

Anish Kapoor: The Poetic Act Isn't Illustrative

February 2, 2023 | By Doboromila Blaszczyk

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A monumental sculpture, meaty, blood-red and porous; reminiscent of an artery that has just been extracted from an organism, through which had pumped blood only minutes ago, this life-giving substance is placed inside a glazed interior – like a jar with formaldehyde or an aquarium built from the museum walls. Sunlight floods in through the glass windows from all angles, falling on the irregular, fracturing resin surface of a sculpture, illuminating its texture, crevices and the saturation of the wax's hue.



Anish Kapoor, Future, 2006, Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko 1.10.2022-12.02.2023,
 photo: Jacek Kucharczyk © Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved DAGS, 2022



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'Men have no access to blood, and women do [...] 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,' stated Kapoor himself. I am reminded of these words as I look at the sculpture which is titled 'Purple Scrape' (1996) and exhibited as though it were an innocently preserved specimen at the Orangery of the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko.

Blood, organs and nature coalesce. Kapoor's art confronts us with an experience of the uncomfortable, at times even overtly hermetic. However, Kapoor emphasizes that art is a 'battle of the lifetime' and 'art is war.' It is hard to disagree with this statement. Art is a courage to create while paying no heed to others. War demands blood, and it is precisely blood's figurative meaning that has captivated Kapoor for several decades. Art is a constant juxtaposition of the physicality of material sculpture and the sense of void that emerges right in front of our eyes owing to the applied technique, colour palette, forms and their perception through our faulty human senses.



Anish Kapoor, Gretshemane, 2013, Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko 1.10.2022-12.02.2023, photo: Jacek Kucharczyk © Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved DAGS, 2022

In October 2022, I participated in the conference alongside Anish Kapoor that accompanied his solo show in Orońsko, which is open until the 12th of February 2023. During a discussion, the artist frequently mentioned his relation to nature and organic forms, as well as his approach to materials and hues, which reverberate throughout his practice. It is also worth pointing out that it is only the second largest exhibition of his stone sculptures, following his show in Istanbul.

The exhibition in Orońsko showcases artworks from several different series. The selection was made by the artist himself in order to augment the relations between the pieces and existing space or museum context.

When asked 'when you've created this exhibition are you thinking about the single work, and how they connect with each other or the story between them?' He replied: **'It's a bit of both. It's partially the way the works connect with each other. Of course, the meaning is in the work itself. Sometimes it's better to see the work frontally and sometimes it's better to see the work beside and related with the other ones. It's about conversation, about how these things come into meaning.'** During our conversation in Orońsko, the artist emphasised the following: **'Context matters. Context, particularly of this moment, matters. All I can say to you is that thinking about making a show is complicated because it is not the job of the artist to illustrate the political context. That's not what we do. That's better done by journalists and other professionals in that area. What we do is ask questions about culture itself – is this art or is this not art? Do they reflect our times?'**

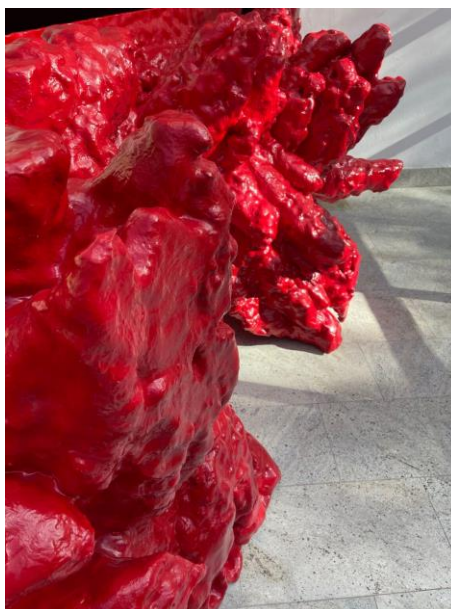
'The poetic act isn't illustrative'

Kapoor's art practice could be defined as 'poetry within sculpture.' If you are expecting the artist to offer a detailed commentary on the meaning of his works, intention and symbolism, you might be disappointed. **'Objects are never just objects'** – this is all you are going to get. The rest depends on the sensibility and knowledge of a viewer. Although you might have already had a chance to view individual sculptures or their collections in public spaces or galleries, these pieces are subject to transformation every time we see them – or rather, the viewer's own perspective on reading and feeling them is different each time we confront with them. These sentiments extend to this show in Orońsko.

