criminal. It is not an exaggeration to wonder how a civilised society can find a meaningful future when it has been deprived of the fragile imaginative underbelly that are the arts and the humanities.

- **Anish Kapoor** will the first British artist to have a major exhibition at Gallerie dell’Accademia in Venice (20 April-9 October)
The studio of Anish Kapoor occupies a long stretch of an anodyne south London road. The British-Indian artist started with one space 25 years ago and, as his fame and wealth have accrued, so have his workrooms, each door allowing access to a different aspect of his oeuvre – and possibly his mind. In one large high-ceilinged hall, you can’t move for ginormous red splodgy paintings, fervent excrescences that remind you of hell, or someone’s guts. In the next, more confined, some of Kapoor’s assistants (more than 20 people work here) execute more technical work.

The one after that privileges another Kapoor signature, his mirror pieces, large concave glasses that discombobulate you as you peer into them. Then there’s a chamber devoted to all things black (red is Kapoor’s longstanding love, but black is his big crush) before finally, through an entrance stacked with hundreds of canvases, we reach a moment of calm: a vast space at least 40ft tall, with high windows letting in crisp winter light. Down below are 10 or so large pictures, and a wide wooden desk absolutely submerged in paint.
“Here is my easel,” says Kapoor, now 67, with a trademark chuckle that betrays both good humour and occasional nerves. He is a small, slight figure clad in black jeans and an aggressively frayed turquoise jumper; his trainers, white a long time ago, are similarly caked in oils. At the other end of the complex, a meeting room containing neat art books and objects is the antithesis of here. But then these are the two poles – precision and mess – between which Kapoor has been swinging for the past 50 years; decades of the slick and monumental jostling with the weird and chaotic, reflecting his interest in endlessness, ritual and sex. In the smaller room, he had been detailing his ongoing fascination with sacrifice. I look over the desk. Is this a place for sacrifice, then? “Indeed it is,” sighs Kapoor. “Yikes!”

There’s a certain scale to everything Anish Kapoor does. He can’t help it, he says – things grow and expand without him even realising. It was like that with this studio – “it just happened to me!” – and it’s been the same with much of his career, an extraordinary trajectory that has seen him show in pretty much every great establishment in the world; his 2009 retrospective at the Royal Academy (the first time an Academician took over the whole of the main galleries), attracted more than 250,000 visitors. According to Sir Charles Saumarez Smith, secretary and chief executive of the RA at the time, the show, with an exploding wax cannon, a small train buzzing around and various other bravura pieces, was a game-changer: “Now people are used to exhibitions that are experiential – but at the time I don’t think people had seen work that was so theatrical, and adventurous, and had an aspect of danger to it.”

Kapoor’s public commissions, meanwhile, have seen him serve up Cloud Gate in Chicago (aka The Bean), Marsyas in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall and the ArcelorMittal Orbit, a huge intestinal swirl commissioned for London’s 2012 Olympics. But it is definitely, he swears, the same haphazard and surprising process that has led to his latest project, a takeover of Venice this spring, a centrepiece of this year’s Biennale that sees him not only showing at the city’s prestigious Gallerie dell’Accademia but also exhibiting works in what he calls several times “my mad, mad project!” Two years ago Kapoor bought the Palazzo Manfrin, an 18th-century edifice that reports describe charitably as “crumbling”; he is doing it up and turning it into... well, that’s still to be decided.

“It isn’t, you know, all that ‘Fondazione Kapoor’ bullshit,” he tuts, almost embarrassed. The palazzo, its renovation still unfinished, will show some of his works this year, but will open officially in 2024. He doesn’t want it only to be about his art, he says – he’s looking at other ways of using, even sharing, the mansion. “I’m wary of ego projects,” he claims. “My ego is plenty big enough!”
Kapoor is in a tricky phase – somewhere between assessing the past, but still bidding for renewal. He’s now in his late 60s, and has new life right by his side; with his second wife, Sophie Walker, he has a three-year-old daughter. (He has two children in their 20s from a previous marriage.) “She’s cute! As cute as can be.” He didn’t expect to be a father so late; it’s “exhausting, but fabulous”, he smiles. “I guess I’m more aware of death than I ever was, if that’s a measure of anything... But I’m also, in some ways, more relaxed about who I am.” He then edits himself. “Meaning who I am as an artist. As a man, I’m pretty confused. Always will be!”
If Kapoor grapples with the big themes, he is desperate not to let things be too grand. He has to be positively cajoled into admitting that he’ll “eventually” be able to stay in the Manfrin, adding to a portfolio of homes in London, the Cotswolds, the Bahamas and Jodhpur. He has been Sir Anish since 2013, but mention of it provokes a retching sound. “Eurgh! Fuck that!” he cries. Do you ever use it? “No.” A naughty pause. “British Airways!” He is actually fine with state honours – “I have a Légion d’Honneur, the Padma Bhushan from India, the Japanese one” – but he doesn’t like the knighthood because it changes your name, “and there’s something wrong with that. I probably shouldn’t have accepted it. But anyway – too late.”

Venice, though. To any outsider, it seems like a surefire way of embedding oneself in art history. But not to Kapoor – he still wants to be radical, dangerous even. “Artists seem to be bothered about what happens when they’re dead or whatever – who gives a shit, honestly?” And yet – can one really be a world-famous artist in one’s 60s and buy a Venetian palazzo and not call it a legacy project? He lets out a high laugh. “Good point. Fair! Fair, fair, fair. Hate it, but fair.”
He was first alerted to the potential of the palace by his friend Mario Codognato (of the esteemed Venetian jeweller family), who will act as director of the Foundation when it launches. Codognato is a bit less modest about the Foundation’s ambitions. He thinks the choice of venue is perfect. For one thing, Kapoor successfully showed for the British Pavilion there back in 1990, a huge success: “It’s a place that has brought him luck.” What’s more, “it’s a city that has always bridged east and west, and so it also makes sense in terms of Anish’s biography.” Kapoor was born in Mumbai to a Punjabi Hindu father and an Iraqi Jewish mother; he moved to Britain nearly 50 years ago to study art. “He is a cosmopolitan artist,” says Codognato, “and you can see that also in the work: there’s an eastern sensibility combined with a modernist, western tradition.”

In Venice, Kapoor will finally show his “Kapoor Black” works for the first time. These sculptures are each encased in a box (there’s no other way; the colour is so fragile and toxic) and showcase a dazzling, eye-tricking blackness – apparently, the deepest blackness in the world. Kapoor bought the exclusive rights to this pigment – formerly Vantablack – in 2016, and has been developing it ever since. When it was first announced, he got into a spat with the artist Stuart Semple, who was indignant that Kapoor was keeping the colour to himself and trolled him; Kapoor tit-for-tatted at the time, but is now eager to forget it.
“There was *no controversy!*” he insists. “It’s silly! Silly!” He clearly feels a little misunderstood. Yet that drama seems breezy stuff compared to the paintings he has been working on for much of the last year. Kapoor has been painting “like an absolutely insane person”, though the textural, blobby nature of many of them still makes them akin to sculpture. A maquette in the studio shows how the entrance hall of the Manfrin looks set to be dominated by a vast upside-down iceberg painted in this angry scarlet.

“I’m in a *hyper* messy stage,” he tells me. Why? “This is very hard. I mean, I’ve always had these two poles. They’ve been there a long, long time... I expect I’m more relaxed about it. I’m more at ease with it – both sexuality and viscerality are, at least, in my recent work, much more present.”

Kapoor’s works can often seem monumental, inscrutable, even cold (Saumarez Smith calls him “an aesthetic artist” and “anti-autobiographical”), but today he cites two works as being especially personal: *Descent into Limbo*, a big black hole in the floor that viewers are begged not to fall into (recently, one foolish man in Porto did so); second, *Shooting into the Corner*, a highlight of his RA show, which saw a cannon shoot a wax-paint mix into a corner of the room. From these we can deduce two things: that he’s fascinated by the abyss, but also, still wants to have a laugh.

Kapoor was born into comfortable privilege, the son of a hydrographer in the Indian navy; he went to The Doon School, often called India’s Eton. In returning to painting, he seems to be returning to childhood too: his mother was very creative, “but oddly she would never finish her paintings. So I would finish them for her, shamelessly!”

On a kibbutz in Israel in his late teens, he had a nervous breakdown and also decided to become an artist. Asked if he ever dreamt of becoming the Anish Kapoor we know now, he gasps. “Ahh, no!” When he moved to London in 1973 to study art, only “a handful” of artists made a living from their art – Henry Moore, Francis Bacon – and the rest all had to teach. This changed radically in the 1980s, and he benefited from it, he acknowledges. “But there was no idea, no thought that one could even *live* from selling one’s work. Never mind bloody palazzos in Venice.” When he became very wealthy, did it change how he made art? “No, no.” You’ve stayed the same? “Well... I don’t know!”
Kapoor’s conversation switches between strong opinions and deep doubt: things are often “tricky”, “complicated”, “difficult”. Things came to a head again a few years later after his first hit show in New York in 1984. The works sold out in hours and he was fêté across the Big Apple; but he returned home to a huge existential crisis and stopped making any work for nearly two years. It took a meeting with fellow artist Bruce Nauman to set him right. “We had a cup of tea together,” he smiles. “Nick Serota [former director of Tate] introduced us. Bruce was really gentle, really smart. I let him know I was going through this terrible crisis. And he patted me on the shoulder and said, ‘Come on, Anish. Is there an artist who hasn’t had this? It’s what it means to be an artist.’”

**Looking back, he says “it was a big lesson in how not to take your own bullshit and how to be sophisticated about money... if you make good work, people will buy it. And you just have to go ‘OK’ and manage it.”** Again, though, he is aware of a certain polarisation. “No one’s ever bought a wax work,” he shrugs. “Too difficult. No one’s ever bought *Descent into Limbo* – too difficult.” What do collectors buy, then? “They buy the stainless-steel works, mirror works. Fine! That’s fine.”

He is also pretty sanguine about how his works are no longer his when they go out into the world. Take The Bean. “When it was first there, I thought: ‘Oh, no! It’s so bloody popular, I can’t bear it!’” But then he went and “sat with it”, and quickly came to terms. “I was hearing some time ago that it has had 200 or 250 million visits, and that, they tell me, is equivalent to 500 or 600 million selfies. Christ almighty!” How does that feel? “It’s weird.”
As for the ArcelorMittal Orbit, Kapoor was commissioned to do it by Boris Johnson when he was mayor of London, and even then it was decried as a Boris folly. “It certainly was,” says Kapoor acidly. And how do you feel about that? “Awful!” he cries. “It was there to be done, and if it wasn’t me, it would have been someone else,” he shrugs. “And I didn’t get paid to do it, by the way – not one penny. And I’m not saying this out of bitterness – I’m saying it because it’s true.” Things got worse when Johnson called him one Sunday morning a few years later and tried to strong-arm him into turning the Orbit into a public attraction (“whatever that is”). The exchange still rankles. “So aggressive! I presume that’s how he does everything.”

He is more nuanced about the state of contemporary art. He thinks that we’re in a “very confusing” time as to what constitutes actual innovation these days; he feels that the rush by galleries and museums to be more diverse in their rosters is still a little crude. “I don’t care who made it. I don’t care where it was made. The question is, is it poetically resonant?” He squirms at shipping in work from Africa without acknowledging that it was made with a completely different notion of beauty to most western art. “What’s the African concept of the sublime? Do you have any idea? Do I have any idea? Almost none. It turns into some exotic view.” Connoisseurship is required, “and I don’t believe museums are anywhere near it.” Spare a thought, though, for today’s museum curators who will be grilled if they don’t try to do something. He sighs sympathetically, but says: “Tokenism is tokenism.”
Since we’re discussing the pitfalls of identity politics, do the labels of Indian and Jewish mean anything to Kapoor? “Weirdly, they matter a lot. There was a period of time where I said, ‘Ech, who cares?’ – but actually as I get older they matter more.” He cites Picasso as an example: he lived in France for decades, and yet he remained a quintessentially Spanish artist. “Similarly, I must say, I realised that so much of what I do has a deep Indianness to it. And it’s a weird counter that I’m also living that [out] through my Jewish background [too]... I keep recognising things and going: ‘Oh my god, that’s what it’s about, really.’”

Take his obsession with red. “The Chinese idea of red is a glorious celebration. The red I’m talking about is the red that is black, that is dark – that is interior and somewhat terrifying.”
This sense of terror is much clearer when you look around his studio. The mirrors, if you stare long enough, give you a headache; the room stocked with paintings has an almost overwhelming smell of old toffee. The Kapoor Black works, meanwhile, are dizzyingly black—essentially high-end optical illusions, they will surely have the Venetian visitors gawping. He isn’t happy, though, with some other works next door which are a slightly lighter shade. We stand in front of a vast dark slit and he peers in, dissatisfied. What’s the matter? “Oh, I hate the idea that you can see anything,” he says. Typical Kapoor: how can you perfect a chasm? Clearly, though, he’ll never stop trying.
Anish Kapoor: 'It is our mission to save' art from Afghanistan’s museums

Sir Anish Kapoor holds the rare status of an artist both revered by critics and enjoyed by the rest of us.

He came to the UK from Mumbai in the early 1970s and since then he's won the Turner Prize, represented Britain at the Venice Biennale and was the first living artist to take over the Royal Academy, with a record-breaking blockbuster show.

Primarily known for his sculpture - whether it's 'Orbit', erected in 2012 and towering over London's Olympic Park, or Cloud Gate, affectionately known as the Bean, in Chicago - Kapoor says he's always been a painter.

Now, he's launching a series of paintings, created before and during the coronavirus pandemic, at London's Lisson Gallery.

Newsnight's Katie Razzall met with Sir Anish Kapoor at his studio in south London.

09 September 2021
© 6 minutes
Anish Kapoor: ‘The government is damn dangerous and a bunch of f***ing liars’

Ahead of a new retrospective, the globally famous British artist talks to Sarah Crompton about art-world capitalism, Emma Raducanu, and whether Tory attempts to control universities, museums and the BBC is a warning sign of neo-fascism.

Monday 20 September 2021 15:47 | 1 comments

It’s a sign of the artist Anish Kapoor’s world-embracing fame that when British teenager Emma Raducanu was playing a tournament in Chicago, in the weeks before winning the US Open tennis championship, she found time to visit his Cloud Gate sculpture, the huge reflective “bean” that has become a tourist attraction as well as an acclaimed work of art.
“I love that,” he says, smiling broadly, throwing back his head to emphasise his words. “It was wonderful. It says something about how a work, or a body of work, can come to have a voice of its own. It’s nothing to do with me any more. It’s out there in the world and it’s doing its own thing. Of course, I love that.”

We are talking in a quiet white room at the Lisson Gallery in London, just as Kapoor is about to unveil an exhibition of his paintings. Made over the past year or so, they represent a new direction in his work, because although he has often used paint and pigment in his pieces – most memorably in the huge cannon that fired paint at the wall in his astonishing solo exhibition at the Royal Academy in 2009 – he is always described as a sculptor. A further and more extensive retrospective of his paintings opens at Modern Art Oxford on 2 October.

Ever since he first emerged as a major artist in the early 1990s – representing Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1990 and winning the Turner Prize in 1991 – Kapoor has attracted both artistic credibility and huge crowds. Popularity is something that has arrived without his entirely expecting it. “There’s no accounting for it,” he says. “You can’t either make it happen or not. It’s just there.”

I wonder whether he has deliberately courted success; whether he likes the sense of being feted. “I’ve had the opposite,” he says, after a long pause. “Which is, ‘Oh God, they like it so much there must be something wrong with it. It’s too popular. It’s too whatever.’”

He explains by talking about his reaction when *Cloud Gate*, made of highly reflective stainless steel, first went on show in the Millennium Park in 2006. “It was just on the cusp of the selfie, and it had thousands and thousands of people around it all the time. I thought, ‘What is this? Disneyland, here I come... It filled me with a kind of disappointment.

“But I went to Chicago and sat with it for three or four days to try to understand what was going on. Something occurred to me, which surprised me. It was a very simple thing, which was that this object has an indeterminate scale. When you’re near it, it’s enormous, but you don’t have to walk 10 metres away from it, and suddenly it becomes not so big. It has this mysterious jumping scale. Jumping scale is, I think, deeply poetic.”

Kapoor believes that this saved the piece – gave it serious intent. “There will be those who will get it and those who don’t,” he adds. “But I think holding on to these sometimes very ephemeral qualities is the real key to a work. We live in a world of objects, that are all known. We name them all. Only in art, and perhaps in the cosmos, are there a few that remain mysterious. And it seems to me that that’s a quality that might be intriguing and popular.”
This power of art to suggest something – a presence, or an absence – beyond itself, runs through all Kapoor’s work since the start, unifying his early works, in pigment and plaster, with his monumental public sculptures, his sky mirrors that reflect and distort the world around them, and now with the paintings. He completed them during lockdown, working in his studio at his Oxfordshire home and in his larger premises at a former factory in south London.

He has always painted – going so far, at one point, as to describe himself as a “painter working as a sculptor” – and sees the oils that now line the walls as part and parcel of his sculptural work. “I made pigment works years and years ago, which use colour that has both a material physical presence and an ethereal something else. That is what I am really interested in, this relationship between what is present and what isn’t.

“If one was to take a – forgive me for this, but I am going to jump in there – if one was to take a philosophical position on it, one might say that in the moment of living there’s a consciousness of some death, of some ephemeral beyond. Maybe it’s because I’m Indian, but maybe it’s because I’m interested in Heidegger, or maybe it’s all sorts of things, that this is constantly a point of reference – maybe more overtly in these paintings than before.”
This is how Kapoor talks, in his deep, highly educated voice, rolling his words around as if he’s about to give a lecture, constantly checking himself, daring himself to take the plunge to say something. He laughs a lot and speaks as if he is always smiling, even when he doesn’t agree with what you are saying.

Which he doesn’t when I suggest that maybe these rich, swirling oils, in reds and deep purples, tempered sometimes with shocks of lighter yellow and mauve, are products of the time of Covid, when everyone has been forced to face mortality every day. They look like landscapes, but also like the innards of bodies; of something pulled from beneath.

“I slightly resist the pandemic illustration,” he says, benign but firm. “I’m suspicious of quotidian commentary. I feel generally it doesn’t lead to good art. While I feel huge political, passionate anger, I don’t feel it is the job of art to act as agitprop in whatever way. Maybe the job of artists, but not of art. On the other hand, one is never fully independent of what’s happening in the world. It is there. It’s going to enter the scene somehow.”

What he does acknowledge is that, at 67, he thinks more about the passing of time. This consciousness is all the stronger because he has a three-year-old daughter, Habiba, with his second wife Sophie Walker, as well as two older children, Ishan and Alba, from his first marriage.

“I was always involved with my children,” he says – a claim backed up by a warm and loving phone call with Ishan that briefly interrupts our chat. “But this renewed involvement [with Habiba] is the most fabulous, delicious thing that could ever be. I’m also aware of turning into an old bugger. And if I’m sensitive to myself I have to be open to the notion that I have a young child, and god knows how much of her life I’ll see and all that stuff.
“It brings with it a sense of pathos. Have I changed?” He laughs. “Yes, inevitably. But I think at another level I might say I’m much less afraid. I think that’s one of the things that perhaps one can grow into as an artist: to say look, I don’t care any more what the art world or anybody thinks. I have to do what I have to do. And it will make of it what it does. It’s not for me to measure.”

It seems strange to think of Kapoor being afraid of anything or anyone; he exudes a confidence, a gleam of certainty. But he insists the doubts are there. “I think these are battles one has to fight with oneself,” he says. “Self-censorship is a real, real, real thing. And one has to open the way for oneself continually.”

The paintings in this sense represent a leap of faith. “My generation at art school were never taught to paint, or draw. It was never part of the scene. But I’ve had a journey over the past four or five years. I feel my inner voice, whatever that is, has made me accept the possibility of the image. What I’ve done in many ways is to resist it. We are supposedly free spirits, us artists. But not so. We are educated like everybody else into modes of practice. De-educating myself is the hardest job of all. To say, not only is it possible, but I have to dare to.”

