

LEAD INTERVIEW



Sahar Zaman in Conversation with Anish Kapoor

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Anish Kapoor, *Past, Present, Future*, wax, oil based paint, 2006.

The darling of the international art world, someone whose stature increases with each successive show, Anish Kapoor, has finally managed to get his works

to India – the country of his origin. It has been in the pipeline for the past 10 years. And all the hype, excitement and expectations on his debut show in India

can be understandable. Sahar Zaman speaks to Anish Kapoor on the day of his opening night in New Delhi at the NGMA.



Anish Kapoor, *To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red*, Mixed Media, Pigment, 1981.

SZ: It has been about 10 years since gallerists in India have been trying to show your works. Why has it been such a Herculean task?

AK: Oh these things are complicated. Sculpture is hard to get but it's definitely the right time, so that's the good thing.

SZ: This would not have happened if the government didn't pitch in considering the budgets involved to have your works installed, right?

AK: Yes, these things are difficult to fund. These works are big, so it's hard. I am lucky to have this backing from the government, the British Council and private individuals. All that coming

together makes this possible.

SZ: What did you have in mind when you decided that these were the set of works which you should show in India?

AK: The show is in two parts – in Delhi and in Mumbai. It was important to have a certain retrospect, even though this is not exactly a retrospective but the works here in Delhi are from the early 80s to the present. It's a 30 year span. Mumbai is quite different. It has larger pieces.

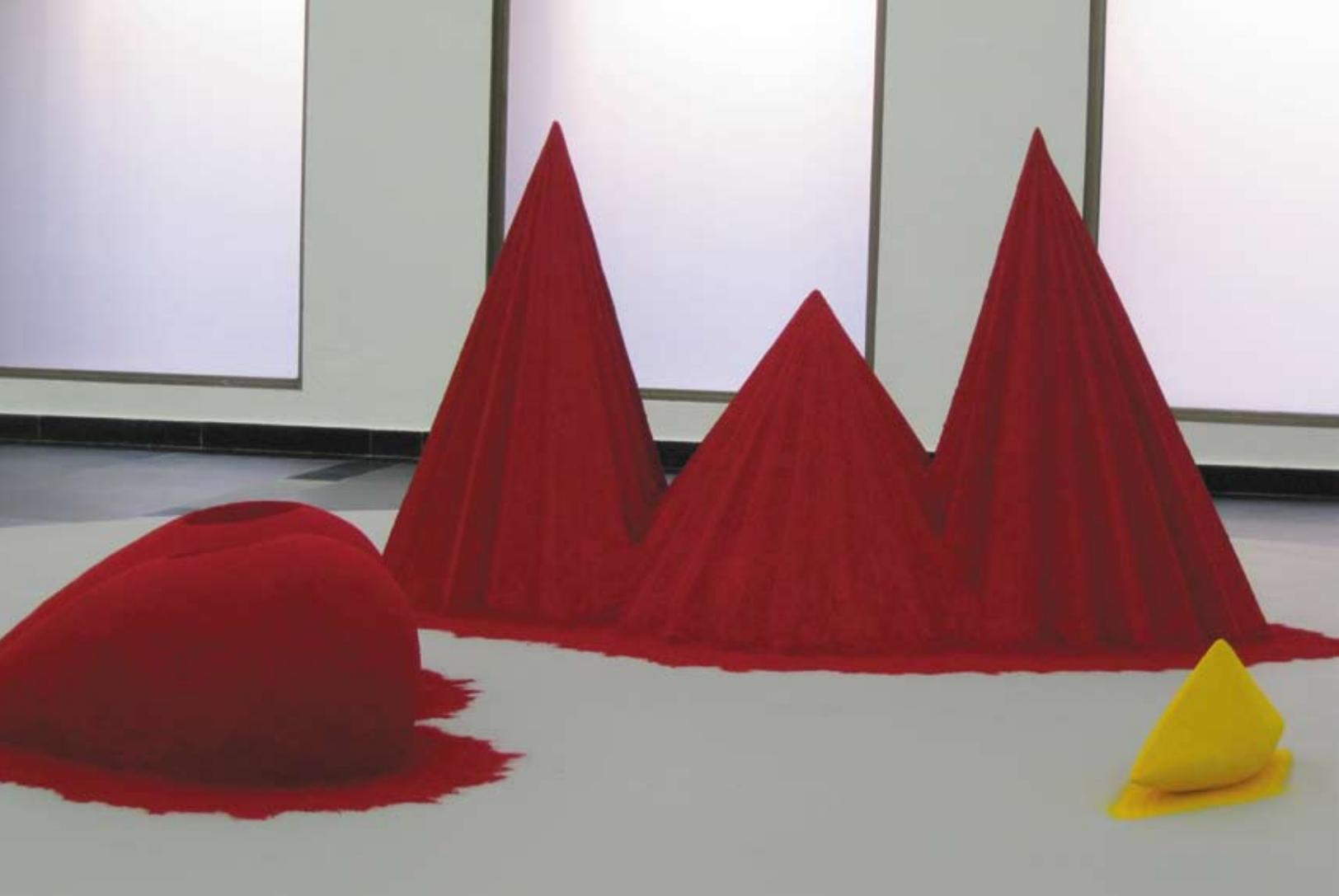
SZ: A record breaking number of visitors came for your show at the Royal Academy of Arts in London last year. What are you expecting here in Delhi

and Mumbai?

