

## Anish Kapoor on myth, meaning and melancholia

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### British-Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor gets confessional for a new documentary, *Under the Skin*



A view of Kapoor's studio in Camberwell, London

It isn't just what you see, there's a lot of unseen,' says Anish Kapoor in *Under the Skin*, his new documentary directed by Martina Margaux Cozzi. He is referring to the city of Rome, with its multiple layers of history that reveal themselves upon careful examination, but he could also well be talking about his own artistic output.

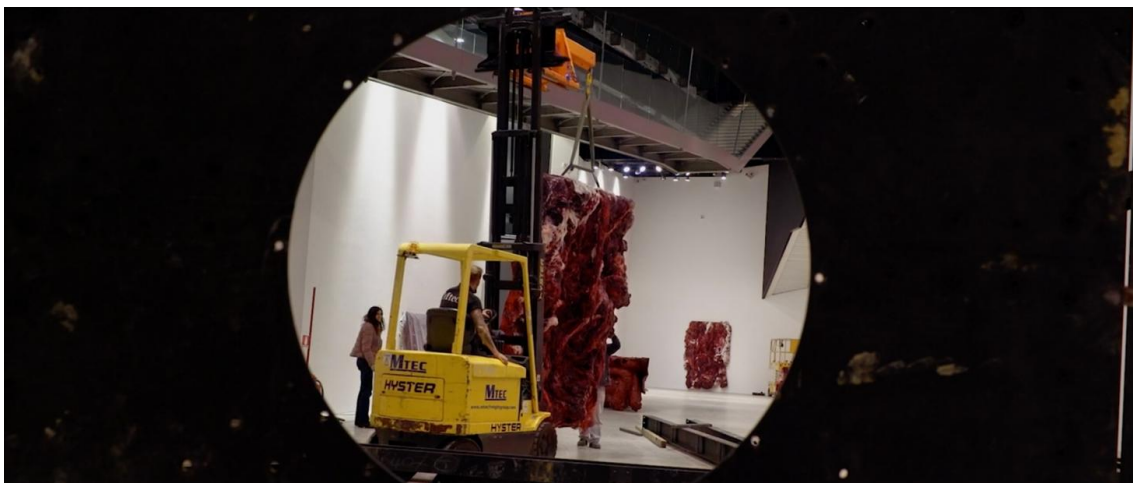
Filmed in 2016 as Kapoor prepared for a solo exhibition at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma (Macro), the documentary has the artist reflecting on diverse themes including physical and psychological space, the role of the viewer, the merits of repetition and ritual, and of course, the colour red ('incredibly alive, while speaking to a darkness that we know about ourselves'). Though pitched as 'a conversation with Anish Kapoor', the questioner's voice is absent throughout. All we hear is Kapoor's unguarded, confessional musings, offering hitherto unseen insights into his creative universe.



Sculptor and installation artist Anish Kapoor, as seen in the new documentary *Under the Skin*, directed by Martina Margaux Cozzi

The discussion of Rome not only gives geographical context to the documentary, but also segues into the ways in which Kapoor's work responds to the artistic tradition. He discusses the myth of Marsyas, the satyr who challenged Apollo to a musical duel, lost, and was flayed as punishment. The story is famously portrayed in Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas*, painted in the 1570s. 'A horrific image, the removal of the skin, the inside becoming the outside,' describes Kapoor. His own takeover of the Tate Modern Turbine Hall in 2003 was similarly titled *Marsyas*: three giant steel rings joined together by a dark red PVC membrane, 'stretched like a skin'.

Beyond mythological allusions, though, Kapoor prefers to avoid prescriptive readings of his work. He acknowledges that it may be understood as a critique of culture or war, but 'that just ties it up in knots and stifles it. I'd much rather it was work about painting itself'. Of his meat paintings – slabs of protruding resin and silicone that bear a discomfiting resemblance to flesh – he says, 'they may be full of red, they may be full of a kind of visceral body thing, there may be melancholia in them, but I don't think they are saying anything about the condition of pain.'



Kapoor's 2016 exhibition at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, seen during installation

While the documentary only shows Kapoor in his London Studio – there are clips showing protective suit-clad technicians working on sculptures, and intricate preparatory drawings on the walls, suggesting the complexities of production – and surveying the exhibition at Macro, there is an interlude at the Church of Santo Stefano Rotondo in Rome, with views of its 16th century frescoes portraying scenes of martyrdom. ‘We are, and I somehow include all of us, religious beings, and religion doesn’t necessarily have to be doctrinal. It can also be about a kind of symbolic continuum that life and all its tragedy seems to keep throwing up. And art finds ways of pointing at that,’ Kapoor narrates, in an introspective moment that lingers in the viewer’s mind long after the documentary is over.

Though only 23 minutes long, the documentary gives a strong measure of the wisdom that has animated Kapoor and made him into one of the preeminent artists of our time. It also makes clear that this elder statesman is far from resting on his laurels. There is plenty of experimentation to come: ‘I think I’m a teenager, and I mean that, especially as an artist. I’m willing to try almost everything.’ §

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Watch a seven-minute excerpt of Under the Skin – In Conversation with Anish Kapoor. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery



A view of Kapoor's 2016 exhibition at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma. ©Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved, 2020



A view of Kapoor's 2016 exhibition at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma. ©Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved, 2020

#### INFORMATION

Under the Skin – in conversation with Anish Kapoor is directed by Martina Margaux Cozzi and NSPRD part of The Aimes. It will have its official release at the Fine Art Film Festival in Venice, California from 8–14 June. [veniceica.org](http://veniceica.org)

Kapoor showed at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma from 17 December 2016 to 17 April 2017. [anishkapoor.com](http://anishkapoor.com)