He paints alone, in silence, without music: “It’s the only way.” When a work is completed, he looks at it, for a long time. “I’m a bloody workaholic and a half. So I work every single day. And I love making paintings. But making them is one part. The second part is to watch them, look at them – never show a work that’s less than six months old. I don’t believe in it. I’ve learnt over the years that you have to watch it, whether it’s a painting or a sculpture, to see whether it can hold authority.”

Kapoor’s ‘Cloud Gate’ sculpture, which he describes as having ‘indeterminate scale’ (Reuters)
More or less at the same time as making these works, teaching himself the techniques of oil painting, he has been exploring pieces that use Vantablack, the blackest of black paints, which absorbs 99.9 per cent of all light and renders three-dimensional objects flat. “If painting technique brings the image into being with the use of paint, then this black stuff takes it away,” he says. “If you put it on a fold, you wouldn’t be able to see the fold. This thing of being and non-being is very important to me.”

His artistic experiments, because they are on a smaller scale than his more public-facing work, are likely to make him even more collectable, I suggest. He groans and covers his face. His relationship with the art market is a complex one; he despises the way that every piece of art is now “chained to the market... We artists have to fight this battle and it’s not a straightforward one,” he says. Has he ever thought about simply walking away?

“I’ve often thought about it,” he says, smiling wryly. “And maybe one day I’ll have the courage to do it. I love making things, and after years and years of psychoanalysis, [I know] that it is a conversation I have with myself that is vital to me. I’m not that interested in the object. I’m more interested in the conversation.

“It’s absolutely part of this strange place that culture finds itself in, at the moment, me included. It doesn’t matter what area of culture, other than perhaps poetry. The commercial, the capitalist world, has entered and we struggle to find an alternative.”

For this reason, he is full of admiration for the five collectives currently nominated for the Turner Prize for their work, which is by and large socially committed. “Bless them,” he says. “I hope they can find a way, or point a way at least. They speak of a different agenda. Their work is not about objects. I warn against agitprop, because art is, in the end – in its best and purest forms – unknowable. And yet we live in a time when right-wing social entrenched is so enormous, encouraged by government, that I fully sympathise with artists who feel that social change is necessary.”
His own campaigning finds outlets outside his art. He is outspoken on matters close to his heart. He loathes Brexit – “I am saddened by the xenophobia that it’s awakened” – and has no hesitation in calling the government “a bunch of f***ing liars”. I say I imagine him shouting at the television a lot during lockdown. He smiles again. “The sad truth is that if there was an election tomorrow, Boris Johnson would be elected. He declared fairly early on that he would be hard on culture and soft on the economy, and that’s what they’re doing. So, you know, bash the BBC, bash the universities, take hold of all the museums by putting their people on the boards. Is that not a form of neo-fascism? Isn’t it a way of taking control of the mind of the nation while feeding relatively liberal economic solutions to all sorts of things? Bloody clever, but damn dangerous, it seems to me.”

He has lived in England since the 1970s, when he moved here as a student. But what is going on in India, where he was born, terrifies him even more: the death toll caused by poverty and neglect; the rise of violent anti-Muslim sentiment encouraged by the Hindu nationalist government of Narendra Modi. “It’s gone absolutely insane,” he says. “I’ve been very vocal about my opposition to both the Hindu agenda and the BJP government. I describe them as the Hindu Taliban. That’s how they behave. It’s a return to a kind of medievalism that’s pointed at exclusion. That’s horrid.”

Kapoor is also sowing his own seeds of hope. Next year, at the Venice Biennale, he is mounting an exhibition at the Accademia, where his sculptural experiments with blackness will be shown for the first time. Simultaneously, he has agreed to renovate the crumbling Palazzo Manfrin, using it as a base for his foundation, a gallery for some of his works, and opening it up as a studio space for young artists. “It is madness!” he says, with a huge grin. “It’s quite a complicated restoration project, but I hope we can give it proper life. It felt the right thing to do. Jump in. See what happens!” Which seems to be his current motto for life.
Anish Kapoor: Painting review: blood-soaked show that's worth a butcher's

★★★★☆ 4/5

The British artist demonstrates his skill with a paint brush in a visceral new show at Modern Art Oxford

By Alastair Smart
1 October 2021 - 5:00am

In a career spanning five decades, Anish Kapoor has pretty much ticked every box for a successful British artist. Turner Prize win, tick (1991). Invitation to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale, tick (1990). Retrospective at a major London institution, tick (2009, at the Royal Academy). For good measure, in 2013 he was knighted. One thing he has never done, though, is put on a significant exhibition of paintings – until now, that is, at Modern Art Oxford, where he’s showing 26 works, almost all of them new.

Kapoor is famous for his sculptures (he broke through in the early 1980s, alongside Tony Cragg and Richard Deacon, as part of the so-called New British Sculpture group). How does he fare with brush in hand? The answer is very well indeed.

These paintings are big, bold and largely abstract, albeit with just a hint of the representational, which teases viewers into thinking they might actually be seeing a subject. A handful of works, such as The Dark (2021), call to mind volcanic eruptions beneath a dark sky – that’s what they called to my mind, anyway. Others may see something completely different.

Occasionally, Kapoor’s titles help steer us towards a certain interpretation. In Orpheus Looks Back (2020), for instance, we’re invited to view its red passages of paint – loosely three upright rectangles – as depicting Orpheus, his beloved Persephone and the god Hades, from Greek myth.
The eponymous hero infamously broke his vow not to check if Persephone was walking behind him as they emerged from the Underworld. However, even here, there is no straightforward reading of the painting, since there’s no straightforward reading of the story either: the morals of which range from the value of patience to the self-destructive power of love.

What unites every work on show is the colour red. A deep dark red, most readily associated with blood. As he has throughout his career, Kapoor operates within a narrow palette that also features white, black, yellow and blue, but there’s no doubt which colour dominates.

The violent way he applies his paint to canvas – and builds it up in thick, swirling impasto – may suggest to some viewers the flagellation of martyrs or the beheading of saints in Renaissance imagery. If there’s one artist whose spectre hangs over this show, however, it’s Francis Bacon, for whom the human body was just a carcass. He managed to evoke – and, through his paint, imitate – entrails, mucus and gore. Kapoor achieves something similar in many of his paintings, though goes deeper beneath the skin and therefore to areas of greater abstraction. The end-result (if you’ll forgive a word over-used by art critics) is visceral.
Again, it’s worth saying that not everyone will look at these works and see innards. However, it’s insightful that the gallery feels the need to offer the following warning on tickets: “This exhibition contains abstract depictions of the human body that some visitors may find graphic and unsettling”.

My emphasis earlier on the difference between Kapoor’s sculptures and paintings is perhaps unhelpful. Pretty much every artist nowadays is multi-disciplinary, and let’s not forget that Kapoor has used pigment in numerous works over the years: Adam (1988-9) in the Tate collection, for example, is a sandstone block with a cavity carved out of it that’s coated blue.

The boundary between the two mediums is blurred even further in the Oxford exhibition. Not just through the three-dimensional nature of Kapoor’s impasto, but also because the show includes eight works that he refers to as “paintings on the floor”.

You and I would just call them sculptures. In fairness, they do deploy canvases or wooden panels as a starting point: these are overlaid with some combination of silicone, resin, oils and steel and exhibited on the ground. Look at Me (2020), which bears semblance to a splayed animal carcass, drips copious blood-like liquid into a tray beneath it – leaving the viewer in fear of spillage and getting his or her shoes soaked.

Modern Art Oxford has come to resemble a butcher’s shop more than a gallery. This show is bloody good.

*Sat Oct 2 to Feb 13 2022; modernartoxford.org.uk*
Anish Kapoor on vaginas, recovering from breakdown and his violent new work: ‘Freud would have a field day’

Interview

Jonathan Jones

Why has the artist painted scenes of bloodletting, decapitation and a woman with 10,000 breasts? He’s scared to talk about it - but he can explain his fascination with vaginas and the world’s blackest black

At 67, Anish Kapoor, with a knighthood, a Turner prize and a retrospective due at the Venice Biennale next year, appears determined to strip away his own artistic skin. Like Marsyas - the satyr flayed alive by Apollo, whose gory fate Kapoor once commemorated in a 150m-long, 10-storey-high sculpture - the artist is exposing his innards. That’s the only way to describe his latest works. One of the world’s most renowned sculptors is about to go public as, well, a painter. Yet it is the content of the works he’s about to unveil that may disconcert. “They’re very, very violent,” he confesses. “And I just wonder what the hell that has to do with what’s in me. I can’t sit here and psychoanalyse them. I don’t know how to. But I recognise that it’s there.”
The works, about to go on display at Modern Art Oxford, are beautifully painted yet brutal: full of images of bloodletting, decapitation and disembowelling. Kapoor seems to have taught himself to paint the human figure in order to desecrate it. At his London studio, there are stacks of these blood-soaked canvases depicting huge wounded bits of bodies and purple organs spattered on the walls.

“Yikes,” he says. “I’m not doing it intellectually. I just wanted to make a many-breasted quasi-female figure and see what happened. Could I unwrap her pristine exterior and look at her problematic interior, full of blood and guts and breasts and bits and pieces, and all that? Fuck knows. Freud would have a field day.”

Kapoor isn’t exactly an inhibited conversationalist. We meet twice, at his gallery, then his studio. On the weekend in between, he gives a speech to Index on Censorship in which he warns against “self-censorship”. And the flow of images and ideas in our discussion is certainly a masterclass in how to not censor yourself. Throwing out provocations and theories, he tries to explain what he’s up to.

“I’m doing what I’ve always done, which is to look to some primal ritual act. If one takes that to its logical conclusion, the primal ritual act has to be murder or sacrifice. In Freud’s Moses and Monotheism he talks initially about Moses having not been a Jew but an Egyptian - which I quite like - but from there on, it’s all about the idea that Moses was murdered. Moses was sacrificed.”
In case anyone misses the point, the paintings are accompanied by sculptures of enigmatic doorways and stepped buildings like Aztec pyramids, over big metal trays flowing with great painterly globs of red matter. Human sacrifice has played a part in many cultures. For Kapoor, it is a part of what religion is: “Its purpose has to be to ask ridiculous questions like, ‘Where do I go after I die?’ Or, ‘Where was I before I was born?’ Public display of the victim, public sacrifice, somehow helps us, even though it’s completely counterintuitive. We think the energy of civilisation is in a different direction. But apparently not so.”

These are unusual ideas and impulses to put on public display. At the gallery of his London dealer, we stop in front of a triptych of three big canvases that depict what at first look like florid, sensual blooms. Then you notice a headless neck bursting with blood, and the flowers turn out to be exposed anatomies. What’s going on? “The Diana of Ephesus who has 10,000 breasts ... she’s there. So I think what was in my mind was the sacrifice of Diana, the opening up, the revealing, of what’s inside her body. You’ll see that the only remaining bit, in a way, is her vagina. All the rest is opened up.”
The vagina has become quite a theme for Kapoor. There was a row in France over his Versailles sculpture, Dirty Corner, which was nicknamed “the queen's vagina”. So what's with the vaginas? Kapoor answers, unexpectedly, in terms of Marxist anthropology. “There’s an anthropologist I’m really interested in who’s weird,” he says. “A man called Chris Knight who wrote a book called Blood Relations, in which he speculates that the first culture was made by women and that it came from menstruation. That women who lived together, especially in small groups, menstruated together, and that they used red ochre to cover their bodies so as to hide their menstruations. He speculates that the first acts of culture were to do with this act of solidarity.”

The earliest artistic material known is indeed red ochre, which was used at Blombos Cave in South Africa up to 80,000 years ago. It makes a strong red pigment - hand prints and animal images in red ochre survive in cave art. Kapoor can't get enough of it either. “I have an obsession with red. My favourite colour of all, the one I use by the ton, is Alizirin crimson. It’s a very dark bloody Bordeaux wine red. What’s interesting about red is that it links to black so unbelievably easily. Red makes great darkness. And of course one might say red is fully a colour of the interior.”

So Kapoor's paintings are not so far from his sculpture after all. Since the 1980s, he has used colour to release the cosmic and the inward - from early works, in which he scattered raw pigment on small objects, to Descent into Limbo, a 2.5m deep hole painted with a black so dark the drop seems infinite (and into which one gallerygoer fell). “Colour is deeply illusionistic,” he says. “Deep space is something I’m constantly in conversation with - the way colour affects deep space, in ways that are indescribable with words.”

In his studio, among the bloody canvases, is a black lozenge on a white background, encased in a glass tank. He asks me what I think it is. One thing I am sure of - it's flat. Then he gets me to look from the side. It's not flat at all: it bulges out into space, a solid diamond form. The optical illusion is mind-blowing. “So this is one of these new works made in the blackest material in the universe,” he says. “It’s in a case because the material is highly toxic and it’s incredibly fragile, especially to saliva, so you can’t talk in front of it. It’s a nano material. And what happens is the light enters and basically it’s trapped and doesn’t escape.”
It traps 98.8% of light — “blacker than a black hole”. When Kapoor got exclusive artistic rights to this material a few years ago, there was a bit of a hoo-ha. You can even buy a “blackest black” acrylic paint, created by self-styled rival Stuart Semple, with the warning that by ordering it, “you confirm that you are not Anish Kapoor, you are in no way affiliated to Anish Kapoor, you are not purchasing this item on behalf of Anish Kapoor or an associate of Anish Kapoor.”

After my breakdown, my mother went to India, got some earth and put it under my bed - so I could dream myself well.

The entire row is daft, for Kapoor’s actual black nano material is dangerous, difficult to use and has taken years to develop into artworks. He shows me 19 more of these freaky spatial illusions in an upper room of his studio. Next year they will be unveiled at the Venice Accademia show. They take a lifetime’s colour research to a sublime extreme. Is it a cliche to ask if this fascination with colour was influenced by his childhood in India? “I think some of my relationship to colour has to be cultural. This propensity for red has to have something of that. I think of Picasso and his relation to his Spanish roots. They were with him always - the dark mythological forces playing away”.

In fact, when I push him to explain how his gory canvases reflect his own psyche, as opposed to anthropological ideas, he comes out with a moving story about India, displacement and the healing power of ritual. “I grew up in India,” he says. “I was there until I was 17, 18. My mother was Jewish, so my brother and I then went to Israel. And I had the most awful, terrible nervous breakdown. I could hardly walk. I had an aunt who lived in Israel and my mother came to visit me. And my aunt, who had a kind of shamanistic predilection, said to my mother, ‘You must go back to India and you must bring some earth and you must put it under Anish’s bed.’ Sorry Jonathan, this sometimes makes me want to cry. But anyway, I’ll tell you it. And so my mother, bless her, went to India and got some earth and put it under my bed, and my aunt said further, ‘He will be able to dream himself well from this matter.’ Wow! You know it took me years to recognise the power of this thing. It gives me goosebumps. Sorry, but it does give me goosebumps.”

Kapoor is an artist who takes you to the edge. He can make you contemplate the biggest questions. His new paintings are not so much a departure as a key to everything he has ever done, ransacking religion and myth to ask why human beings have always been driven to ponder the mystery of being. “I’ve been in Buddhist practice for a long, long time,” he says. “Zen practice. It matters to me. I do really believe that we are religious beings. Where do I come from? Who am I? What am I? Where do I go? Those are questions that puzzle us all.”

Anish Kapoor: Painting is at Modern Art Oxford from 2 October to 13 February. His show at Gallerie dell’Accademia di Venezia opens April 2022.
Anish Kapoor to Convert 18th-Century Venetian Palazzo into Exhibition Space

The Anish Kapoor Foundation has bought and will be renovating the 18th-century Palazzo Manfrin into a gallery, artist studio, and archival deposit, according to the Art Newspaper. Mario Codognato, Venice native and current director of the Anish Kapoor Foundation, will be leading the new project.

Kapoor has previously raised concerns about the state of Venice as a city. This past June, Kapoor and 21 other artists signed a letter urging Venetian officials to consider the negative impacts of tourism on the city.

The Palazzo Marin will host rotating exhibitions in a ground-floor gallery. Its second and third floors will display works from the foundation’s collection, and there will also be room for an archive and a workshop intended to support artists and scholars working in the fields of history, technology, and art.

Palazzo Manfrin was built in the 1500s for the aristocratic Priuli family. The Venetian palazzo was reconstructed during the 1720s, and was further modified in the late 1780s.

Until recent years, the building served as a school and has since fallen into disrepair. Kapoor tapped the architecture firms FWR Associati and UNA studio, based in Venice and Hamburg, respectively, to spearhead this major project.

The Art Newspaper reported that Kapoor’s foundation is expected to open at the Palazzo Manfrin in 2023. But it is not the only forthcoming Kapoor project headed to the city, however. In 2022, the Gallerie dell’Accademia will host a major exhibition of Kapoor’s sculptures coated in Vantablack, which is believed to be the darkest shade of black in the world.
Anish Kapoor is converting a vast, crumbling Venetian palace into his permanent exhibition space and workshop

The 18th-century Palazzo Manfrin will house a collection of the British-Indian sculptor’s work

KABIR JHALA
30th July 2021 18:40 BST

Palazzo Manfrin has been empty for several years

The foundation of the British-Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor has begun renovating a palazzo in Venice that will eventually become the organisation’s headquarters.

Earlier this year, the Venice city council green-lit construction plans for the Anish Kapoor Foundation to convert the dilapidated 18th-century Palazzo...
Priuli Manfrin into an exhibition venue, artist studio and repository for a number of Kapoor's most significant works.

Facing onto the Cannaregio Canal, the Palazzo Priuli Manfrin was established in the 16th century and largely rebuilt in the 1700s. It first served as the seat of the Priulis, a prominent Italian aristocratic family which claim among their ranks several Doges of Venice. During the 19th century the palace housed a collection of paintings that acted as a predecessor to the Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia where, incidentally, Kapoor will debut his much anticipated VantaBlack sculptures & coated in the world's "blackest" pigment next year (20 April-9 October 2022).

The building's ground floor will be turned into a gallery that will host a programme of temporary exhibitions and a bookshop overlooking the canal, as well as educational and recreational spaces, according to the Venice city council. The first and second floors will house exhibition spaces for the "most significant" works from the foundation's collection. Above these will be workshops, an archive and a collection deposit. Several ancient decorative structures in the east wing of the building will be conserved as part of the redevelopment.
According to a statement from the Anish Kapoor Foundation, the programme will include: "Conferences and workshops for scholars and artists interested in the history, technologies and developments of sculpture as an art form, creating initiatives with experts in different cultural and scientific fields to contribute to a better understanding of contemporary art and culture."

The foundation adds that it intends to "work closely with the museums and cultural institutions of the city of Venice, with universities and research centres, as well as with organisations that deal with the future of the environment".

The project will be led by the Venetian architecture studio FWR Associati and UNA studio, based in Hamburg. "Palazzo Priuli Manfrin presents an architecture virtually unique in Venice. Its double-height hall is of typical Palladian design and its facade, without ornament, make this building the prototype of the Neoclassical style that is rarely found elsewhere in the city," say UNA's lead architects Giulia Foscari and Antonio Foscari in a statement released by the Venice city council.

Although the building once served as a school, it now stands empty and decaying like many of Venice's grand palazzos. Construction will take "a few years" and is unlikely to be completed until at least 2023. The exact budget for the project is not yet known, although the site requires major structural renovations.

"Thanks to this important acquisition, another palace in the city of Venice will once again show all its beauty and magnificence, and have a function worthy of its past," says Venice's mayor Luigi Brugnaro in a statement. "An operation that is fully part of the path that we are carrying out as an administration for cultural relaunch, also attracting artists of international level." In the past three years a number of notable arts foundations have set up base in the Italian lagoon city such as those of the collector Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza and the US-based billionaire philanthropist Nicolas Berggruen.