Perhaps the circumstances of my visit enhanced my experience of their physical, almost tangible corporeality. Seemingly trivial circumstance, the banality of a windy day with clouds sweeping across the sky, allowed the sculptures displayed in the Orangery to blend into a single organism with the park, creating an illusion of movement of blood-red objects in the rhythm of the rays of sunlight passing over them and the fluttering of golden leaves on the surrounding trees.



Anish Kapoor, Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko 1.10.2022-12.02.2023,
photo: Dobromila Blaszczyk



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Additionally, nine stone sculptures displayed in the Museum were illuminated only by the natural light streaming through the roof windows in the main space of the museum. Daylight falling on the stone highlighted its hue and penetrated the surface, thus creating a feeling of warmth that emanated from the body. In our conversation, Kapoor recalled the story of pink marble originating from Portugal, which he used in about six of his works: **'There is this particular pink marble that comes from Portugal. It has this sort of very immediate bodily association. There was of course granite and all the other stones over the years. I put quite a lot of work into the alabaster, again because it has this wonderful permeability of light. Especially alabaster – it has this sense as if light is caught in the stone.'** Light percolates the stone's structure like layers of skin. As a result, a cold boulder morphs and stills in-between (our/its own) breaths in the state of a poetic suspension on the verge of geometry and naturalness.

Experiencing his works in these circumstances was exceptional. What also played a role, in my opinion, was the fact that I waited until other visitors left and saw the exhibition on my own – just me among nine monumental pieces in this monumental space. Nobody else, just silence and a surrounding emptiness. I could suggest that this experience was borderline sacrosanct. It was the second time that Kapoor's sculpture gave me such an impression. I had a similar, though more subdued, feeling when I saw 'Aima' in Castello di Ama in 2020. Upon entering the small desacralized chapel, I encountered a luminous red circle gaping in the stone floor – it looked like fire, eternal flames burning beneath my feet. It was like heart of the earth that has and always will be beating to remind us of the most universal truths of our fragile existence. 'Aima' is a beating heart, an internal flame. The exhibition in Orońsko is a space, a breath or, to be exact, breath-guided meditation side by side with these impressive sculptures in lieu of other visitors.



Anish Kapoor, Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko 1.10.2022-12.02.2023,
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A discussion of this exhibit must take note of the notions of materiality and scale. The monumental size of Kapoor's sculptures and the result achieved by these parameters are frequently lambasted by critics who point out an ostentatious use of scale and a shock factor. Nonetheless, the artist himself stated the following during a conversation in Orońsko: **'Of course, scale is a part of what we do as sculptors. Scale is our thing. That's what it's all about. So the scale is this deeply poetic question, it is not just a matter of size. Scale is the matter of meaning, not the matter of size.'**

What do the sculptures of Kapoor mean, then? Personally, I view Kapoor's art practice in terms of sculptural poetry. His abstract forms made from a variety of materials, their sheer scale that confronts my body with 'the body of sculpture' are all elements of the syntax that, like in a poem, denote much more than just a string of letters and clever word order. They liberate the imagination, stimulate abstract thinking and allow me to confront the self in moments of tranquillity – all this invisible universe held within. Crevices, holes, fractures and transitions create a void, a potential space to be filled through an interaction with art. Intimate shapes open up the portal to intimate reflection. Some of these shapes resemble a womb – a mother's womb, a womb of nature, and taking a step further, the primordial conditions and mechanisms of our existence.



Anish Kapoor, A Blackish Fluid Excavation, 2018, Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko

1.10.2022-12.02.2023, photo: Jacek Kucharczyk

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For Kapoor, it is also a rumination on what is inevitable and inherent to life, namely death. **'The void perhaps, says something about this unavoidable state. It forms a very difficult question. What is it? As we get older one of the things loose for all of us is death. Because that's unavoidable for all of us. In our world science attempts to explain everything. But it hasn't done very well with consciousness, the ability to be conscious about ourselves. So, the question is: Where was it before I was born and where do I go after I die? As Emmanuel Kant says: the sublime is full of fear. Maybe that's what artists are meant to do, to speculate on consciousness, on being and not being and those kinds of questions... It is our job, I believe. The best we can do,'** is what Kapoor said to me.