AK: The important thing for me is to move beyond the art world. I want to involve a bigger public if I can; to reach out to, to make available to the general public, because the art world tends to be rather specialised.

SZ: Here in India, there are other modern masters, like MF Husain, who are more known to the common man. Anish Kapoor is a new name to them. Are you nervous about that?

AK: I am not surprised at all. But the important thing is to see the works in person. Seeing just the images is another thing.



Anish Kapoor, *As if to Celebrate I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers*, Wood, Cement, Pigment, 1981.

SZ: Yes, absolutely. When I entered the gallery I literally gasped on seeing this piece in red wax called *Past Present and Future*. Is this location specific?

AK: Yes, it is. This is a mound of wax, and the motorized blade gradually shapes the wax as it gradually moves.

SZ: One is also very curious about the large team that you work with because for works on this large a scale, your studio would be very different from an artist who just paints.

AK: Yes, my sculptures are very tedious. They take a lot of time. I am fortunate to have people who have worked with me for many years and helped me in the process. The important thing for an artist is to be free enough to one's own

self, to be properly inventive and that's what a studio space is about. I try to see it as a laboratory for experimentation.

So, I hope that the shows that I have are results of those experiments.

In my experiments (pointing toward *Past Present and Future*), I make propositions about sculpture that can be made from a relative immaterial substance and live in this strange area, between being very emphatic announced object because of its colour and at the same time have this rather pudgy part. Another work with a similar philosophy is a hard block with a carved interior in a particular way that the inside looks bigger than the outside, bigger than the container. So in that you get the sense of the non object, the object

that isn't. Even with the work titled *When I'm Pregnant*, as you move up to it you realise it plays a game with you.

SZ: Yes it is very subtle but when you notice it, the surface does play a game! But let's now talk about the art market, something that artists are very hesitant about. What does it mean to you - auction results, auction records etc.?

AK: Artists should not be shy about money. Money is part of the deal, the way I look at it. Making art can be seen as being mythological. We don't make objects, we make mythologies of various kind. Stories with an abstract language... Money is part of that language. In our society, money means so many different sorts of things. But all



Anish Kapoor, *Vertigo*, Stainless Steel, 1981.

has to do with power. In a way, art also plays in that game. Why not?

SZ: So you have no hesitation in talking about money and art in the same breath?

AK: Good artists have always been there with money. It's part of the deal.

SZ: Your architectural projects are on a much larger scale but some of them still remain unrealised. Knowing what you lend to a space as an artist, how much does it take for someone to say that I'm going to back this project?

AK: I'm happy that some projects are unrealised. In a way you look at the poetic territory that the project might occupy. Sometimes they get realised

but it takes an effort to bring it to life.

SZ: You are creating a special tower for the London Olympics 2012 – *The Orbit*, supported by Arcelor Mittal. What was that entire process about, right from giving the design to finally getting selected and getting someone on board who can put funds as well?

AK: The Mayor of London invited artists and architects of London to design projects with a specific brief to build the tower. We were lucky – Cecil Balmond and myself. We proposed it together and we were lucky to win it and it's now in production. I never thought it would get done but it has come through. It should be done in a year or so.

SZ: And your first reaction when you realised it has come through?

AK: Some surprise, I must admit.

SZ: Why?

AK: Well, some slightly mad utopian projects never get built and one doesn't imagine they ever would. But here is a situation where we've been able to find the money, the political will and the artistic will too – to have all this together is a great thing.

SZ: I have been noticing our reflection here on your concave mirrored piece. Our image is funny but it's also very hard on my eyes.

AK: This is made of stainless steel. The thing I've been trying to point out about



Anish Kapoor, *Sky Mirror*, Stainless Steel.

absolute objects is taken to a different level with this one. Mirrored objects that have been made right since the Egyptians have always been convex objects meaning positive forms. Now what happens with positive form is that they camouflage themselves in the space. The concave objects don't do anything about the camouflage, they actually hold the space. And the reason

why it's hard on your eyes is because it's an activated space. It's as if you are entering a certain part of the object. Sculptures add to a space but this adds to make a problem with the space that you are interacting with."

SZ: The most popular of your works in this medium are *Sky Mirror* and *Cloud Gate*. And they are both very popular.

AK: It's a complicated technology to make objects on that scale. It has taken me and my team of 200 people at least 7 years for getting it right *Cloud Gate*!

SZ: So it's the concave that mesmerises you and is seen in many of your works.

AK: Yes, you see that in many of my works. I have never really understood composition in art and what balances what. I am looking at absolute conditions.

SZ: One can't avoid the 'Indian-ness' in your works especially the colours. But you have used your connection with India in a totally different language in your art.

AK: Well I grew up here and I carry India in me, in my mind, in my soul. The work is like reliving a certain preoccupation of colour and space.

SZ: That one public space in India where you would love to do a site specific installation?

AK: That's an unfair question. I won't name a place, that isn't right. But I would say that there's a certain way that art in a public space can occupy a democratic access. And I really believe in that. I believe there really is a sense in which an object or an environment can galvanize a certain public-private activity.

SZ: But would it be a raw space or a monument or a ready space?

AK: Oh I'm not going to answer that! I can't really decide without a process, without an idea, but it will happen someday!