The new space will be helmed by the Anish Kapoor Foundation's director—and the artist’s long-time friend—Mario Codognato, formerly the chief curator of Belvedere 21 in Venice. He returns to his home city after 35 years away. The Anish Kapoor Foundation was founded as a charity in 2017 and is currently registered at Old Brompton Road in West London.
"London was the most obvious place for this, as [Kapoor] has lived there most of his life, and I have lived there too. But one day I was coming back to Venice on the plane with the director general of the Cini Foundation, the most important foundation here in Venice, who talked to me about a building they had where they were looking for someone who wanted to set up a foundation. I talked to Anish about it, and because people from all over the world come to Venice to see the Biennale we started to think that Venice would be the place," Codognato told the Italian journalist Alain Elkann in an interview earlier this year.

Kapoor has long been inspired by Venice. He recently told the art management company SpeakArt of his upcoming show at Gallerie dell'Academia: "I have come to love this city and its painters, sculptors and architects. I hope I can add something to the vocabulary of colour and shape that was Venice's gift to the world."

Earlier this year Kapoor was one of 21 prominent cultural figures to sign an open letter imploring Italy's leaders to safeguard Venice from overtourism as it emerges from lockdown.
Anish Kapoor talks about his vision and the role of artists in today’s world

BY SHAHNAZ SIGANPORIA
MAR 19, 2021 | 17:39 IST | 18

What makes Anish Kapoor one of the greats? It isn’t his list of accolades, which includes being awarded a knighthood (2013), winning the Turner Prize (1991) and becoming the first living artist to be given a solo at the Royal Academy of Arts in London (2009). It isn’t because he has created multiple landmarks across the world—whether Cloud Gate (nicknamed ‘The Bean’) in Chicago or Britain’s largest work of public art, the ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture and observation tower in London—and it definitely isn’t the fact that he holds the exclusive licence to the blackest black pigment known to the world. What makes Kapoor great is that whether you love him or hate him, his work evokes and provokes—it cannot be ignored. He’s the master of the void, a maverick of form who plays his sleight of hand by never informing his works with answers but instead infusing them with all the right questions.
The 67-year-old artist refuses to explain himself or his work. As the lockdowns waned last year, Kapoor launched his largest outdoor exhibit ever at Houghton Hall in Norfolk. Ask him why and he quips, “Houghton Hall is beautiful and it is a great place for art outdoors.” Earlier this year, while in conversation with Homi K Bhabha at the virtual Jaipur Literature Festival, he shared, “The object has no status; the non-object becomes real, it’s a fiction, a poetic gesture, a possibility.” Kapoor uses his work to make you uncomfortable and forces you to confront perceived reality. But most of all, he creates mythologies of his own.
As he continues his abstract-ish storytelling, he goes on to scale heights and blur boundaries as the radical voice of the contemporary. He’s currently prepping for his upcoming retrospective at the Gallerie dell’Accademia di Venezia, where he will become the first British artist to be honoured with a major exhibition at the museum, during the Venice International Art Biennale in 2022. And rumour has it that he’s also working on a project in India that will be made public soon, but little else is known about it as yet and Kapoor isn’t spilling, but he is talking about his artistic vision even as he advises his fellow creatives on how to disrupt the status quo.

**How do you understand the role of the artist today?**

Artists are like everyone else, but we make a decision somewhere, somehow to have an inner life and to take it seriously. Out of the ordinary, every day, sometimes something apart occurs and it is our job to recognise this and work with it. Artists make mythological propositions. Artists do not make objects for the wealthy. It is the job of the artist to be radical. The art market today turns everything we do into a commodity. We must resist and disrupt what is expected of us. If we are not radical, what are we? Disobey, disrupt and disagree.

**In turn, how do you understand your gaze as an artist?**

My gaze is eager to recognise real art. Most art made now has too much to say. I am not interested in art that has a message. Great art sits between life and death, between meaning and no meaning. The viewer is then implicated in the act of looking and the gaze is an active part of the artwork. Between something and nothing, the gaze is drawn into poetic possibility.
Has the pandemic changed you as an artist?

I have nothing to say as an artist, therefore COVID-19 has no direct effect on what I do. But of course I am sure that the psychic space of global uncertainty has an effect on me and, as a consequence, on my work.

The last year has also led to a louder conversation around representation. You have warned against tokenism in the art world. What is the way forward for a truly diverse art world?

The Western museums, MoMA in New York, Tate Modern and Tate Britain in London, and many others all over the world follow fashion and collect and show what they call ‘world art’. What crap! Because while they do this, they also maintain the fiction that the great canon of art is still white and male. We artists have to disavow this fiction and force these Luddite institutions to reconstruct the canon of art. Without a doubt, today’s great artists are not white or male. The modern artist is not asking for cultural relativism, we demand a new kind of connoisseurship. Curators need to learn to look with their eyes and feel with their hearts or stomachs and stop looking with their ears and feeling with their backsides.

In an age of increased censorship, you still speak your mind. How does the artist community defend itself?

The diversity of our country and its tolerance have always been its power and its magical and magnificent mystery. Are we going to allow goons to silence us and stop us from being who and what we are and have always been? The most direct effect of state terror is self-censorship. We keep
our mouths shut and keep our art away from troublesome issues. This gives them victory, and when it’s too late we lament what we have lost. Artists, dear friends, shout now. Your freedom is teetering...
The mirrors and the light

Sculpture: Anish Kapoor's art dazzles among the grand vistas of Houghton Hall, writes Jan Dalley

Above: "The Mirror and the Sky" by Anish Kapoor at Houghton Hall, Norfolk. The artist has ripped a piece of the Mother Nature canvas and incorporated it into the long garden vista.

Left: "Spiritual and Pagan Gold" by Maggi Hambling for the Tower Hall.

"In this age of the/The time is/The time is/The time is"

Kapoor's sculpture is set in the Long Gallery, which is 170m long and 2.7m high. A black cube is set in the middle of the room, with a large mirror on the ceiling. The end of the room is a stone wall, with a large window looking out to the garden. The sculpture is made of black marble and glass, and is lit from the ceiling. The space is divided into three sections: a black cube, a mirror, and a stone wall. The cube is the largest of the three, and is made of black marble. The mirror is the second largest, and is made of glass. The stone wall is the smallest, and is made of stone. The sculpture is a conversation between the three elements, and is meant to be seen from different angles. The piece is a reflection of the beauty and the light that surround it.
Pubs and cafés face al-fresco smoking ban plea

Peers to challenge ministers to stop outdoor smoking in return for permission to serve ‘pavement drinks’

Bid to boost Covid-hit hospitality sector ‘must not be at expense of public health’, campaigners warn

No 10 hopes more people will head to work today after PM urged employees to help boost economic recovery

Government backs away from move to make face masks compulsory in shops in England
Reflecting on magnificence

Sir Anish Kapoor’s long-awaited exhibition at Houghton Hall explores and deconstructs the miracle of perfected forms, and raises questions about our desire to tame and improve the work of nature. By Hettie Judah

We are not the first generation to encounter Sir Anish Kapoor’s sculptures. His works have been displayed in the most venerable institutions in the world. But it is still a joy to see them as if for the first time. The scale of his recent exhibition at Houghton Hall, with its grandiose setting, is grand enough to make the viewer feel that the artist is at the height of his powers. The pieces on display are a powerful reminder of the beauty of nature, and of the human desire to control and manipulate it.

The pieces on display are a powerful reminder of the beauty of nature, and of the human desire to control and manipulate it. It is a testament to Kapoor’s genius that he is able to create works that are both visually stunning and conceptually profound. His sculptures are a testament to the power of imagination and the beauty of the unexpected. They are a reminder that the world is not a place of rigid boundaries, but of fluid possibilities. The sculptures are a reminder that the human desire to control and manipulate the world is not a unique quality of our species, but a quality that is shared by all living things.

Kapoor’s sculptures are a reminder that the world is not a place of rigid boundaries, but of fluid possibilities. They are a reminder that the human desire to control and manipulate the world is not a unique quality of our species, but a quality that is shared by all living things. They are a testament to the power of imagination and the beauty of the unexpected. The sculptures are a reminder that the world is not a place of rigid boundaries, but of fluid possibilities.

Kapoor steps up to the scale of Houghton, and engages with the history and landscape. From the Earth’s surface, rooted and vertical, to the vastness of the sky, Kapoor’s sculptures explore the relationship between the body and the landscape. They are a reminder that the world is not a place of rigid boundaries, but of fluid possibilities. The sculptures are a reminder that the human desire to control and manipulate the world is not a unique quality of our species, but a quality that is shared by all living things.
As maddening as it is mesmerising

Anish Kapoor’s Norfolk show has one special jewel, reports Rachel Campbell-Johnston

H as the Marquess of Cholmondeley taken up a new hobby? What appears to be a massive satellite dish has been set down slap bang in the middle of his magnificent lawn. Is he scanning the Norfolk skies for signs of extraterrestrial life?

A first glimpse of Anish Kapoor’s 2018 Sky Mirror, gleaming amid the formal green expanses of Houghton Hall’s immaculately kept grounds, might lead you to wonder if Britain’s finest Palladian mansion is now, with its latest art show, launching itself into the world of sci-fi. If so, you might find that you are not so far wrong.

Sky Mirror is the star piece in an exhibition, Anish Kapoor at Houghton Hall, that was originally scheduled for March, but was postponed by lockdown and now opens on July 12 (with all the requisite safety measures, including mandatory pre-booking) on July 12.

It features nine big outdoor sculptures, most carved from stone, which have been positioned within the formal gardens. On the lawns directly in front of, but completely dwarfed by, the building’s towering façade are huge rectangular tanks of carved marble. They play with the idea of, among other things, openings and occlusions. They make windows and frames and occlusions.

Follow a pleached lime walkway and then wind down a path through the grounds, and you find, in a clearing, a strange pink object. A polished chunk of marble peckers into what can only be compared to an anal orifice.

Other works are displayed indoors. A series of circular mirrors shimmer like drops of water or the grassy stonework. Some reflections reflect the ornate plasterwork of the overthrow on the floor; send the ornamental poti tumbling, turn the dangling chandelier into a growing tree. No wonder the Roman emperors, deposed from their pedestals to be replaced by these shimmering rainbow discs, look a little disconcerted.

These 2018-19 Works are the most recent in the show. In the small south wing gallery you will find the show’s earliest dated pieces: 1990s sculptures that evoked the rich sensuality of colour. A selection of working drawings, saws and snips and plotted geometries on plywood.

are also included. They have never been shown before. Little wonder: even though they could hardly be shown to more advantage than in the curved stone gallery of the north wing colonnade, they are hardly fascinating.

Sky Mirror, however, is the show’s obvious highlight. It stands there, a massive ellipse of highly polished steel, scanning the skies for reflections of infinity. On the day I visit it is dull. I feel as if a grey Tupperware box has been placed right over the park, sealing me into a drab world of windless drizzle. And even then, this sculpture is beautiful. I stare entranced at the subtlest shifts in the light, at the faint drift and gentle disintegration of cloud masses, at the bedraggled crow that, disturbed from its roost, laps its sudden black reflection across the luminous sphere. Imagine how lovely it will look on a bright day when puffs of white cloud, breastled along by sea breezes, scud over the surfaces, magnifying heavenly dramas.

It’s a mesmerising experience. And that probably makes it the best place to start. This compact little survey does not catch Kapoor at his most entertainingly dramatic. You are being offered something far less obviously exciting, but at its best more sublime. If you want to get much out of it you must linger. Slow to a stop and let your eyes and mind drift. What is land and what is sky? What is solid and what is space? What is inside and what is outside? Kapoor strongly resists providing any definitive answers. He just keeps playing his games with perception.

Works that for the most part lack supremely simple can your mind up in a tangle of knots. I can’t help thinking of the great medieval philosopher Meinhard Eckhart, who, understanding that words could not capture the spiritual, resorted instead to paradox. The unpoppable essence of the mystic, he believed, could somehow be caught up in contrary clauses. And is it this sense of the transcendent that Kapoor is searching for as he angles his vast satellite dish towards the infinite skies?
It’s hard to be radical if everything’s for sale

Anish Kapoor talks to Chris Harvey about making art from the universe’s blackest material – and saying no to Boris Johnson.

A picture of the article from The Telegraph on 23 May 2020.
POEM OF THE WEEK

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Every portrait is a self-portrait.
Looking into a pair of painted eyes,
We might for a moment feel we’ve
seen the living subject, when really
what we’ve seen is the version that caught
the artist’s imagination. The real thing is
out of reach. Christina Rossetti
was aware of the complex relationship
between artist and model, harboring
for her brother, the painter Dante
Gabriel Rossetti.

This poem was not published in her lifetime. Its form—a Petrarchan sonnet—suggests a love poem, and for the first eight lines it describes a beloved artist’s transformation of his muse into “a saint, an angel” in a way that could be read as a pure expression of his devotion. But from this point, the sonnet’s twist or rebuke, it takes an unsettling turn.

Critics have seen something distinctly Victorian in this portrait of the artist at work: “He feeds upon her by day and night.” It is worth remembering that Rossetti’s uncle was Lord Byron’s doctor, John Filine, the author of the first modern vampire story, The Vampire.

The “face” in this artist’s paintings shows his model “not as she is, but as
When hope is shone bright.” What is the hope that has faded and left her “wan
with waiting”? The long-delayed hope that he might put down his paintbrush
and propose to her, perhaps?

According to William Rossetti, another brother of Christinax, this poem—“apparently refers to...
the closest possible description of the lady whom he afterwards
married, Miss Siddal.”

Eliza Chevey Fowke was a poet and artist, and had been a model after model for years by the time Christina wrote this poem, in 1856, four years before she
married Dante. Modeling could be arduous work. In 1852, Siddal fell ill—possibly with pneumonia—and died. Her husband remarried her as a duchess.

Next time you marveled at Mihail’s photos, spare a thought for Siddall shrinking in the tub.

TRISTAN FAR NURSING

IN AN ARTIST’S STUDY

one face looks out from all his canvases,
onewelcome figure sits or walks or
leaves. We found her hidden just behind those
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen among them, a princess,
A nameless girl in freshets and
A saint, an angel—every canvas seems
The same one meaning, neither more or
He feeds upon her face by day and
And with true kind eyes looks back
As the moon and joyful as the light.
Not with waiting, not with sorrow
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright.
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.
my culture fix
The artist lets us into his cultural life

Anish Kapoor

My favourite author or book.

I have to be Paul Colín, the poet—specifically in translation by Michael Hamburger. Colín poems remain moving and I’m a great believer in art that doesn’t reveal itself.

The book I’m reading.

Jacqueline Rhoades Can We Name the Migration Crisis? It’s a deep and thought-provoking book on human migration. It proposes that as long as we maintain global inequality, in discussions about “us” and “the others,” there’s little space for correction. Also, it very clearly puts across the idea that the world population has grown from three billion to eight billion in 70 years, in the context of world institutions having changed very little.

The box set I’m hooked on.

Twentieth-Century Mariachi, the story of the Mexican drug lord. I love it. There’s something about how nasty we can be to each other that is deeply compelling. I’m sad to say.

The book I wish I had written.

A Broadway answer: Virginia A. Rees’s, by Lynn Nottage.

The book I couldn’t finish.

The Swallows and Amazons, by Arthur Ransome.

The poem that saved me.

Elements of War Time by the American poet, Anna Tichy. One of the most moving poems I’ve read. It is a melancholy reflection on what it means to be in love, to be an outsider, to be truly free. An excerpt: “I am a family dispersed between..."
LISSON GALLERY

The Observer
14 March 2020

Anish Kapoor
Artist, 66

The artist on working with the world’s blackest substance, the troubled legacy of his Olympic sculpture and the state of the art world today.

British Indian artist Anish Kapoor is mounting his largest ever UK exhibition of outdoor sculpture at Houghton Hall in Norfolk from late March, including his famous Sky Mirror, a five-metre stainless steel disc that turns the world around. It upsides down.

What kind of things did you want to show at Houghton Hall?

It’s the greatest honour of England, with a great history and stunning grounds. I decided to make something that I’ve made over the past 25 years, and I’ve never shown in the UK before. It’s quite well there. It’s right to put it in some mirror works, and put the Sky Mirror in the grounds.

What are you investigating with the stone sculptures?

Most stone carving, over the last centuries, has been to have a block of stone, and then carve, like Rembrandt did, from inside out. What I’ve been doing, very quietly, is to reverse the hierarchic. The block stays as it was assessed, and then I’ve been working on the outer form.

Do you have a sense of yourself when you mount a retrospective exhibition? Yes, absolutely. I think I’m looking, I’m looking, to bring this body of work that I hope make sense together. I seem to have a disciplined practice, because that’s the only way I’m making these very geometric, very pure objects, and in the other my work is very free and all over the place – whether it’s a great pile of wire or those relational paintings that I am making for an exhibition at the Modern Art Oxford gallery in September. Yet they are one practice – and they are, in a way, very similar to each other.

What’s your current writing description of what you do? Oh God, I have no idea. [Laughter] I really do feel very strongly that I have nothing to say. I have no message need to give the world, and nor do I want to give the world a message. I’m not looking to do or to make decisions that question the nature of objects – ones that are empty heavy barn isn’t heavy, black doesn’t tell themselves...

The black objects you are making with dust from the world’s darkest black substance, will be shown for the first time in the Accademia in Venice next year. They are thrilling... I’m very excited by them. The material is, in a way, mysticological. Imagine being able to create an object as the blackness in the universe, including black holes. That’s kind of daffy, isn’t it?

How do you think it is now for young artists?

Incredibly difficult. I think the art world is in severe difficulty. At one level, it’s booming. Not what does that mean for artists? We all know that art is not a market of luxury goods. I am part of that, systems too. I’m not looking to be an outsider, but if everything’s fine, how is it possible to find anything that is radical? It’s so hard to maintain one’s distance from the commodification of the object. And for young artists today, it’s incredibly hard to find space in London, it’s so godawful expensive. When I first had a studio in Central London in the early 90s it cost £15 a week.

What advice would you give to someone starting out? It’s taking your mates as an artist, being absurdly, totally seriously. It’s not a pure art activity, it’s about doing all the time.

Artists are not makers of luxury goods. If everything is for sale, how can we find anything radical?

Do you still work every day? Oh yes, I have a practice. I think I’ve never once said “I’m so tired of being admired.” I’m so tired of being admired, inspiration is so marvelous, it’s not really about that. I work every normal day, 8 am to 6, five days a week. I don’t work on weekends. I’m through the practice of working that things occur. It doesn’t matter what you do. But do it.

You were vocally opposed to Brexit. What’s your feeling now? It continues to be a disaster. Psychologically it’s about where we are and how we see ourselves. The idea that Brexit can do special deals and play big nations, I think it’s a fantasy, an illusion, and fantasy, art political discourse has almost been censored on the subject. I hope it will return.

Would it make you think about leaving? I’ve had serious thoughts about leaving, and sad thoughts, because I’ve been here 60 years.

You’ve recently managed to stop the National Rifle Association of America using an image of your Chicago sculpture Cloud Gate in one of their film.

Yes, I did. They put out a white film that they said was the image of the so-called liberal invention of renewable American spaces. I thought the whole way it was done was very revolting. I decided to fight him on the basis of copyright. A group of American lawyers took us on, they won, and agreed to pay their expenses. They say it was the first case because the NRA to react from a position, and they’ve been interesting ever since. You?

On the subject of public sculpture. The Orbit, which you designed for the Olympic Park in London, is apparently losing a lot of money – it was made as a public sculpture. Then maintenance, it’s just maintenance. In many ways, London, I turned it into a – what do they call it? – a tourist attraction. Oh, jeez. I think I was made a bad deal with them, but I didn’t want it. But it’s always been a bad idea, according to me. Either you do something or a publicly funded public enterprise. To ask two up is confusion. It doesn’t work.

Generally, you always seem enthusiastic and creative. In that true? I’m often, you know, I seem deeply engaged in what I’m doing. I’m not interested in doing what I know how to do. I’ve been doing it since my 10th birthday and I hope I can work with the same kind of idiosyncratic enthusiasm that I had when I was 20.

