

Anish Kapoor Reveals His Hopes for Vantablack at Seoul's Kukje Gallery

5 September, 2016 | Sarah Cascone

page 1 of 2



Anish Kapoor. Courtesy of Kukje Gallery.

It was a long wait for Anish Kapoor at Seoul's Kukje Gallery, where he was expected on the occasion of the opening of his new show, "Gathering Clouds," which is on view until October 30. The artist was coming directly from a vacation in the Bahamas, and between flight delays and Seoul's typically heavy traffic, he was quite late, which turned a planned press conference into an informal chat with a cadre of journalists over lunch at the gallery restaurant.

It was perhaps the rather harried nature of Kapoor's day that led to the refreshingly candid discussion that followed, with the artist speaking freely about his work, his career, and his recent penchant for courting controversy.

At Kukje Gallery, three formidable, twisted mirrored columns display warped visions. "It's a stupid, simple idea, but it does something—it becomes something else," said Kapoor, by way of introducing the latest additions to his "Non Objects" series, which are the centerpiece of the current show. He was referring to the 90-degree twist, which transforms mundane columns into strangely unknowable objects with unexpected concavities and edges that seem to shift as you behold them.

The exhibition also includes four entries in Kapoor's "Gathering Clouds" series, concave discs painted in matte gray, and two rows of smaller "Non Objects" sculptures, displayed mounted on pedestals.

Earlier works from the "Gathering Clouds" series have often featured shiny, mirrored surfaces, which tend to attract plenty of attention from social media-obsessed art fair goers. Kapoor, who has what he described as "a deep interest in concave mirrored form," has moved beyond that fascination here.

These works have a different, less readily apparent appeal, at first appearing to be flat circles, their depth rendered imperceptible by the gray paint. "The void in the middle brings out curiosity in viewers," Kapoor noted.

The heaviness of the matte works calls to mind Kapoor's well-documented experiments with Vantablack, the newly-invented pigment that he described as "the blackest material in the universe after a black hole." The so-called "nano paint" is made up of microscopic stems of color that are 300 times as tall as they are wide, so that 99.6 percent of all "light just gets trapped in the network of standing segments," he explained. "It's literally as if you could disappear into it."

Anish Kapoor Angers Artists by Seizing Exclusive Rights to 'Blackest Black' Pigment

Though it's easy to imagine how striking "Gathering Clouds" would look coated in that unreflective color, it will likely be some time before the artist is able to bring that vision to life: The pigment's inventors are currently only able to produce amounts of about two centimeters square, and Kapoor doesn't know if they will ever be able to get to a bigger scale.

"It's not black paint that comes out of a tube. It's complicated," he added.

When Kapoor first read about Vantablack, he immediately knew "this is for me, because I've worked with void forms for many years." But that quest for the deep blackness of Vantablack appears to stem from a rather morbid place. "Perhaps the darkest black is the black that we carry within ourselves," he mused.

As for Kapoor's widely-criticized Vantablack monopoly—he is the only artist who will be able to use the color, after all—he's quick to note that the arrangement is quite necessary. The inventors designed the pigment with the applications in defense industry and science in mind, not visual ones, he says. Successfully creating a version that can be used by artists requires a collaborative process with Kapoor.

Related: Anish Kapoor's 'Dirty Corner' Vandalized for Third Time

The artist also touched on his other recent controversy, 2015's Versailles Garden public art show, Dirty Corner. "That became hugely controversial, I still don't know why. It seemed to offend people for reasons I can't understand," he said of the work, which caused a public uproar in France for its resemblance to the female anatomy.

"It's interesting that the moment got sexualized," Kapoor added. "Our cities are full of masculine objects. No one makes the slightest noise about another phallus on the horizon, but it seems a vagina is really a problem."

"Anish Kapoor: Gathering Clouds" is on view at Kukje Gallery, 54 Samcheong-ro, Sogyek-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul, August 31–October 30, 2016.