Interview by Saoirse Cunningham

Anish Kapoor at Houghton Hall runs from 24 March to 27 September.
Envoy’s testimony may be pivotal to impeachment showdown

US Ambassador to the EU Gordon Sondland will testify today with his own and Trump’s future at significant risk.

We went to the Hong Kong campus at the center of protests. Here’s what we saw
• China hints it may expand HK’s legal system
• US Senate passes $1 billion bill

A room in this hotel costs $1 a night. But there’s a catch

Outspoken artist Anish Kapoor opens retrospective in Beijing

Aston Martin unveils a $190,000 SUV
Lisson Gallery

CNN Style
20 November 2019

Anish Kapoor
Artist

On another site, Kapoor’s works are being exhibited at Taimiao Art Museum, in Beijing’s 600-year-old Imperial Ancestral Temple near the Forbidden City.
'Part of the conversation': Outspoken artist Anish Kapoor opens retrospective in Beijing

Updated 20th November 2019
Wallpaper
November & December 2019
艺术家并非造物者

“我没有话要说”是Anish Kapoor一直以来的态度，他将自己投入“做”的行为之中，并让“行为”成为认知形成的初始途径。

在2010年6月25日与6月16日，Anish Kapoor首次在台湾中央大学美术馆举办个展，展览期间这位国际知名艺术家在不同时间创作的多件作品，在台北市中央大学艺术系的创意空间展出，吸引了大批观众。Kapoor的作品以大胆的色彩、强烈的形状和线条，以及对空间和光影的运用，展示了他对艺术的深刻理解和创新思维。

Kapoor的艺术理念在于打破传统艺术的界限，将自然与人类、感官与理性、形式与功能、内在与外在、个体与整体等元素融为一体，创造出一种全新的艺术体验。他的作品具有强烈的视觉冲击力和思想深度，挑战了观众的思维定式，激发了对自我和世界的重新思考。

Kapoor的作品传达了一种超越形式的观念，他通过将日常生活中常见的物品（如沙子、水、火等）转化为艺术品，展示了对自然力量的敬畏和对生命奥秘的探索。他的作品不仅仅是形式的创造，更是对人与自然关系的深度思考，引发人们对环境、社会和存在的深刻反思。

Kapoor的作品在台湾的展出，不仅为观众提供了近距离接触大师作品的机会，也为台湾的艺术界和公众带来了新的艺术视野。他的创作方法和理念，对于推动台湾艺术的发展具有重要的启示意义。
所作的所谓特定装置（Mansyas，2002）。作品多为PVC表面。

透过旋转扭动的不被翻阅的书本形成一个新的构造的装置。其

t弹性的膨胀与收缩将给观众一种什么感觉。我无法在观察到的全貌。

由此，通过探索物理研究的自然现象。Kapoor的对现代艺

术家并不陌生。他所展示的是一种具有理学言的语言哲学。将

归至目的力量加以释放。唤起人们对身体存在中最核心的体

验。

对于此次展览。我认为最重要的就是如何瞬间形成不可意想的体

验。而归至艺术者或表达者一定会不同点画在坐视的观察。

对于Kapoor，我认为一名艺术家并没有什么线索。我所希望我的作

品展现的是一种构造意义的可能性，而不是意义本身。换言之

Kapoor的挑战需要我们为观察行为本身构造意义——观众是参

与者，不是旁观者。

展览开幕式在即。我们应尝试探寻Kapoor位于伦敦南

部Camberwell区的工作室。Kapoor工作室的前身为印刷品工

厂。在此期间工作与住宅。Kapoor委任Casey Jones

Architects设计工作室扩建至整条街区。构成了一栋建筑的不同模块。首

层、二层和三层的每天开放的综合空间。每个区域都分为三个

工作室。用于建造的“装置”作品的展示空间。用于建造构

建模块的结构实验室、用于创作各种材料和作品的大型空间。用于制

造与雕塑材料隔断的综合空间，为艺术家提供固定的工作室和展览

空间以及工作室和画室创作空间。其中，一间只有Kapoor才能进

入的“工作室”是他的工作室的安全隔间。墙壁上独立的白色标

识、堆置在墙面上的家具、悬挂在墙面上的画作等组成一个大型画室

一层的架子上摆放着杜松叶葡萄，下方摆放着双双颜色红色

颜色的花瓶，整个环境犹如将艺术家的身体与精神物外延展。构成

整个画室空间。

成为艺术历史的四十年来。Kapoor始终是当今的实践中

者。他是一个富有想像力的艺术家，他坚持每天创作一幅作品的画

纸。始终创作相应的艺术，从早期的素描、水彩、速写等再到

中后期的铅笔素描。每天早上九点至傍晚六点在工作室创作。但凡当

天。便从画室回到画室Kapoor从画室中拿出一管颜料瓶。显

然，他并没有专心致志。

我想到这里，便想到Kapoor这个人。他是不是在创作出

样的行为，是否是这样的级

等等将蕴涵一生成新的意义。这是不是因为有它什么不同时期的观

而是在这过程中，想象着一样。意义得实验。然而。同时作为艺

术家的内省与媒介，艺术家如何在自身思想、身体和精神之间进

行富有与实验。Kapoor说：“我常常有这样行，尤其针对

我自己。我脑中会惊醒疼痛。然而，他又能看到现实。这个实际

中，通过这个意象的过程，常常是用素描和铅笔画才能形成，这

当中的转折点是如何解决烈日所画的意象。我所创作的是不去创

意，而是让艺术家灵活地行走。

因此，在这个过程中。当前更加关注意义。Kapoor的工

作室中放置了在道具的作品，而那些散放在特定材质空间

中的作品。我所的创作并无明确的创作方式生成分类。今日世界几

乎

“我希望我的作品指向一种构造意义的

可能性，而不是意义本身。”
在艺术的世界里，女性的美与力量是不可忽视的存在。艺术家中，Kapoor以其独特的女性主义视角，探索女性在社会中的角色和价值。他的作品常常蕴含着对女性的赞美与尊重。Kapoor的作品中，女性形象不再是被动的象征，而是独立的主体，展现着力量与自信。

Kapoor的作品《Mother as a Ship》（1989），通过女性的身体形象，表达出女性的内在力量。作品中，女性的身体被赋予了船只的形象，象征着女性在社会中的重要地位。作品《Mother as a Void》（1991）则进一步展示了女性的空灵与神秘，仿佛女性在某种意义上是无尽的源泉。

Kapoor的女性主义视角，不仅体现在作品中，也在他的个人生活中。Kapoor的创作灵感，往往来自于他对女性的理解和尊重。他相信，女性的力量是不可忽视的，女性的美是不可亵渎的。

Kapoor的作品，不仅仅是对女性的赞美，更是对女性力量的肯定。他的作品，让我们看到了女性的美与力量，看到了女性在社会中的重要地位。Kapoor的作品，让我们看到了女性的美，看到了女性的力量，看到了女性的尊严。

Kapoor的作品，让我们看到了女性的美，看到了女性的力量，看到了女性的尊严。他的作品，让我们看到了女性的美，看到了女性的力量，看到了女性的尊严。
UNIVERSE
BODY MYTH AND
生命与神话

从90年代中期开始，卡普尔扩大了对材料的使用范围。包括抛光的不锈钢、后来的红蜡和水。看起来卡普尔是在向极简主义的信念致敬，包括轻巧的体积、抽象的材料、饱和的色彩和简单的形式，同时他还探索了不同材质的视觉效果。然而，卡普尔的许多雕塑在材料和意义上都显得很沉重，与年轻的英国艺术家在90年代以震撼人心的艺术风格有所不同。卡普尔更喜欢采用一种温和的方法，用不那么丑陋但仍引人注目的形式吸引观众。

《天镜》由一个20英尺宽的圆雕组成，该坛脉冲着天空向上倾斜。卡普尔将世界颠倒，牢牢地种植在地面上的抛光不锈钢镜片，提供了一个视角，可以观察不断变化和经过的云层。透过远离颜色和石头，
而使用镜面表面来制作作品，卡普尔更加明显地希望他的观众反思自己周围的社会和自己。卡普尔本人称此作品为“非物体”，因为其反射面会将周围的环境映射在作品上。

真正让卡普尔声名鹊起的，是他在近二十年里巨大的场域制作作品，他在伦敦泰特现代美术馆的作品雕塑被认为是他的标志性作品，也是卡普尔大型的雕塑作品之一。《马里西亚》，以古希腊的阿瑞斯命名，后者是阿芙洛狄忒的丈夫，而这种乐器常常用作崇拜酒神的仪式，因此整件作品由红色PVC材料覆盖在货架上，构成为巨大的双面形形结构，当聆听音乐引人入胜时，卡普尔试图使用视觉刺激来模仿相同的感受。这些作品是类似于皮筋的乐器，将会被公开展示或安装在特定的公共空间。卡普尔不断地希望，通过这样巧妙地力场空间，填满一切的《马里利亚》的整个空间获得的巨大的成功，而对于它的大小，卡普尔解释说：“每个雕塑都有其规模，它们是现在规模的三分之一，将无法到达。金宇塔之所以备受瞩目也是因为它们的大小，规模是一个工具，雕刻的工具。”

### 巨大与黑色

艺术需要极端化吗？当评论家尚未停止，卡普尔继续利用反射表面和大比例尺，在芝加哥艺术博物馆创作了《云门》，33英尺高的凹形长的雕塑，灵感来自波纹状的表的和桥梁的静穆，被称为“豆子”，它由168块抛光不锈钢板与焊接在一组构成一种奇异的物体，装饰在雕塑周围走来走去，观察雕塑扭曲反射的方式。像所有艺术家的大型雕塑一样，《云门》造价昂贵且制作技术上具有挑战性，负责雕塑制作的工程师首先认为不可能进行设计，而预计600万美元的本项目在完成后最终接近2,300万美元，保安人员每天24小时在线，以防止任何事情发生在昂贵的物品上，从而增加高昂的成本，并在金钱变得千丝万缕地缠绕在一起时引发了关于艺术品“价值”的进一步辩论。“在艺术家行为和经济之间有非常复杂的关系，我承认自己是一个雕塑家，雕塑确实需要许多的钱去制作，但是，从古至今艺术家始终需要金钱的支持。即使在几米开外的盔甲和斯基廷大礼堂的穹顶上作画，到塞翁的大型雕塑使用大量的黄金，如果西方的大教堂，艺术家一直需要金钱的支持，才能完成一件作品，我同时需要自信和经济的援助。”

除了空间的尺度和尺度的概念，红色一直作为卡普尔的标志性色彩，伴随他的艺术生涯。2014年，卡普尔获得了Vontobelbank的独家使用权，他将作品命名为“黑色”，通过一个巨大的圆形镜面水碗组成，水碗在镜面中旋转，形成一种流体的水碗，卡普尔继续扩大他的颜色概念，用颜色染料处理了镜面状的水，形成了黑洞的视觉，该作品是作为一种非同寻常的方式处理了普通材料，这表明卡普尔有能力破坏对自然世界的先入之见。

### 与中国共振

当然光的不锈钢巨型雕塑不再反射太阳的光芒，太空中的阴霾为卡普尔的作品增添了荫蔽的内质。2019年11月，太空艺术展展出了卡普尔的镜面作品及早期的雕塑作品《S曲线》（2006）和《C曲线》（2007），将被放置在太庙的正殿。《S曲线》是两片大型不锈钢无缝连接形成的“S”形雕塑，而《C曲线》则是一整片巨大的钢质不锈钢，在观察者与作品的距离而变化，Wolf在2012年的批评中指出，卡普尔的作品更像是一种视觉的吸引力，而非沉浸其中。而在中国，卡普尔的作品则被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。如：在长江、黄河、长城等大片的黑色雕塑作品中，卡普尔的作品被赋予了新的意义。
全球公认超敢说的男人来了，屡次挑战女性道德底线，女生却排队去看

可能是2019年最后一个重磅展览——
安迪·沃霍尔的中国首次个展。
这位国际艺术明星，
带着过去35年的代表作品，来到了北京。
作品在中央美术学院美术馆和太庙艺术馆，
两馆同时展出。
于10月底和11月初先后开幕，
“速足了声势”。
开展后红遍全网，
“视觉盛宴，不够看！”
“就等这个展了，一定得去打卡！”
周迅的最新时装大片，
也选择了在他的作品前拍摄。
卡普尔在印度长大，于英国成名，今年65岁，是全球最敢说敢做的艺术家之一，卡普尔认为所有雕塑都与身体有关，他的许多作品，都有性隐喻。最疯狂的一件，是在法国凡尔赛宫正中央摆放的名叫《肮脏的角落》的巨型雕塑，有人曾私下将它暗指“皇后的阴道”。

同时，他也是全球最负盛名的艺术家之一，在芝加哥的户外公共雕塑《云门》，曾有2亿5千万人看过。今年11月，一条在太空对他进行了专访。
今年11月初，卡普尔来到北京，为个展做准备。初见这位65岁的印度大爷，头发灰白，在太庙大厅检查不锈钢镜面作品，拿着毛巾擦拭几滴不起眼的污渍。

在开幕之前，一位对他进行了专访。与作品的“极端”不同，卡普尔本人给人感觉温和，语速也不快。他个头不高，一米七上下，却着迷于做巨型的公共雕塑，“公共空间的力量是很强大的，比如现在我们坐在天安门广场旁边，就能感受到它的气概扑面而来。”

这次个展体量巨大，备受关注，他35年来的重要作品被分成了两个部分同时展出。
太庙个展：与皇家建筑的碰撞

故宫东侧的太庙，本是明清皇帝祭祖的去处。在这里坐落着卡普尓的13件抽象的大雕塑，与传统的太庙建筑形成一种对立，古老又科幻。

在中轴的享殿大厅，摆着六件不锈钢装置。工作人员原计划在每件作品下垫一个基座，但卡普尓希望它们直接接触地面——有着600年历史的金砖地板。

殿内屋顶的金箔、梁柱上的彩绘，全都反射到不锈钢凹镜面上。
从90年代末以来，他一直在跟这种材料打交道，最感兴趣的是圆形镜。“因为它能把世界弄得天翻地覆，它就像一个玻璃的‘吸盘’，随着人走近走远，镜子里的景象变得虚幻飘渺，甚至从某些角度根本看不到镜子里的自己。

他希望这些‘镜子’能与太空碰撞出火花，“它们不应该像异国的外来物，而是应属于这个地方。”

但也有观众觉得这些太空格格不入：“无论色彩与形状都与恢宏厚重的太空不搭，笔直的沉香木和金丝楠木，在镜面作品中被反射折射、模糊扭曲。”

在东西配殿中，是一系列“色粉”作品。他较为早期的创作，常常会使用彩色粉末。当时他还是个到英国学习艺术的印度学生，假期回到印度，看到传统市场里小贩常常堆成一个个小山的色粉堆，唤起他内心深处对家乡的敏感。
安尼施·卡普尔，1954年出生于印度，现生活在英国伦敦，是当代最受争议的艺术家、雕塑家之一。他以大型公共装置闻名，但他的作品都免不了被一顿议论；

伦敦的《空中海米塔尔轨道》，被说丑；
巴黎的《肮脏的角落》，被说粗俗；
芝加哥的《云门》，被说笨拙……

但他享誉国际，拿的奖也没几个人能与之匹敌；
36岁，卡普尔代表英国参加威尼斯双年展；
37岁，摘得英国特纳奖——欧洲最重要、最有威信的视觉艺术大奖；
55岁，成为第一个在英国皇家艺术学院举办个展的在世艺术家；
2013年，被英国女王授予骑士爵位……

对非艺术专业的观众来说，卡普尔的作品“十分当代”，不好理解，但展览依然足够吸引人，成为北京新晋网红打卡地。
《献给心爱太阳的交响曲》 2013
央美个展：中国红

距离太庙10公里开外的中央美术学院美术馆内，卡普尔的作品占据了整个一到四层，三楼的白墙上印着他的一句话——“作为艺术家，我要使我的每一件作品不只是物体，而且是思想（大部分是东方思想）的呈现。”

四件大型装置刺激眼球，以“红”为主。

一进入，首先看到的是高达四层楼的主作品《献给心爱太阳的交响曲》。

它的中心是巨大的红色圆盘，像一个太阳，旁边的轨道在不断往上输送血红色的模块，但在终点总会坠落在地上的模块堆里，一遍遍循环往复。
卡普尔的初衷“这是一个带有悲剧色彩的作品”，不过它也让人能往温暖的方向解读，有观众说这场景就像海子的诗一样：你来人间一趟，你要看看太阳。

后光万物

VISION
Anish Kapoor

周迅的最新时装大片拍摄地也在这里，她不禁感叹：“当它们动起来的时候，在那声‘咚’之后，你才能体会到作品的真正奇妙之处。”
在卡普尔看来，所有的雕塑都与身体有关。”身体是一种非常私密、又有公共性的东西，甚至充满隐喻。”

《将成为奇特单细胞的藏面体》是一个方块体，有四面通道，“就像我们的身体一样。”
观众可以走进它的内部，看看里面像血管又像纤维的结构。"太浪漫了，愿每次与你折叠进同一个虫洞徜徉，" 有观众这样感叹。
再往下走，还是一片红色。

《我的红色家乡》，20吨混合了凡士林的红色颜料形似红糖，堆在一个直径12米的圆台上，中间一个像人形的金属块伸出长杆，缓缓地推移烘烤。

“这些红色，象征动物内脏，包括人，我们的肉身、血液、五脏六腑都是红色的。”卡普尔说，红色的另一层含义，是东方、是家乡、是一切的起源。“中国和印度一样，都是一片红色的土地。”
《远行》像一个景观，曾经只在2017年于阿根廷纪念公园展出，这次搬来了室内。一辆饱和度极高的蓝色挖掘机，爬伏在几百度红色土壤上。

颜色完全占据了他的视野，好像整个人都要被眼前的蓝色或红色吞没，包裹着你，让你身临其境。

Anish Kapoor

一个印度男孩的国际艺术之路

15年精神治疗

1954年，卡普尔出生在印度孟买的一个优渥家庭，父亲是印度人——一名海军物理学家，母亲是犹太人，祖父是犹太教堂的牧师。他从小在宗教氛围浓厚民族成分复杂的家庭长大。

杜塞赫拉中学校园
青少年时，卡普尔就读于印度屈指一指的精英高校——杜恩中学（Doon School），这是一所男校，学校历史上曾教育了印度无数的王公和亿万富翁的子女，相当于英国的“伊顿公学”。但卡普尔受不了这种教育，甚至“憎恨”这段日子，他想逃离。

1971年，卡普尔和他的兄弟搬到了以色列，学习电子工程。但六个月后他就放弃了，“我很庆幸自己在很小的时候，就明确了想当艺术家的愿望。”

1973年，他前往英国，先后在霍恩西艺术学院（Hornsey College of Art）和切尔西艺术与设计学院（Chelsea School of Art and Design）学习。留学之路并不轻松。

他从上学期间，一直到结婚生子前，接受了长达15年的精神治疗。卡普尔回忆说，对于一个在东方文化中长大、又在西方教育里被“重塑”的印度男孩来说，“居无定所”是他最大的心理障碍。

于是他每天都去工作室，“无论如何，今天一定要创作点什么出来。”这对他来说就是一种冥想和自愈的过程，直到现在65岁了，依旧坚持每天去工作室，工作10小时，每天最少要创作一件作品，有时甚至一天两三件。这也是为什么，他能成为当代艺术界最活跃的艺术家之一。
两亿五千万人看过它

卡普尔最为人所知的作品，是芝加哥的《云门》。它竖立在芝加哥的千禧公园里12年了，是这个城市最出名的地标和“打卡点”。

这个豆形的不锈钢雕塑，长约25米、高15米、宽10米，体量巨大，却没有任何焊接点。它表面光滑，能把周围的景色和城市都“收入囊中”。

听说有两亿五千万人看过它，有五亿张自拍是和它一起的。但卡普尔说，他并不喜欢这种作品与人的互动方式。
“虽然一个雕塑做完就在那里，它的命运就不是我能控制的了，但我认为作品要保持一定的严肃性。他觉得人们的拍照就走了，打个卡，没有什么意义，‘它毕竟不是迪士尼乐园里的一项游乐设施。’

卡普尔也因‘敢说敢做’背负了不少骂名，比如被放在巴黎凡尔赛宫的一件作品，就让他被骂惨了。

“皇宫的阴道”

2015年6月，卡普尔受邀在巴黎的凡尔赛宫举办个展，共展示了六件作品。其中一件大型装置《皇宫的角落》引起了轩然大波——有人将它戏称为‘皇宫的阴道’，并曾指责其为‘六月皇后’。
Le 2nd Viol de la Nation Française
des honneurs
Le 2nd Viol de la Nation Française
des honneurs

JUIES TRADIS & KABBALISTES !
CE TERÉ VOUS MÉT EN DANGER
这激怒了一大批人，开展没几天就被人泼油漆，清理后不到三个月又一次遭遇破坏。

把一件叫做“肮脏的角落”的作品放在皇宫中央，他说早知道这肯定会争议。之所以还这样做，部分原因“就是想看看在我们认为的自由的欧洲、自由的巴黎，能发生什么？”
大众认为它充满性暗示。‘可我们生在一个充满男性性象征的世界里，那么多高耸的像男性生殖器的雕塑、物件，为什么我们在地上平放一件可能有女性象征的东西，大家就突然被冒犯了？这很有问题了！’

那段时间也是难民大量涌进法国的时候，他们被视为入侵，而对卡普尔作品的讨论也插进这个范围。它被看作是在挑战法国皇权，在引发种族歧视。凡尔赛镇上的议员以引发种族仇恨为由，起诉了卡普尔和凡尔赛宫馆长。

《坠入地狱》 1992

为了一个颜色请得你死我活

卡普尔本人也很喜欢‘惹事儿’，曾经和另外一名艺术家有过一场关于颜色的大战。

卡普尔一直以来都非常痴迷。2014年，和他合作的一个英国实验室，研发出一种‘最黑的物质’，起名叫Vantablack。这种超黑涂层黑到极致，可以吸收99.965%的可见光，人眼本来能看到的褶皱、形状和轮廓都丢失了，只剩下像黑洞的物体。
由于开发成本昂贵，英国政府不仅对Vantablack的配方进行保密，还严格限制售卖。结果卡普尔买断了Vantablack的版权，大声宣扬：“只有我能用！”

另一位艺术家斯图尔特·塞普（Stuart Semple）不爽了，研发出了一种粉色叫PINK——史上最粉的粉色，并扬言谁都可以使用和购买，但是就不卖给卡普尔。

最戏剧化的一幕出现，卡普尔不知如何买到了PINK，并在社交媒体上炫耀，两人的骂战至今还没看到大结局。
《重创角落》 2008
《考古学与生物学》 2007
卡普尔说自己的作品和埃菲尔铁塔“拥有相同的命运”。在埃菲尔铁塔刚被建成时，遭到了大量巴黎人的漠视和批评，后来，铁塔却成为当代最伟大的一件艺术品，一个国家的象征。

卡普尔说：“我认为雕塑并不需要以取悦为目的，它被觉得尴尬、被骂，都没关系。我愿意给大众时间，慢慢来不用急。”

“在我们的生活里，几乎所有东西都能被命名和定义，只有在艺术世界里，存在不能被明确定义的东西。”卡普尔在无数次的采访中重申他的观点，他的目的是“play a game with the viewer（与观众做游戏）。”

他的梦想听起来也很异类：“我这一生能创作出一件作品，它浑身上下都带着问号，‘那是什么？我怎么看不懂呢？’如果能做到这一点，我就大大地满足了。”

部分图片提供：里森画廊
Lisson Gallery

Modern Weekly
November 29, 2019

阿尼什·卡普尔，作为当代艺术领域最著名艺术家之一，他的名字自千禧年后便成为大众所熟知。区别于其他国家的现代艺术家，他们的作品中往往带有鲜明的“学院”特质或主题，然而这部分“学院”特质却从未出现在他的作品中。今年十月，受中央美术学院美术馆的邀请，阿尼什·卡普尔带着他的4件大型装置作品及56件曾在世界各地展出过的公共项目的模型，在中国举办他的首次大型个人展览。

Anish Kapoor, 《线体狱》，2011, P.V.C, 33.5 x 99.09 x 72.23 cm.
2011年“新空间”艺术项目展出项目（大粤京、巴黎），摄影：陈友嘉。
Outspoken, politically opinionated and a longtime friend of Ai Weiwei -- artist Anish Kapoor may not have expected to be high on Beijing's invite list.

Yet the sculptor's first solo show in China could hardly be closer to the heart of the country's establishment: a career retrospective at a temple in between the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square.

This only tells part of the story, however.
For one thing, just a portion of Kapoor’s landmark exhibition is showing at the 15th-century Imperial Ancestral Temple. The rest is on display 10 kilometers away at Beijing’s Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), a prestigious school that has produced multiple generations of leading Chinese artists since its founding a century ago.

For another, the Mumbai-born British sculptor doesn’t consider a collaboration with a respected Chinese arts institution as somehow incompatible with his activism. After threatening to pull out of the 2016 Yinchuan Biennale over its exclusion of Ai Weiwei’s work, and turning down opportunities to exhibit in China over the dissident artist’s treatment, Kapoor now says it is time to be “part of the conversation.”

“I understand your question about being politically outspoken -- about standing up, as I have done, against, if you like, oppression,” he says during an interview at the CAFA Art Museum. “I have to mediate (this) in relation to showing in China. And (I) take the view that culture has a voice, and a cultural conversation is a conversation about joining up, not one about separating.”

In “Destierro,” Kapoor transforms part of the CAFA Art Museum into a surreal red landscape. Credit: Anish Kapoor / Lisson Gallery
Though clearly opinionated, Kapoor, who turned 65 this year, has never let politics overshadow his art. Rather, he has always been more concerned with confronting dualities through his work -- bold, challenging creations that are at once smooth and textured, convex and concave, reflective and absorbent.

These contrasts are widely explored in his Beijing retrospective. Bringing together some of his most celebrated sculptures and installations, it's a body of work that spans 35 years -- a time in which Kapoor has been knighted, won the coveted Turner Prize and represented the UK at the Venice Biennale.

The most ambitious artworks are set across three floors of CAFA’s on-campus museum. Chief among them is "Destierro," an entire room transformed into a surreal red landscape, and "My Red Homeland," a circular mass of wax almost 40 feet across around which a steel block, propelled by a motorized arm, slowly rotates.
At the temple, meanwhile, a selection of more understated sculptures is spread across three of the complex's buildings. It is here that visitors find Kapoor's curvilinear experimentation with stainless steel, alongside abstract objects that seem to emerge from -- or disappear into -- the floor beneath them.

"Of course, it's true to the work that I've made, but it has some relation with the site," Kapoor said of the decision to exhibit in this unusual setting, adding that he likes "the idea of this non-art space."

"So one building has a group of pigment works from late '70s to the early '80s, (and) one building has the big work called "Angel," which is a series of pigment stones, kind of floating in the space."
In China, red is a color that carries connotations of good fortune, patriotism and even revolution. So while Kapoor stresses that his latest exhibition isn’t specifically designed for Chinese audiences, he is acutely aware that his work may be received differently.

"China, as we all know, has a very long deep history of (the) color red itself. And I think that makes (the art a) kind of strange bridge ... which I hope engages something in the Chinese context, in the Chinese psyche. It’s the color that you walk into the space and the color grabs (you)."

"So, celebration ... but also, blood, death and decay," he adds. "Whether you are Chinese or not Chinese, we all have red inside our bodies."


CNN’s Mun Ng and Karsten Holmamn contributed to the video.
Artist Anish Kapoor plays with reality in his debut solo show in China, which brings his mirror sculptures indoors for the first time
British artist Anish Kapoor’s debut solo exhibition in China creates the illusion he has transformed a temple. Stainless steel works in the form of a concave mirror “turn the world upside down” at the Imperial Ancestral Temple, just outside the Forbidden City in Beijing, the artist says.

“[They] are hard to understand as objects, and kind of play a game with the viewer. The real project is this question about the status of the object, whether the object is a real thing or an illusory thing. We know that paintings are illusions of reality. A sculpture is supposed to be a real thing. But the question I am asking is ....is it a real thing? It is kind of in between.”

Kapoor, 65, says of the temple site: “It’s something that I understand has great weight. I hope ... there will be other artists who follow me to show [their works] in these incredible buildings. They are really very powerful and are full of all kinds of psychic memory.”

More than a dozen of the Indian-born artist’s most significant works were unveiled this week in Beijing, at the temple and the Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum. The former houses some of his earlier works and the latter more recent ones.
Anish Kapoor’s 2007 work C-Curve at the Imperial Ancestral Temple in Beijing.

Known for public sculptures that are considered by many as feats of engineering, his outdoor works often invite viewers to go on a visual and spatial adventure that is both stimulating and stretches conventions.

At the temple, his works are installed in three buildings. “I tried to think about the temples as places of history, ancestors and memory,” he says.
His sculpture *Cloud Gate* (2004–2006), also known as “the Bean” for its shape, is seen by thousands of visitors to Chicago’s Millennium Park on a daily basis. Made up of 168 stainless steel plates welded together, the immense sculpture with a mirror surface reflects and distorts the city’s skyline. Those walking around and under its 3.7–metre–high arch will get a warped sense of the city.

Visitors to the ancestral temple will have a similar experience as they stroll past works including *Stave* (2013), *C-Curve* (2007) and *S-Curve* (2006). The magisterial wooden beams, columns and roofs, and ancient copper bells lining the temple all look distorted in the reflections.
Kapoor says showing his mirror sculptures indoors at the ancestral temple strays from his usual practice.

“\[\text{I have shown them outdoors many times. There’s the sky and light. This is a complete reversal of that ... In this [new] situation, [the mirror works] are full of darkness because they are concave ... even though one thinks of a mirror as reflecting the light ... I really like [the darkness].}\]

“\[\text{[Like] the C-Curve, which sits on the ground. It’s like a Dutch painting [of a scene with people sitting around]. Dutch paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries are full of blackness. I like that,]" the artist says.

Kapoor says he wants to bring physical sensations to Chinese audiences.
“The works are open enough to allow for multiple interpretations,” he says. “They don’t have some very direct narratives. They are not trying to tell you something. It’s [a presentation] of a situation, a group of objects, a colour, or no colour, or a reflection. So it’s these physical sensations that I feel are translatable into many [different] kinds of languages.”

“The inner part of our bodies is red. So we all carry red with us,” says Kapoor. “Chinese red is slightly more orange red. It’s sort of fun … My instinct tells me that the Chinese red is triumphant. It is the colour that hits you. It’s not like blue which retreats …

Kapoor’s Sectional Body preparing for Monadic Singularity, on display in Beijing.
“The red I have used most is darker than that. These subtle differences make big differences [in] the emotional meaning of a colour. ... I’m interested in these little differences between different sorts of red and what their significance could be.”


This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: Artist plays with reality in debut solo exhibition in China

Art  Chinese history  Chinese culture
Tourism
Anish Kapoor opens solo exhibit in Imperial Ancestral Temple

By Li Xiu

Indian-born British artist Anish Kapoor has brought many of his important pieces to the Imperial Ancestral Temple, opening the second half of his solo exhibition in the Chinese capital.

TaiMiao, or the Imperial Ancestral Temple, is said to be the largest ancient palatial structure in the world. Kapoor’s stainless steel and pigment sculptures give a nod to the architectural and spiritual history of the site.

"S-Curve" by Anish Kapoor, /CGTN photo
Some of Kapoor’s mirrored steel works are displayed in the central atrium of the Imperial Ancestral Temple, like the S-Curve and C-Curve.

Visitors are also challenged to view their surroundings – and themselves – in the installation, which tries to turn the world upside down by bending and twisting everything in front of them. Ancient and contemporary art reflect each other and become part of each other in this exhibit.

![Image](image.png)

*To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red* by Anish Kapoor. /CGTN photo

In the two galleries flanking the central Temple, Kapoor displays a seminal series of pigment sculptures, emerging from the wall and floor, rendered in intense, alluring colors that deceive the eye through their forms and protrusions.

This is the first solo exhibition Kapoor’s held in China. Quite a number of his works are exhibited in another ongoing exhibition in the Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum in Beijing.

The artist invites viewers inside the structure through an inconspicuous door. It opens into a network of glowing red orifices, intravenously connected, and conjures powerful metaphors about the body, existence and spirituality.

The exhibition in the CAFA Art Museum runs through January 1, 2020. And the one at the Art Museum of the Imperial Ancestral Temple will last till the end of this year.
Lisson Gallery

CGTN (China Global Television Network)
11 November 2019

Anish Kapoor is a famous British sculptor – a specialist in installation art and conception art who has been putting "spectacular" artworks in the public domain for 40 years. He was the first living artist to be given an entire galley to display his work by the Royal Academy. For the first time, he is holding a public exhibition in China. In CGTN's Icon, host Ji Xiaojun sits down with Kapoor to find out why he thinks his work receives so much public attention.
"Symphony for a Beloved Sun" reveals a landscape, activated by a machine that's calmly processing masses of aggregating material. This system - watched over by a vast, red sun that hovers above the scene - takes place with no evident human interactions. It allows the viewer an opportunity to commune directly with the mysterious entity.

"To Anish Kapoor, the color red is like a symbolic icon," said curator Wang Churchman. "He was born in India, where red is largely applied in religious rituals. It represents communication between human beings and god, as well as energy, passion and vitality."

The themes of some pieces are not obvious from their looks, like the "Sectional Body preparing for Monadic Singularity." It's a very important piece of Anish Kapoor. The artist invites viewers inside the structure through an inconspicuous door. It opens into a network of glowing red oriels, intangibly connected, and conjures powerful metaphors about the body, existence and spirituality. The construction explores the relationship between the interior and exterior, not only of the work but of the body and space itself.

Red is not the only symbol of Kapoor. The application of mirror reflection is another. At the exhibition hall, visitors are presented with various miniatures of Kapoor's acclaimed public art displays.

"Cloud Gate" is one of them, better known as "The Bean." Displayed at Millennium Park in Chicago, it is one of the world's largest permanent outdoor art installations. The mirror-like surface reflects the activity and lights of the park and city skyline. Visitors could also see their images reflected from different perspectives. This art piece is a symbolic contemporary one. It has a simple shape, which goes well with urban life, but actually looks different in different weather, at different times. Meanwhile, the mirror fully enables the public installation to communicate with people," Wang said.

The exhibition in the CAFA Art Museum runs through January 1, 2020. And many of his other important works will be on display at the Tainan Art Museum of the Imperial Ancestral Temple next month.
Lisson Gallery

T Magazine
October issue, 2019

BEING AND NOTHINGNESS 存在与虚无
背后的深意
Test Site
卡普尔的镜与境

卡普尔的镜与境

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卡普尔的镜与境
Anish Kapoor unveils new paintings that evoke menstruation

British artist says men should be able “to deal with women’s questions”, as first major solo show in China is announced

ANNV SHAV
14th May 2019 16:35 BST
The British artist Anish Kapoor today unveiled a new series of paintings, depicting blood streaming from wounds, or, it would seem, vaginas.

His fascination, he says, stems from blood as “ritual matter”, but also its association with “the abject, with death, with the impure”. He adds: “It’s so strange that both are a place of origin and a place of dirt, or other matter, menstrual [blood].”

Speaking at the unveiling of the works at London’s Lisson Gallery, Kapoor acknowledged the problems he faced as a male artist addressing issues such as menstruation. “One of the things that arises is, inevitably, can a man deal with women’s questions? Is a man allowed to?”

Kapoor says that the “whole point” of artistic practice is that “reality can be borrowed, to be shared, envisioned, imagined”. He argues that it is a “kind of purity [to say] you can only do it if you are really black, or really Indian or if you are really a man. The point is to measure the work, not in terms of whether a man is allowed to do it or not, but in terms of whether it’s any good or not”.

He defended the US artist Dana Schutz, whose painting Open Casket sparked protests at the 2017 Whitney Biennial for its portrayal of the corpse of the black teenager Emmett Till, who was lynched by two white men in 1955. “What a weird idea, that a white artist makes work that is supposedly cultural heritage of black artists and she is given shit for it. How can it be?” Kapoor says.
It was also announced that Kapoor is to have his first major solo show in China this autumn. The sprawling retrospective will take place across two locations: the Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum and the Imperial Ancestral Temple, by the walls of the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Built during the early Ming Dynasty in 1420, the Forbidden City attracts more 10 million visitors annually. As a place where Chinese emperors worshipped during ancient festivals and ceremonies, the Imperial Ancestral Temple is one of the most scared sites in Imperial Beijing and has never been used for a contemporary art exhibition before.

Kapoor’s relationship with China has not always been plain sailing, however. In 2015, he criticised the country’s stance on copyright after an uncannily similar version of Cloud Gate, his bulbous monument in Chicago known as the bean, appeared in the town of Karamay in the Xinjiang region of China.

Kapoor today described the situation as complicated. “I did at first try quite robustly to fight a plagiarism case but things take so long,” he says. “It’s going, but very slowly. We’ll see, copyright in china is very complicated.”
A

Art is distinctly phallic, Kapoor do, in a way, the opposite." It's curious, this joyful under-
tone, because his intent could hard-
ly be more serious, a stark warning
against the politics of hate and sepa-
ration which stain so much of
the world today. Brexit is very
much part of that: “Our obsession with
purity is very much what Brexit has
come to be about,” he says.

His starting point is menstrual
blood, and the purification rituals
of his dual heritage — the Judaism of
his Iranian mother and the Hin-
duism of his Indian father.
The “ancient practice” of treat-
ing menstruating women as
impure, different, and separate
and the cleansing ritual that takes
place in a mikveh, is, he says an act
which “affects everything else, our
points of view, our sense of who’s
in the tribe and who isn’t.”

Treatning menstruating women as
impure is the beginning of tribal ali-
bation, he says. “The question we
ask about the undercurrent of
this in some perspective. These are
questions — very simple questions
that suggests that one of our best-
known sculptors has very much
enjoyed a move to painting in oils.

Later, when we grab ten minutes
to talk, we return to this question.
“I’m deeply into political correct-
ness, because to not be is too right
wing an agenda.”

LISSON GALLERY

The Jewish Chronicle
17 May 2019

KEREN DAVID

INTERVIEWS

SIR ANISH KAPOOR

NISH KAPOOR’S

latest exhibition
may not

seem immedi-
ately attractive
to those still
recovering from
this week’s Game
of Thrones. Torrents of blood flow on
to giant canvasses; the stuff of life,
death, dirt and shame splashing and
and dripping with an exuberance
that suggests that one of our best-
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place in a mikveh, is, he says an act
which “affects everything else, our
points of view, our sense of who’s
in the tribe and who isn’t.”

Treatning menstruating women as
impure is the beginning of tribal ali-
bation, he says. “The question we
ask about the undercurrent of
this in some perspective. These are
questions — very simple questions
that suggests that one of our best-
known sculptors has very much
enjoyed a move to painting in oils.

Later, when we grab ten minutes
to talk, we return to this question.
“I’m deeply into political correct-
ness, because to not be is too right
wing an agenda.”

But this other question about
whether a man is allowed to make
women’s things, ... whether a white
person is allowed to do a black
person’s thing, or whether a black
person is allowed to do a white per-
son’s thing or a woman’s allowed to
do whatever... give me a break!”

The idea of cultural appropria-
tion is “rubbish” he says. “Each one
of us can claim what enters our
mind is all. “Instead of who we exclude,
why do we exclude them, and who
decides? And is it a matter of the
colour of your skin, the place you
come from?”

His ideas about separation and
its dangers are very much part of
his Jewish identity. He is not a “prac-
ticing Jew” he says, he never was,
although his maternal grandfather
was the chazer of shuls in India. But
he is “hugely conscious of my Jew-
ishness, it matters to me massively.”

In 1984, he moved to a kibbutz in israel as a
teenager, later studying electrical
engineering, it was in israel that he
decided to be an artist, and moved
to London where he has lived ever
since.

His warnings about boundaries
extend to the Jewish community,
and argues that paternal descent
should be accepted. If we did that,
he says, we could double the num-
ber of Jews in the world. Inclusivity
is all. “Instead of who we exclude,
why do we exclude them, and who
decides? And is it a matter of the
colour of your skin, the place you
come from?”

He says, come in all sorts
and should be celebrated. And
that includes anti-Zionist Jews,
“because you can be anti-zionist
and pro-palestinian and be very Jew-
ish and not antisemitic.

To confine those things is a huge
mistake, and we must remember, it
is our tradition.

All the major writers of the left,
from Marx onwards were Jewish,”
he points out. In fact Judaism
with its emphasis on community is intri-
gically left. “I implore our Jew-
ish sisters and brothers to not be
taken in by the right wing press...”

Including the JC! “Yes!”

Our wish to protect ourselves,
he says, should not go so far as to
endanger us. “Really we have to get
this in some perspective. These are all
ways of unjustifying ourselves and we
mustn’t do it.”

Anish Kapoor is at the Lisson Gallery
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The body and the blood

Anish Kapoor’s menstrual art and the vexed question of appropriation

“Can a man deal with women’s issues?” the British artist wonders. “Is a man allowed to?”
BLOOD LEAKS and gushes from the art in Anish Kapoor’s new show at the Lisson Gallery in London. Almost literally in the case of his silicone and fibreglass reliefs: the gauze dangling beneath them is spattered with scarlet. In his oil paintings, meanwhile, blood-red spurts emanate from corporeal pinks and black cavities and orifices. Black is deathly, says Mr Kapoor, but also, like red, a colour of earth.

Mr Kapoor, a British artist who was born in Mumbai, is best known for his monumental sculptures (including a gigantic tubular installation in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in 2002). His new series of paintings contemplate the idea of ritual, and the meaning of blood—which, as he puts it, is “associated with the abject and impure”. In particular, the paintings evoke menstrual blood. That motif raises another question, a version of which these days confronts artists in every genre and form. “Can a man deal with women’s issues?” Mr Kapoor muses. “Is a man allowed to?”

Would that anxiety have occurred to him, say, 20 years ago? “We live in times of political correctness,” he responds, adding: “I am for it.” All the same, Mr Kapoor insists, “we have to manage it rather carefully”—in other words, being sure to safeguard artistic freedom. “Give me a break! What crap is that?” he asks of the notion that, for instance, a white artist should not explore a black person’s experience. Such leaps are the purpose of what he calls “the artistic imagination”. The only real question, he thinks, is whether the resulting work of art is good or bad.
Some of the shapes in his paintings—“partial objects”, Mr Kapoor calls them—are distinctly female, but the bodily references of others are more ambiguous. His white canvases suggest purity, and contamination, but also an androgynous disembodiment. In fact, while these paintings trespass on a particular “taboo” in their concern with menstruation, the curves and concavities of much of Mr Kapoor’s previous work likewise convey a preoccupation with bodies and sexuality. In his telling, the turn towards characteristically female forms goes well beyond him: he reckons that the entire history of art since Freud has involved a reorientation from phallic forms to the inward kind. In another of Mr Kapoor’s metaphors, instead of peering from the mouth of the cave up into the sky, artists have instead turned back into the shadows. 

The layout at the Lisson Gallery reinforces the theme of ritual. Several of the canvases hang around a pink onyx sculpture, in which twin ovoid shapes are encased in a sarcophagus or urn. As Mr Kapoor sees it, the blood in his paintings is pouring into the recesses of the stone, which to him resembles a mikveh or Jewish ritual bath (he is Jewish, but also describes himself as a practising Buddhist). To this reviewer’s eye, the sculpture evokes a receptacle for the blood of a sacrifice; Mr Kapoor accepts that interpretation, too. Purity and defilement, sacrifice and cleansing: in art, as in life, contradictory things are often bound together.

“Anish Kapoor” is showing at the Lisson Gallery, London, until June 22nd
Anish Kapoor unveils new paintings that evoke menstruation

British artist says men should be able “to deal with women’s questions”, as first major solo show in China is announced

ANNY SHIN
14th May 2019 16:35 BST
The British artist Anish Kapoor today unveiled a new series of paintings, depicting blood streaming from wounds, or, it would seem, vaginas.

His fascination, he says, stems from blood as “ritual matter”, but also its association with “the abject, with death, with the impure”. He adds: “It’s so strange that both are a place of origin and a place of dirt, or other matter, menstrual [blood].”

Speaking at the unveiling of the works at London’s Lisson Gallery, Kapoor acknowledged the problems he faced as a male artist addressing issues such as menstruation. “One of the things that arises is, inevitably, can a man deal with women’s questions? Is a man allowed to?”

Kapoor says that the “whole point” of artistic practice is that “reality can be borrowed, to be shared, envisioned, imagined”. He argues that it is a “kind of purity [to say] you can only do it if you are really black, or really Indian or if you are really a man. The point is to measure the work, not in terms of whether a man is allowed to do it or not, but in terms of whether it’s any good or not”.

He defended the US artist Dana Schutz, whose painting Open Casket sparked protests at the 2017 Whitney Biennial for its portrayal of the corpse of the black teenager Emmett Till, who was lynched by two white men in 1955. “What a weird idea, that a white artist makes work that is supposedly cultural heritage of black artists and she is given shit for it. How can it be?” Kapoor says.
It was also announced that Kapoor is to have his first major solo show in China this autumn. The sprawling retrospective will take place across two locations: the Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum and the Imperial Ancestral Temple, by the walls of the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Built during the early Ming Dynasty in 1420, the Forbidden City attracts more 10 million visitors annually. As a place where Chinese emperors worshipped during ancient festivals and ceremonies, the Imperial Ancestral Temple is one of the most sacred sites in Imperial Beijing and has never been used for a contemporary art exhibition before.

Kapoor’s relationship with China has not always been plain sailing, however. In 2015, he criticised the country’s stance on copyright after an uncannily similar version of Cloud Gate, his bulbous monument in Chicago known as the bean, appeared in the town of Karamay in the Xinjiang region of China.

Kapoor today described the situation as complicated. “I did at first try quite robustly to fight a plagiarism case but things take so long,” he says. “It’s going, but very slowly. We’ll see, copyright in China is very complicated.”
Anish Kapoor at the Lisson Gallery

Helena Wadia
14th May 2019

He is known around the world for his sculptures, but the latest exhibition from Sir Anish Kapoor also focuses on his works on canvas. Rarely shown in public, his paintings often relate closely to his works with stone and mirror.

The new collection, at the Lisson Gallery, is accompanied by three standing stones, placed outside the building.

Anish Kapoor is showing at the Lisson Gallery from 15 May - 22 June 2019
Anish Kapoor has exposed a bottomless void at the heart of Britain. You could topple in there and never stop falling. In fact, that is exactly what we have done - and solid ground still seems to be nowhere in sight.

Anish Kapoor’s Brexit artwork: Britain on the edge of the abyss

This artwork, which Kapoor has created for the Guardian, is his response to our current predicament and the new Britain that appeared after the leave vote. Although the Mumbai-born artist has given it a title - A Brexit, A Broxit, We All Fall Down - he does not wish to make any further comment about the piece, preferring to let it speak for itself.

The use of colour to suggest infinite voids is one of Kapoor’s most mind-bending abilities as an artist - as a visitor to an exhibition in Portugal recently discovered. The man actually fell into one work, a black hole in the floor of the gallery. The artist’s use of the world’s blackest paint, which is actually called Kapoor Black, made it impossible to gauge the hole’s depth. When the man fell in, it turned out to be a lot shallower than it looked, luckily for him.
This wound, however, is anything but shallow. Britain has inflicted a dreadful injury on itself: a gory rip stretching from Glasgow to the south coast. Our fellow Europeans are watching aghast from across the water as we near the abyss of a no-deal Brexit. Kapoor suggests the damage is even visible from space. His artwork might serve as a warning to any passing flying saucers: avoid this riven nightmare of a nation.

While he wants this image to speak for itself, Kapoor has been a consistent and vocal opponent of Brexit since the 2016 referendum. He recently characterised our political paralysis as a descent into strange mental territory. “We’ve allowed ourselves as a nation to enter a space of unknowing,” he told the i newspaper. “I can’t help but see it in terms of a depressive self.” He compared it to “self-harm”.

And here is the result of that self-harm. This is a surrealistic work, one that seeks to let the unconscious out. But instead of his own demons, Kapoor lets out the shadows in the nation’s psyche: yours, mine and Jacob Rees-Mogg’s. For, like a black hole of melancholy, something about this bottomless pit is alluring. Part of you wants to fall in.

So this work goes well beyond simple sloganising. It is not another protest. It is an attempt to psychoanalyse the British. Is there something about us that wants to fall into shadow? There may be fear down there, but there’s mystery too. What if, like that man in Portugal, we jumped? Britain’s domestic history is remarkably middle of the road - a story of reform and stability - and yet there are moments when things go haywire and we find ourselves in a trench of blood.

Kapoor has captured our morbid obsession with the futile chasm of Brexit, the perverse character of a nation that wants, in some sad corner of itself, to be back in the trenches. A bigger trench this time, where meaning ends and reality dissolves.

* Anish Kapoor’s latest exhibition is at Pitshanger Manor, London, until 18 August.*
Anish Kapoor: ‘Brexit is like what teenagers do when they self harm’

Glossy mirrors vs dirty orifices: as he opens two new exhibitions, Hettie Judah asks who is the real Anish Kapoor?

I did not realise, until I sat down to write, that Anish Kapoor had turned 65 the day before our interview. Had he, in retrospect, been a little dishevelled, a touch morning-after? Sure, there was paint on his quilted jacket – scraps of the hot reds, oranges and pinks that lick across his works on paper – but I had assumed that was part of a studied pose.

These days, the sculptor responsible for Chicago’s massive Cloud Gate(aka The Bean) and London’s even more massive ArcelorMittal Orbit is rather a snappy dresser. Knighted in 2013, he rolls with an international art elite more given to Gucci and Prada than battered Uniqlo.
Thus his choice of attire for a high-profile press conference seemed calculated
to communicate hands-on involvement in the world of making. I thought Sir
Anish was serving Jackson Pollock reallness, but maybe he just woke up late after
his birthday party and grabbed the first thing to hand?

‘I’ve always been very interested in exotic materials’

The first of two Kapoor shows opening in London this spring, this is the
inaugural exhibition in the gallery adjacent to the freshly restored Pitshanger
Manor in Ealing. A gorgeous little jewel-box of a building, it was Sir John Soane’s
country house from 1800 to 1810 and is full of the great architect’s luscious
flourishes: delicious proportions, domes, mirrors, painted ceilings and coloured
glass.

You can see immediately why they chose Kapoor to open the gallery: he shares
Soane’s fascination with perceptual trickery. Concavities, concentric forms,
framed views, eccentric perspectives and the desire to give intense pleasure in
the act of looking are shared concerns for artist and architect alike.

![Image of Kapoor's artwork](image)

Installation view of Anish Kapoor at Pitshanger Manor & Gallery. Photo: Dave Morgan; Artwork © Anish Kapoor, courtesy Lisson Gallery

“I’ve known of Soane a long time. It’s good to recognise, from my perspective,
that many of these things that I’ve been playing with over the years were played
with before in a different way,” says Kapoor. “There are a lots of overlaps. What’s
interesting about Soane is that it’s very playful.”

We’re sitting in Pitshanger Manor’s small dining room, and the sculptor nods
approvingly at the blood-red walls: Soane was not shy of bold colour. Red, too, is
something of a Kapoor signature, he has “made hundreds of red works” in
materials ranging from powdered pigment to aluminium to silicone to wax (“I’ve
always been very interested in exotic materials”).
The exhibition in the adjacent gallery includes a red, mirrored work – *Glisten Eclipse* (2018) – concealing a classic Kapoor illusion. Two red convex mirrors jointed like a clamshell are shown in a corner – except that as you walk past the colour drains off one mirror in a sudden flash, revealing the colour as perfect reflection.

“For many years I've worked with concave mirror forms of all types: concavity of course invites interiority which is why I'm interested in it. It turns the world upside down.”

The theme of concavity runs through Kapoor's exhibition at Pitzhanger, which is entrancing, despite its apparent simplicity. On paper, it's a small array of convex mirrors, and hollow, mirror-polished metal balls, but all perform subtly different tricks. Working out where exterior surface ends and interior begins, and vice versa, engages you in a constant game of wits.

The newly restored Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing. Photo: © Andy Stagg

The modest scale of this space with its glass ceiling domes allows circular reflections to zip around the room between the various objects, creating vistas of overlapping geometry that recall Soane's echoing archways in the main house.

“Geometry when taken to perfect extremes is also mysterious,” says Kapoor. “Geometry is a mind thing, it's not a body thing, it's completely made of mathematics and precision. Yet it can have this unknowable quality and that I think is another weird relationship with Soane – geometry does something that is less than graspable when given free rein.”
Ah, the mind/ body thing. This show is all about ethereal pleasures and perfection: when I last sat down with Kapoor, exactly two years ago, he was unveiling an exhibition of rather different work at the Lisson Gallery.

The sculptures in that show resembled vast, bloodied, festering bones bound with gauze. Works on paper looked like he’d been sketching the corrosive flames of hell. Many featured orifice-like forms that recalled his monumental trumpet-like sculpture Dirty Corner seen head on (which is a roundabout way of saying they look a bit vaginal.)

At the time, the artist was vocally incensed about the racism, xenophobia and intolerance whipped up by UKIP and the Leave campaign. The exhibition seemed a visceral response. How’s he feeling now, I wonder? I mention Brexit, and there is some cathartic swearing.

“It’s very interesting, isn’t it, that psychically we’ve allowed ourselves as a nation to enter a space of unknowing, and that we let it linger and linger. And it’s not just our leaders, it’s all of us,” he ponders.

“Nations don’t do that, so why are we doing it? Is it some un-nameable spirit in us? I’ve been in psychoanalysis for more than 30 years, and I can’t help but see it in terms of a depressive self. It’s like what teenagers do when they self harm.”

Read more: Can Martin Parr’s jolly exhibition cheer up Brexit Britain? Maybe

In May, he has a new exhibition at Lisson Gallery. It’s largely of paintings, and they’re picking up where that last, visceral show left off. Are his thoughts about the psychic state of the nation feeding into these paintings? He thinks it’s inescapable.
“An artist’s job is to try and uncover what’s unknown, otherwise it’s not worth doing. What is not known in the deeper self. Making paintings is about trying to uncover something I didn’t know before. The zeitgeist of course affects that – it’s bound to.”

These two Anish Kapoors – the artist of the mind and the artist of the body, if you like – have coexisted for a while. The red wax sculpture Swayambh (meaning self-generated) was first installed in 2007. Running on rails it left scraped traces of itself as it passed through doorways, messing up the immaculate whiteness of the art gallery.

The canon-like Shooting into the Corner, installed at the Royal Academy in 2009, fired red wax, building up an oozing messy heap over the course of his exhibition. Both seemed deliberate, wilful transgressions: a kind of acting out by an artist that had attained a status that put him beyond reprimand.

Read more: The best exhibitions to visit in 2019, from Van Gogh to Bridget Riley

There’s no question that he’s more drawn to this visceral, bodily side at the moment, and has been “for the last few years.” How does all this dirt relate to the polish, how does the Anish that wants to please with perfection relate to the Anish who wants to disgust and horrify?

“I ask myself all the time – how do I reconcile these two things? And I’ve given up. I can’t reconcile them. They are just two aspects of the stupid idiot that I am,” he says, flashing a winning smile and shrugging his shoulders within that delicately paint-besmeared jacket.

Anish Kapoor, Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery, London, to 18 August (07756 866739); Anish Kapoor, Lisson Gallery, London, 15 May to 22 June (020 7724 2739)
John Soane's Pitzhanger Manor, review: a brilliant addition to London’s art scene

It's a magnificent mansion, designed and lived in by the visionary neo-classical architect Sir John Soane (1753-1837), with a gallery alongside, set on the edge of a handsome park in Ealing, a mere tube hop from the centre of London. So how come you've probably never heard of it?
Substantially this is because Pitzhanger Manor spent much of the past century in the ownership of Ealing Council, functioning as a public library and little-visited gallery, and acquiring so many coats of municipal emulsion, the hand of Soane was barely visible.

Four years ago, however, the council closed Pitzhanger, forming a trust to restore the house and turn the adjoining library, built in the Thirties on top of Soane’s demolished kitchens, into an art gallery.

The superb restoration, which opens on Saturday, returns the building as far as can be imagined to its original condition, while providing fascinating insights into Soane’s creatively fertile, but ultimately troubled time here.

An Oxfordshire builder’s son, who worked his way up to become architect of the Bank of England and President of the Royal Academy, Soane bought this plot, then in deepest rural Middlesex, as a weekend retreat, laying out extensive gardens – now Walpole Park – where he enjoyed fishing with his close friend, the painter J.M.W. Turner.
The house, with its row of Grecian maidens atop ionic columns, appears a typically eccentric Soanean classical fantasy, a style familiar from his Dulwich Picture Gallery and his other more famous London residence in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, now the Soane Museum. Stepping inside, you enter the theatrical world of Soane’s imagination, the lower walls painted in sepulchral grey, while muted amber light filters eerily from a dim space overhead – actually from inner windows in the children’s bedrooms. With a statue of Minerva standing over the oval sky-lit staircase, it’s like being in a Roman tomb that also functions as a family house.
Soane retained two floors of an earlier building on the site designed by his mentor, George Dance the Younger, and a comparison of the two architects is revealing: where Dance’s airy reception rooms, including a beautifully restored “Chinese” room with hand-painted wall-paper, have a typically neo-classical light and clarity, Soane obsessedly plays with space, using mirrors, curving ceilings, arches and looming gaps between doorways to create a sense of ambiguous monumentality. You soon lose track of how big the house actually is. It feels grand, but is actually pretty tiny.

In the immaculately restored breakfast room, the circular ceiling, with its trompe l’oeil painted sky, seems to float in the curving “canopied” vaulting. Such a preoccupation with bending space, and Soane’s use of infinite mirrors (in the library) and ambiguous illusion, means he could hardly have found a better contemporary foil than the sculptor Anish Kapoor, whose mirrored spheres look superb here, apparently floating against the white walls of the new gallery.

Kapoor’s sculptures are all recent, with one, the extraordinary Red to Blue (2016), seen here for the first time: three enormous rainbow-tinted discs that seem to swell out from the wall. The reflected room swivels alarmingly in the burnished surfaces, which reveal themselves as shallow concave dishes as you approach.

But the most Soanean of Kapoor’s works, in which you can feel a real meeting of minds between architect and sculptor over two and a half centuries is the square, Untitled (2018), in which the entire space is reflected, with you the viewer walking upside down across the ceiling.
Soane's time here didn't end well. Disappointed by his children's lack of interest in architecture and his wife's boredom with country weekends, he sold up after only ten years. This sympathetic restoration, however, with inspired use of modern art in the gallery, makes both a perfect introduction to Soane's unique architectural vision and a brilliant addition to London's art scene.

(Kapoor exhibition) Until Aug 18; 07756 866739; pitzhanger.org.uk
Anish Kapoor: 'If I was a young Muslim, would I feel angry enough to join Isis? I would at least think about it'

Interview

Britain has gone through the looking glass and the artist's new show follows it into the abyss. He talks about the upsurge in racism, fighting for Shamima Begum - and his clash with France's president

At 7.30 on the morning after Britain voted to leave the European Union, Anish Kapoor left his London flat for an appointment with his analyst. On the street, he heard two men talking. “Bet he doesn’t even speak English,” said one. “I turned around and they were talking about me. I was so furious.”

Sir Anish Mikhail Kapoor, CBE, RA, the 65-year-old, Turner prize-winning, Mumbai-born British-Indian artist, who has lived in London since the early 1970s and (though this is hardly the point) speaks better English than most of his countrymen, had woken up in a new land. “Since then permission has been given for difference, rather than being celebrated, to be undermined.”
Kapoor’s latest exhibition, a suite of mirrors and other discombobulating reflective sculptures, some inspired by Lewis Carroll, opens on Saturday at Pitzhanger Manor in London. Like Alice, Britain has gone through the looking glass, splintered its image and emerged in darkness.

Last year, a visitor to the Serralves museum in Porto jumped with Kierkegaardian heedlessness, into another of Kapoor’s works, a 2.5-metre circular hole called Descent Into Limbo, fell eight feet and had to be taken to hospital. Perhaps that’s an unwitting allegory too: Britain is broken, and is now stuck in the eternal limbo of Theresa May’s Brexit strategy.

The sense of being diminished for the colour of his skin in a resurgent racist Britain is one reason Kapoor has decided to campaign for Shamima Begum, the young Londoner who joined Isis in Syria aged 15 and has since had three children die there, most recently her three-week-old son, Jarrah.

“One of the good things about Britain is that people from all over the world lived here, reasonably tolerantly with different views,” says Kapoor. “Increasingly that’s less likely to be the case. We’re seeing a kind of enforced normality where you have to prove you’re a real Brit in some way that fits the populist agenda. Come on! Britons are better than that.”

Kapoor is not Muslim, but Jewish (he was born to a Jewish mother of Iraqi ancestry and a Hindu father). Nevertheless, Begum’s case resonates with him. “There’s this real sense for me of who’s next? There’s an atmosphere of vilifying Muslims for having extreme views. If I was a young Muslim, would I feel angry enough to have joined Isis? I would at least think about it.”

Kapoor has experience of being vilified as an artist. In 2015 he installed Dirty Corner, a vast steel funnel made for the gardens of Versailles, a sculpture he described as “the vagina of the queen”. He intended it to disrupt landscape-gardener André Le Nôtre’s perfect geometric perspectives. “Before it opened I did an interview with the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva in which I said I wanted to create some unease in this ordered space. It worked beyond my wildest dreams. Within two weeks it was covered with graffiti, which we cleaned off. We’d hardly finished when antisemitic graffiti appeared on it.”
The sculpture and surrounding rocks were sprayed with such phrases as “SS blood sacrifice” and “the second RAPE of the nation by DEVIAN'T JEWISH activism”. Kapoor decided not to erase them, but to display the ugliness manifested, the return of the repressed.

“I felt from the start this was an inside job. They have cameras everywhere, but when we asked the police to open an investigation they found nothing. I say phooey to that.” Then a councillor took Kapoor to court, bizarrely accusing the artist of displaying antisemitic material. He was invited for an audience at the Élysée Palace with then President François Hollande.

“It was around the time Isis bombed Palmyra” – the ruins of an ancient city that for 1,500 years had been one of the best preserved sites from antiquity. “So I said, ‘Mr President, the thing to do is call on people in France to speak out against the destruction of culture.’ And he replied, ‘C’est vous qui devriez le faire!’ It’s you who must do it. I thought, ‘Pathetic shit.’ Then he asked me to remove the graffiti. He said, ‘From a pedagogic point of view I understand what you are doing, but as a citizen I cannot agree. Complete waste of time!’

In the end Kapoor covered the bits of graffiti that were prominent with gold leaf- gold leaf being Louis XIV’s go-to decorative material. Just enough not to land him in jail.

What about antisemitism this side of the Channel - does Kapoor have compunctions about Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn? “No, I’m Jewish and I believe he has done his best on this. He’s an anti-Zionist. And you can be anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian without being antisemitic.” Kapoor suspects this is a distraction from a bigger political issue. “What this all misses is that we have probably the most rightwing government in Europe. If Corbyn comes to power he will be the first prime minister since Thatcher to believe people matter more than or as much as business. Blair was just a continuation of Thatcher. And that matters because the biggest polluters of our world are all big businesses.”
Sporting a hazmat suit, Kapoor guides me through his vast warehouse complex near the Oval cricket ground in London. Masked assistants, like a dozen Jesse Pinkmans to his Walter White, are cooking up not crystal meth, but carefully buffed painted mirrors, blood-red resin sculptures that look like placentas, and a work consisting of what Kapoor calls a hair of metal shards overlaying a dark conic space.

We pause before a large sculpture consisting of fabric folded in on itself on a mesh carapace. The fabric is curled up like a bouquet of roses, dark spaces between each petal. It’s an unsettling variation on a theme that increasingly obsessed Kapoor in recent years: the negative space opened up by folds in fabric, paper, any material. While early folded works, such as the 2016 etching Fold IV, were riffs on open books (or just possibly variants on his Versailles vagina, but certainly not at all phallic) this piece is a symphony of holes that contain more than you’d think.

“The story we were told at art school is that the Renaissance’s great discovery was perspective. But there’s another aspect, which is the fold. Being is represented in the involuted fold. The body of the Madonna is represented by the fold of her cloak.”

We should, Kapoor tells me, look into the spaces between. “We live in a world of phallic objects. It’s as if Brancusi’s modernism led to the rocket, the forward-thrusting. I’m anti-phallic. Plato wanted to lead us out of the cave into the light. But what about the back of the cave, the upside down which is dark, perhaps even menacing and abject?” His is the art of stranger things, with Kapoor as sculpture’s answer to Joyce Byers excavating voids into uncanny realms.

“I am the luckiest man alive,” he says, as we stroll through the studios. “In the 60s there were perhaps five artists - Francis Bacon, Henry Moore and a few others - who could live by making art. Now the art world is huge and everything is for sale. I expected to spend my life teaching art rather than being able to be an artist.”

But you’re an artist making commodities even though you despise neoliberal commodification. “It’s a system I’ve benefited from, no question. We risk becoming further cogs in the wheel of production. Only poetry and the more serious classical music seem able to resist becoming commodities. There’s a sense that art has been eroded by the market. The world that Steve Bannon wants is here. And it’s our fault.” Whose? “Liberal lefties like me. I’m going to dare the art world is a part of it.” Part of what? “The ruin of art’s ability to stand opposed to the order of things.”

It is as if art had fallen, bewitched by its own reflection, into Narcissus’s pool. Which brings us back to Pitzhanger Manor. It’s a brilliant coup to get the modern master of mirrors to do the first show at architect Sir John Soane’s former country house after its lottery-funded refurbishment. Soane’s spaces, after all, involve a play of mirrors “to infer a multitude of elsewheres”, as artist Mark Pimlott puts it in his essay for the show.
Kapoor’s mirrors are mostly concave, Soane’s convex or flat. Where Soane’s mirrors point beyond or back, Kapoor’s point within. It’s Nietzschean: we look into the abyss, and the abyss stares back.

Kapoor likes that idea. “Perhaps that is the mission of the artist - to make something that isn’t knowable, that bears long looking, that’s a dangerous thing, a deep space full of darkness.” Such is his best art: mirrors that trap, voids that eat you up, bloody wall hangings that menace.

Kapoor thinks once more of the Portuguese man who fell into a hole. “Bless him, poor soul, he thought it was an illusion, even though he’d been given a piece of paper to tell him it was eight feet deep. And then he jumped in as if to prove it wasn’t. In a way I was 100% successful. Art had taken him somewhere unexpected.”
Politics

The NRA Used Anish Kapoor's Most Famous Work in a Political Ad. Now the Artist Is Blasting Back.

The artist behind 'The Bean' stands off against the NRA’s 'Clenched Fist of Truth.'

Eileen Kinsella, March 12, 2018

Artist Anish Kapoor today blasted the National Rifle Association in an open letter in collaboration with the gun control advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety. Specifically, he slammed the NRA for appropriating the image of his famed Chicago sculpture Cloud Gate, affectionately dubbed “The Bean,” that sits in Millennium Park, where it was installed in 2004.
Kapoor said the NRA used an image of the work—which shows the bean and a surrounding crowd in the plaza—without his consent in a “politiciised advertisement” called the “The Clenched Fist of Truth.” In his letter, Kapoor says the ad “plays to the basest and most primal impulses of paranoia, conflict and violence, and uses them in an effort to create a schism to justify its most regressive attitudes.” The artist added that he was “disgusted” to see his work used by the NRA “to promote their vile message.”

In the wake of recent shootings in Florida, Las Vegas, and Texas, Kapoor said that it is “more urgent than ever that this organization is held to account for its ongoing campaign of fear and hate in American society.”

The advertisement in question is a one-minute video available on the NRA website, featuring national spokesperson Dana Loesch. As Loesch speaks, images flash across the screen in black-and-white showing crowds in time-lapsed movement. One of these is Kapoor’s ‘Cloud Gate’ with people shown in stop-motion moving around it. Another shows the Hollywood sign, as Loesch speaks about an unidentified “They,” who, she says, “use their media to assassinate real news,” “use their schools to teach children that their president is another Hitler,” “use their movie stars and singers and comedy shows and award shows to repeat their narrative over and over again,” and “use their ex-president to endorse the Resistance.”

Loesch ends by stating: “I’m the NRA,” and calling the gun lobbying organization “Freedom’s safest place.”

Kapoor begs to differ, writing that the NRA video “gives voice to xenophobic anxiety, and a further call to ‘arm’ the population against a fictional enemy.”

The complete letter is below:
Last year an image of my work Cloud Gate (in Millennium Park Chicago) was used without my consent in a politicalised advertisement for the National Rifle Association (NRA), entitled The Clenched Fist of Truth. The NRA's "advertising"—as they describe the video on their own website—seeks to whip up fear and hate. It plays to the basest and most primal impulses of paranoia, conflict and violence, and uses them in an effort to create a schism to justify its most regressive attitudes. Hidden here is a need to believe in a threatening "Other" different from ourselves. I am disgusted to see my work—in truth the sculpture of the people of Chicago—used by the NRA to promote their vile message. Recent shootings in Florida, Las Vegas, Texas, and a number of other towns and cities, make it more urgent than ever that this organization is held to account for its ongoing campaign of fear and hate in American society.

Cloud Gate reflects the space around it, the city of Chicago. People visit the sculpture to get married, to meet friends, to take selfies, to dance, to jump, to engage in communal experience. Its mirrored form is engulfing and intimate. It gathers the viewer into itself. This experience, judging by the number of people that visit it every day (two-hundred million to date), still seems to carry the potential to communicate a sense of wonder. A mirror of self and other, both private and collective, Cloud Gate—or the 'Bean' as it is affectionately referred to—is an inclusive work that engages public participation. Its success has little to do with me, but rather with the thousands of residents and visitors who have adopted it and embraced it as their 'Bean'. Cloud Gate has become a democratic object in a space that is free and open to all.

In the NRA's vile and dishonest video, Cloud Gate appears as part of a montage of iconic buildings that purport to represent 'Liberal America' in which the 'public object' is the focus of communal exchange. Art seeks new form, it is by its nature a dynamic force in society. The NRA in its nationalist rhetoric uses Cloud Gate to suggest that these ideas constitute a 'foreign object' in our midst. The NRA's video gives voice to xenophobic anxiety, and a further call to 'arm' the population against a fictional enemy.

The NRA's nightmarish, intolerant, divisive vision perverts everything that Cloud Gate—and America—stands for. Art must stand clear in its mission to recognise the dignity and humanity of all, irrespective of creed or racial origin.

Gun violence in the United States affects every citizen of your country—all religions, all cultures, all ages. The NRA's continued defence of the gun industry makes them complicit in compromising the safety of the many in favour of corporate profit. I support Everytown for Gun Safety and their efforts to build safer communities for everyone across the United States.

Anish Kapoor
Artist
There's almost nothing in this Hayward show – and that's the point

*Shape Shifters at the Hayward Gallery is intriguing, elusive, contains at least one masterpiece and is full of menace*

*Martin Gayford*

A reflection on still water was perhaps the first picture that Homo sapiens ever encountered. The importance of mirrors in the history of art has been underestimated. Alberti, Vasari and Leonardo recommended them as a tool for painters. Van Eyck delighted in them. Caravaggio had one in his studio. And they haven’t stopped fascinating artists. *Shape Shifters*, the new exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, might as well have been entitled ‘Modern Art through the Looking Glass’.
Consequently, you see yourself all over the show, generally in surprising forms and positions. Early on, for example, you come across Anish Kapoor's 'Non-Object (Door)' (2008), a rectangular block of highly polished stainless steel, each side of which is curved and convex. The result is that, as you approach it, your reflected image — and the surroundings — swirl and fly around. Meanwhile, the work itself, which is, after all, a large metallic object, effectively disappears.

Dematerialisation is, you might think, an unexpected effect for a sculptor to aim at. After all, traditionally, sculpture has been about form, mass and weight. But making solid objects melt away is one of Kapoor's constant preoccupations. His 'Sky Mirror, Blue' (2016), installed on one of the rooftop courts at the Hayward, scoops up the skyline of London, and the clouds above, turns them upside-down and colours them a steely cobalt. Viewed at a distance, from inside the gallery, this is a strangely compelling sight: a cool, contemporary equivalent to the celebrated black obsidian mirror in which the Elizabethan magus Dr John Dee claimed to see spirits.

Reflections can do two intriguing things. They can make what's really there disappear and, perhaps simultaneously, create a new setting that doesn't actually exist at all. Richard Wilson's celebrated piece '20: 50' (1987) does both of these tricks, which adds an undertone of existential threat — and perfectly rational anxiety.

It consists of a huge tank of black recycled engine oil (the title refers to the grade of its viscosity, a particularly thick and glutinous one). You advance into this along a gangway that gets progressively narrower, so that at the end you are standing almost completely surrounded by this dense liquid. You can't really see it, but — and this is the sinister part — you can certainly smell it.

What you actually see is the top part of the room, reflected in the perfectly smooth surface — a black mirror much better than Dr Dee's. Like most contemporary art fans, I've experienced this piece many times in various iterations of the Saatchi Gallery over the years. Nonetheless, for a second the illusion fooled me. I was visiting the show before the installation was quite complete, and briefly wondered whether the oil had been pumped in yet. Then I realised that what I had assumed was some space below the gallery floor was in fact a vast and faultless reflection of the ceiling.
This work by Wilson — a masterpiece — is sui generis in its injection of a hint of menace (a worry about the consequences if a trailing cuff or scarf were to dip into the art). Most of the pieces on show are more serene, though there is a subtly disquieting quality to Yayoi Kusama’s ‘Narcissus Garden’ (1966–2018). This is another room-filling installation, but rather than thick, inky oil she has covered the floor with shiny metal globes the size of bowling balls. Each of these, the title suggests, is like a tiny mini-you, mirroring the spectator in almost but — because the angle changes — not quite the same way as all the others.

Several of the artists included in the show were based in California in the 1960s and afterwards, and represent a movement or tendency that hasn’t yet been given a satisfactory name. Various tags have been suggested: ‘light and space’, ‘West Coast minimalism’ and, slightly desperately, the ‘LA look’. But none caught on in the way that, say, ‘pop art’ did.

In a way, it’s appropriate that this group, if it was a group, should be nameless, since the works on show by Larry Bell and Robert Irwin are exceptionally elusive. Irwin’s ‘Untitled (Acrylic Column)’, 1969–2011, is close to not being there at all. It’s a long, thin, transparent prism suspended in front of you. The artist calls it an ‘optical instrument’.

When you look through it, what you see is inflected. Only slightly, but enough to suggest that everything we look at is illusory — or is at least created by our sense organs and brains, working together, on the basis of evidence that is always partial and sometimes wrong.

This is also the message of the exhibition. You might complain that there’s almost nothing in the Hayward — just a lot of mirrors and reflections — leaning against the wall, on the floor, in mirror glass mazes, and even carried around by live performers. But that is also the point.
ALL FORM IS GOOD: INTERVIEW WITH ANISH KAPOOR

BY NED CARTER WILES

Anish Kapoor first exhibited at London’s Lisson gallery in 1982. In the 35 years since then, he has used a wide variety of materials, including pigment, stone, mirrors and wax to extend his artistic enquiry in both private shows and high-profile public commissions.

Now, in Lisson’s 50th year since owner Nicholas Logsdail founded the gallery, Kapoor is exhibiting there for the 16th time with an unusually eclectic selection of works. Among them are painted three-dimensional silicon objects wrapped in gauze, mirror pieces and a collection of “drawings” that more closely resemble traditional paintings. ArtAsiaPacific caught up with Kapoor at the show’s preview to talk about the spaces he creates, the problem of the artist’s hand with which he has struggled throughout his career, and the development of mythology in both art and life.
You've spoken about developing languages in your practice—a “pigment” language, a “void” language, a “mirror” language—how would you describe the language here?

It’s confusing. I don’t have a phrase for it yet, but I think what I’m trying to get at is that the object includes its shadow. One of the things the gauze does is include a space within the space of the object. It’s only half-physical.

Would you call the space a heterotopia?

Yes, something like that. I haven’t made enough of them yet and I haven’t fully formed it, but it’s happening there somewhere …

ANISH KAPOOR, Shade, 2016, silicone, fiberglass and gauze, 236 × 325 × 225 cm, Copyright the artist. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London.

Do you believe there’s such a thing as an ideal language?

I don’t believe there’s an ideal language at all. Some of them have been geometric and, if you like, utopic; others have been entropic and acknowledge decay. I don’t see entropy as not being mathematical; it’s just a different kind of geometry, even though it doesn’t appear to be so at a first reading. A normal flow of art history would tell us that artists work in that way or that way. For some reason, I need both sides.

What does it mean to you then to have both entropic and geometric “languages” under the same roof?

In my first studio I wrote on a wall: “There is no hierarchy of form. All form is good.” And I’ve stuck with it. I guess they both acknowledge psychic reality. One is a pursuit for an absolute or a purity, while the other is uncertain, and I’m more interested right now in uncertainty than I am in purity, especially as purity seems vulgar in this political moment.

There’s something very fleshy and visceral about these silicon paintings. They seem to suggest violence, but also a kind of genesis. What is this doing?

Those two words you’ve used, one is beginning and one is the end. All our ideas about the universe seem to suggest a big bang, a blow-up beginning and a blow-up end, and one wonders to what extent those things are mythological, even in physics. One of the real pursuits of art—perhaps more so of abstract art—is consciousness. Science on the whole hasn’t been so good at talking about this. I think it’s legitimate to ponder what is a beginning, what is consciousness. It necessarily implicates things like meaning, that moment when a non-thing becomes something, and, in the conversation between a viewer and a thing being viewed, where and how meaning arises and recedes. I think that to-and-fro is essential, and has something to do with both consciousness and, weirdly, with beginning and end. It’s not fully logical, but it has something to it.
In your drawings, there seems to be clear cosmological imagery. You’ve got your crescent moons and supernovas and nebulae . . .

Definitely! Definitely! I think it’s definitely there. Some parts of it are conscious of course, but some parts are to do with scale. When you have a sun and moon, you make the space bigger. I’m really interested in that. Enlarging the space isn’t simply making a big space and putting a thing in it. Does the so-called “voiding” of a thing or a space—either by painting it black or all the other things I’ve tried to do over the years—merely paint it black, or does it do what is more poetically poignant to my mind, which is to make more space? Is it possible to make more space than there was when you started out? I think that’s an ambition worth pursuing, and weirdly kind of possible.

You veil these silicon objects with translucent gauze, while also describing them as paintings. Does this gauze function like a picture plane?

I’m glad you put it like that because that’s exactly right. Exactly right. It’s the thing through which you need to look. It mediates the interior. The first ones I made weren’t painted. Curiously, painting it black makes it most transparent—the opposite of what you think it would be. When I first did it I naïvely thought painting it black would make it darker. I’ve been playing with that: levels of transparency.

You’ve always tried to remove the artist’s hand from your work. Here you have both two-dimensional and three-dimensional works, the former of which can’t really escape the “hand” . . .

Correct! Correct!
...And when you have both together, as here, it reveals this developmental process, and thus even more of the "hand." How do you feel about this? Is it something you're more at peace with here?

I've made the decision to put the drawings in. I think it's the first time I've ever put drawings in the same space as objects, and drawings—they're more like little paintings really—are clearly of the "hand." I'd love them not to be, but there they are. I hope it's not fetishized as an idiosyncratic kind of thing. It's also to do, in this particular group of works, not so much with line but with color. So, as you say, the "hand" is there, there's no denying it!

You once said artists don't make objects, but rather mythologies. There's a certain sense of history around this show, how do you see your own mythology?

First of all—50 years—Nicholas is unbelievable. I have to say big chapeau to him for this way of really working with artists. I'm really proud of him for that. I've tried to be associated with Lisson and what it stands for in that respect.

The first time I realized that mythology mattered was when I did the Venice Biennale [in 1999]. I was a young artist. It was one of my first fully international shows and, extraordinarily to me, people were telling me what my work was about. They were telling me the stuff I'd been saying for the last few years. I thought, "Wow, that's so weird."

That's pretty much what we've been doing here in our conversation!

Exactly. And it works! Objects represent an evolving mythological process. Who knows where it goes? I'm convinced that's the reason it takes more than a lifetime for art to have a real effect. With truly great artists like Yves Klein, for example, it's taken 40 to 50 years for us to see him in a particular way and be able to say that color is mythologized, that blue is a part of his image, his hand. It's a hell of a process....

Anish Kapoor's latest exhibition at Lisson Gallery, London, is on view until May 6, 2017.

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Five of the best

1 **Anish Kapoor**
   One of our greatest artists, this modern Rubens continues the exploration of colour and its emotional power that started with his early experiments in bright-hued sculptural forms in the 1980s. In his latest works, he plays with the idea of painting in the same way a child might play with a doll – by pulling it apart. Spectacular, intensely vivid, somehow erotic wall works deliberately confuse two dimensions with three and voluptuously celebrate the power of art.

   *Lisson Gallery, NW1, to 6 May*

2 **Graham MacIndoe**
   It’s *Trainspotting*, only real. Scottish photographer MacIndoe, who lives in New York, took the brutal self-portraits in this exhibition when he was trying to overcome an addiction to heroin. Later, once recovered, the artist rediscovered his unflinching pictures; they preserve a story of fact. There is no sentiment or self-pity here, only real life.

   *Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, to 5 Nov*

3 **Rachel Kneebone**
   Fantastical porcelain sculptures that create fountains of body parts, white grottos of surreal desire and tottering towers of pale flesh. Kneebone has something in common with Turner-nominated sculptor Rebecca Warren as well as being consciously inspired by Rodin’s Gates of Hell. Her exuberant sensuality is eerily undercut by the icy coldness of her works’ bright glazed surfaces – it is as if a witch has frozen a decadent court.

   *V&A, SW7, to 14 Jan*

4 **Marlene Dumas: Oscar Wilde and Bosie**
   Two portraits of the joyously provocative late Victorian dandy and the young man he began a relationship with in 1891. Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas was the son of the Marquess of Queenberry, whose court battle with Wilde led to the writer’s downfall. These portraits haunt in their overtly decadent colours and sensual expressiveness. Dumas brings a dark eroticism and sense of doom.

   *National Portrait Gallery, WC2, to 30 Oct*

5 **Erik van Lieshout**
   Cats that live in the cellars of the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg are among the stars of Van Lieshout’s videos, which also feature his family and a mysterious dead man called Janus. These blackly comic meditations on modern life are shown in an immersive installation by this Dutch artist, whose anthropological eye offers ironic reportage on the social world, from spontaneous portrait drawings to doc-style interviews.

   *South London Gallery, SE5, to 11 Jun*

Jonathan Jones
Lunch with the FT: Anish Kapoor

Over a fusion takeaway feast at his London studio, the artist talks to the FT’s Jackie Wullschlager about sex, psychobiography and the ‘madness’ of his towering new sculpture at London’s Olympic Park.

Although I have the address, it is impossible to pinpoint the entrance to Anish Kapoor’s studio in Camberwell. It turns out that the artist owns all the buildings in the street – a low-rise row of former rollerblind factories that line one side of the road. On the other side is a construction site, piles of rubbish and an abandoned Routemaster bus – nothing to do with Kapoor. All around are the tower blocks of south London.

“I’ve been here for 25 years,” says Kapoor, a trim, small figure with floppy silver hair and matching grey glasses, when he emerges at the end of the terrace. This is where, a few months ago, the last factory was converted into a huge, glass-walled, white-painted box, the atelier where he works alone, undisturbed by the 20-strong technical and office staff on the rest of his site.

“Life’s gone pretty well and I’ve been able to get the whole street,” Kapoor explains, speaking softly but precisely, with a slight Indian accent – he was born in Mumbai in 1954. “I hope it’s not just megalomania – well, a certain amount of it is, of course! – that drives all this.”

Dressed in jeans, open-necked shirt and dark jacket, he is relaxed and immediately friendly, taking my arm to negotiate the muddy puddles on the pavement as we begin a tour. One of Britain’s most acclaimed sculptors, he has made an estimated fortune of £80m from his art and won the Turner Prize. But this summer his work, which is abstract and depends on formal contrasts of light and dark, surface and depth, inside and outside, will reach a vast new public with “Orbit”, at 115 metres the largest public sculpture in the UK.

Commissioned for London’s Olympic Park after a competition in which Kapoor was chosen ahead of other celebrated names, including his keen rival Antony Gormley (“He did make a bit of a scene about it”), “Orbit” was completed days ago and launches next week.
Kapoor first suggested meeting at La Petite Maison in Mayfair but a lastminute visit to the Olympic Park in the East End of town left him short of time, so we relocate for a studio lunch, beginning in his serene working space. Walking past walls lined with his characteristic concave mirror pieces and yellow, purple, pink discs which look solid but are radiant voids – “Monochrome is incredible, isn’t it?” – we arrive at a model of the rollercoaster steel coils and giant canopy of “Orbit”.

“It’s a bit of madness,” Kapoor laughs. “The canopy is dark and menacing. I’m interested in this journey from dark to light – you go into this dark heavy object, then up the lift and you’re tipped out into an observation platform with two concave mirrors, so you’re in a kind of instrument for looking. You’re inside a telescope ...I’ve been looking at this for two years and it still looks uncomfortable. That’s the point. I can make long, sleek elegant things, but this object needed to be the opposite.

“There’s so much in the tradition of the tower that’s about symmetry but even though ‘Orbit’ s bolted steel is a 19th-century method, it’s a 21st-century result, it’s asymmetrical, it’s tipping, a mess of a knot, the elbows sticking out. I hope Cecil [Balmond, the structural engineer, Kapoor’s collaborator] and I get away with it! It has the language of sculpture, but also archaic architecture – the Tower of Babel, an ant’s nest, people storming, climbing all over an object. It’s the idea of participation, performing, you act it out, you go up.”

I think “Orbit” (or “ArcelorMittal Orbit” to give it its full title, after the company that contributed £19.6m towards its cost) manages to combine a mythic quality with the inventiveness, humour and subversions of history that are a mark of 21st-century sculpture. But it is also the most extravagant example yet of how, in the past two decades, sculpture has become spectacle, performance, architecture – from Gormley’s “Angel of the North” (1998) to installations in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall Unilever Series such as Rachel Whiteread’s mountain of 14,000 white boxes in “Embarkment” (2005) and Carsten Höller’s giant slides “Test Site” (2006). With this gigantism, sculpture has won wider popular engagement; but has it also suffered losses – of seriousness, of innovation and experimentation?
“Public sculpture is problematic because it always becomes an emblem,” Kapoor says. “I’ve tried to avoid it being a logo. I’m interested in scale because it’s a genuine, actual tool of sculpture. We live in a world where there are lots of big things but few have scale. That jaw-dropping moment – when you say, ‘Can it really be?’ – there are only a few of those: like in a cathedral, when your body is thrown into it, and it brings all kinds of emotional repercussions. That’s what I’m aiming for.”

At this rather hubristic instant, there is a loud, resounding bang: a mirror piece crashes down from the wall, shattering into fragments. Kapoor strolls over, phones a technician and shrugs: “Stuff happens.” But he hurries from that studio into another, packed with a cement mixer and a work-in-progress of piled-up cement turds, then invites me into a long pristine room with oak floors, white walls, two white chairs and a white table set with salads and platters of fish. Kapoor’s studio manager, Lucy, offers drinks: he chooses Coke, I request mineral water.

The food has been ordered from the fashionable delicatessen Ottolenghi. Its rich western/Middle Eastern/Asian mix of colours and flavours offsets the streamlined purist interior in a way that almost parodies Kapoor’s aesthetic of late-minimalist abstraction revitalised by brilliant hues and sensuous textures. The artist, however, surveys the luscious offerings mournfully, presumably thinking of what might have been. “Have you been to La Petite Maison?” he inquires. “You must go, Jackie! It’s superb, Provençal food done so well – and owned by an Indian!”

Nevertheless, he tucks in readily. We begin with chargrilled tuna steaks with chilli, on which Kapoor heaps miso yoghurt. “I love food!” he announces, adding some salad – a spoonful of mixed green beans, shaved asparagus with spinach, chilli, garlic and chervil; another of cucumber, celery and radish with coriander, mint and nigella seeds. I follow suit and, wondering whether these dishes share something of the fusion cuisine of his childhood – Kapoor’s maternal family came from Baghdad, emigrating to India where his grandfather was cantor of the Pune synagogue – I question him about his mother.
“My mother? Oh God, don’t ask! God knows!” he answers hastily, adding without enthusiasm, “It was a great childhood.” The oldest of three brothers, Kapoor left India at 17 for Israel: “My parents were very cosmopolitan, we grew up with Judaism as a cultural reality, a family reality, rather than a religious one – which is right, I believe in that.”

Initially, he lived on a kibbutz, then studied engineering before realising “it really wasn’t for me, it was too tight. I went back to the kibbutz and decided I had to be an artist. I got myself a little studio and made some really bad paintings. My parents weren’t over the moon. I was so young and so naive. I’d hardly looked at any art, hardly ever seen a painting. Then I came to art school [Hornsey College of Art] in London and felt utterly liberated. They were very difficult years emotionally, but in a way I’m grateful for them. It took me many years of psychoanalysis to get over it.”

Was the problem a standard coming-of-age neurosis? Kapoor looks vaguely amused at this understatement. “Er, no. It was much, much, much more than that. It was a sense of disorientation, not culturally, but with myself, which I needed to live with, understand, be less afraid of. Perhaps I was also coming to terms with an idea that I wanted to do something. No – wait, it’s difficult to find the right words – a sensation that I had something to do, but I didn’t know how to do it and didn’t know if I could allow myself to do it.

“The first years when I was making art, I felt as if I didn’t exist if I didn’t work. Now I don’t. The work got better when I didn’t feel that. Now I’ve allowed the work to be the work, I can be me, and somehow we can live together.” He quit psychoanalysis around the time he married medieval art historian Susanne Spicale in 1995; the couple have a daughter, Alba, 16, and son Ishan, 15.

We move on to grilled salmon served with avocado, coriander, chilli onion and mustard seed salsa, helping ourselves to further salads: baby potatoes with parsley pesto, courgettes, walnuts, radicchio and watercress; roasted squash with green olive and yoghurt sauce, red onion, capers, mint and sumac. Everything is fresh, robust and tastes less complicated than it sounds.
“The psychoanalytic method is somewhat the studio method,” Kapoor expands. “The speculative process, the space between analyst and patient where there’s a third object, the fantasy object – that’s very much like sculpture. In a post-Freudian world, it’s not very interesting if you don’t speculate. After the idea that human motivation is complex, that there is Jewish guilt and taboos, that there is anxiety in all projects, there’s no such thing as an innocent eye. All looking is done with envy, hate, love.

“That’s a problem for the maker of things, this question of the anxiety of the viewer and therefore the anxiety of the object. [Marcel] Duchamp came to the idea that the viewer needed to look with a particular stance. ‘The Large Glass’ (‘The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even’) is divided into male and female – looking is divided, it’s about desire, stripping something bare.”

I say that I often ask artists whether creativity and sex come from the same place. “Definitely, yes! Does any artist ever say ‘No’? It’s pretty bloody obvious, isn’t it? A fundamental thing of the world is that it’s made up of male and female, night and day, up and down, all opposites, from the moment we are born until we die, life and death. It’s almost silly to say it. One of the riches of abstract language is that it can point to these bits of deeper content.”

Kapoor’s earliest powdered pigment pieces in the 1980s featured thrusting red stalactites and rounded lemon-orange breasts. Tate Modern’s popular “Ishi’s Light” (2003, named for his son) is an incomplete egg with a distorting mirrored red lacquer interior that you enter through a slit. In “Shooting into the Corner”, an installation at his 2008 Royal Academy show, a gun of red paint was fired across a gallery (“Corners are crucial to sculpture. A corner has all kinds of implications – sexual, architectural, the secret part of the room, womb-like”). This was a parody of masculinity – as is the curving, looping “Orbit”, which can be read as a feminised, circular, open-ended version of the phallic tower form.

Why has Kapoor so relentlessly explored abstract forms of sexual polarity? “Look, Henry Moore spent his whole career making women in a landscape. I think he didn’t acknowledge fully the sexuality – they were almost asexual presences. I have always been interested in involuted form, which is often vaginal, female. It would be dishonest not to recognise that it’s blatantly sexual. You can’t be coy about it. Art is good at intimacy: it can say, ‘Come here, be part of this’, beckoning. It’s a tool of intimacy.”
Is his art, then, autobiographical? “No! No, but yes. You can’t avoid your psychobiography. In psychoanalysis, you go into the room with a problem, lie on the couch, and something else emerges, which has repercussions way more interesting than anything you might have gone in with. Similarly when you go into the studio, you get unexpected connections. If I had a great message to deliver, god how boring it would be. Boring for me above all. Not knowing, yet daring – that’s the métier!”

Lucy comes in to offer coffee – “Oh I’d love one!” he exclaims. “No I wouldn’t, I’ve already had too much” – and pudding: chocolate fondant cake and lemon mascarpone tart. We both declare that we are full, yet the cake, moist and flavoured with coffee and rum, is irresistible. “I can’t help it,” says Kapoor.

“I love poetry, I read a lot,” he continues, as we each slowly slice wedges off the cake until we have finished it all. “Rilke was a great constructor. And Twombly, a bit of paint and he scribbles something on canvas, how does he get away with it, the fucker – conveying a whole passionate universe with the smallest of means!

“That’s what poetry is about – condensing experience into a meaningful few words, gestures. ‘Vir Heroicus Sublimus’ by Barnett Newman, it’s a big red painting with a strip in, and yet it isn’t – it’s something mysterious. Newman is one of my favourite artists. Duchamp is another – ‘The Large Glass’, there are very few objects in the world that remain mysterious like that. And the third artist for me is Joseph Beuys: if Duchamp’s idea was that all objects are art, Beuys’ was that all objects have mythological potential.

“It’s compelling, a deeply serious idea but also playful. I hope with increasing confidence that I’m being playful ...You know, who cares? I have the guts to do it.”

*Jackie Wulschlager is the FT’s chief visual arts critic*
Anish Kapoor at the Royal Academy, review

Anish Kapoor's retrospective at the Royal Academy is an awe-inspiring riot of the senses. Rating: *****

By Richard Dorment
6:28PM BST 21 Sep 2009

SOMETHING and nothing, form and formlessness, concave and convex, hard and soft, rough and smooth, inside and outside, slow and fast, presence and absence, colour and non-colour, reflection and absorption, surface and depth, clean and dirty, big and small, movement and stasis, austerity and excess, illusion and reality, creation and destruction: Anish Kapoor's joyful mid-career retrospective at the Royal Academy is a like an inventory of the possibilities of sculpture.
The show begins with pieces made from wood covered in gesso and powdered pigments such as you see sold in neat conical piles in Indian street markets for use in dyes, cosmetics and at Hindu festivals. Small in scale, they sit on the gallery floor, spiky red stalactites, orange-yellow breasts, a lemon wedge of pure yellow, a miniature mountain range of intense blue. By turns sensual and cruel, they look so fragile that you fear a sudden gust of wind could blow them away.

Looking though the door leading into the next gallery, we see what looks like a veil of saturated yellow floating in front of the wall. In fact, it is a six-square-metre disc made from fibreglass and covered in 12 coats of yellow paint which, when seen from a distance, fills our field of vision.

Only when you approach it do you understand that the wall is not flat but concave, and that what looked solid is actually a void. Drawn into its inviting nothingness, we are suffused with pleasure even as our sense of self feels diminished by its enveloping radiance. The last time I felt something similar, it was in front of another giant disc—Olafur Eliasson’s famous mirrored sun in Tate Modern’s turbine hall.

Elsewhere Kapoor shows free-standing stainless-steel sculptures and hanging discs, in whose polished curves we expect to see our own reflections, as in the sculptures of Michelangelo Pistoletto. But Kapoor’s surfaces are concave, so that when you see yourself in them, you and your surroundings are either upside down or grotesquely distorted in a way that makes you feel that what is important to Kapoor is not the object, but the animated gallery space around and behind you. More worryingly, in a vertical statue entitled Non-Object (Pole), from certain angles and distances you can’t see yourself at all.

Almost the opposite sensory experiences occur in Kapoor’s new series of sculptures, where concrete shapes that look like slugs, turds or phalluses, are piled up to make dozens of mounds of different shapes and sizes. Some look organic, like worm casts or piles of dung, while others feel architectural, like the crumbling ruins of a forgotten civilisation. Whereas in the first galleries Kapoor seduced with light, colour and sleek, inviting shapes, here he repels by using a material that absorbs the light and evokes things that either disgust us or feel ancient, damaged, decayed.

So far, you could say that for all his innovation, Kapoor is at least working with the materials and techniques of traditional sculpture. But in two other works in the show, he moves decisively into the realms of performance art. Not since the days when J M W Turner arrived at the Royal Academy on vanishing days to work in public with brush and palette knife on pictures he had submitted as mere dabs of colour, has Burlington House seen anything what remotely like what will go on in those galleries this autumn.

Kapoor is using a powerful cannon to shoot heavy pellets of crimson wax from one gallery onto the wall of another. By the end of the show’s run, 20 tons of wax will have built up on the gallery floor and spattered the walls.
But the essence of the art work is not on the walls, but in the performance. Every 20 minutes, an attendant in black enacts a carefully choreographed ritual, and I defy you not to feel a shiver of fear and excitement when he loads the cannon and the gallery explodes with the sound of the shot.

_ Shooting into the Corner _ has been discussed in terms of its Freudian symbolism, but I think it is closer to Kapoor’s intention to see it as following on from the famous sculpture Richard Serra made in 1968 by flinging molten lead against a gallery wall.

The other never-to-be-forgotten performance Kapoor is staging for this show takes the form of a 40-ton block of red wax, paint and Vaseline that moves on tracks through five galleries at the RA. So high and so broad that it only just fits through each archway, the huge object leaves a splattered residue of crimson grunge on the walls and floors as it passes, like the great juggernaut that is dragged by devotees of the Hindu god Jagannatha at the festival of Rathayatra and which is said to crush everything in its path. The silent presence travels so slowly that it takes an hour and a half to complete its journey. It’s like a dream in which all the paint in all the paintings ever shown at the Royal Academy has somehow returned in the form of a giant brushstroke slapping paint back and forth, back and forth, all over the galleries.

No other contemporary British artist has Kapoor’s range of imagination and no one else routinely works on this scale. Over the years, he’s become more of a public than a private artist – or at least one whose most effective works are intended not for private contemplation, but to inspire awe in large numbers of people.

In the courtyard of the RA, there’s a giddy example of Kapoor at his most grandioso and light-hearted, a new sculpture in the form of a column of large polished, stainless-steel spheres that appear to rise up from the ground weightlessly like giant bubbles in a bottle of champagne, and look so precariously balanced that they could come tumbling down with a gentle push.

Stop to look and what you’ll see in the mirror-like silver surface of each sphere are reflections of the buildings surrounding the courtyard and the people walking among them. It’s like an animated version of Brancusi’s _Endless Column_, reflecting the whole world, in fact, in constant change,