

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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The Sculptor as Magician

BOSTON — The Indian-born, London-based sculptor Anish Kapoor has always been a kind of magician, which cuts two ways. Whether with blazingly reflective metal surfaces or dark, plush, seemingly infinite interiors, his pieces dispense multiple visual thrills and mysteries. But the same effects can make his work appear tricky, decorative and shallow. It hasn't helped that they seem to have been concocted by playing fast and slick with the innovations of his Minimalist and Post-Minimalist predecessors.

**ROBERTA
SMITH**

**ART
REVIEW**

These objections fade without entirely disappearing in the face of Mr. Kapoor's small, well-chosen survey at the Institute of Contemporary Art here. "Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future" includes 14 works that concentrate on the last 15 years. It was organized by Nicholas Baume, the institute's chief curator.

The works range from acrylic and resin volumes reminiscent of Donald Judd's work to an immense half-dome of deep red wax and paint kept in shape by a built-in slow-moving scraper. Titled "Past, Present, Future," this piece suggests a planet shouldering its way through the museum's walls.

Seeing Mr. Kapoor's work as it has unfolded over time diminishes the new-model appearance his gallery shows can have. Under-scoring that point is a pair of dazzling if thin shows of his new work

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Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future

A survey of Mr. Kapoor's work is at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Boston, top. There are also two Kapoor exhibitions at the Gladstone Gallery's spaces in New York, one of them shown above.

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at the Gladstone Gallery's two spaces in Manhattan. The smaller show — a matched set of three geometric forms and a smallish Serra-like curve in polished steel — inaugurates the stately new Gladstone emporium on West 21st Street in Chelsea.

Taken together, however, these three shows indicate that Mr. Kapoor shouldn't be considered merely derivative. He combines too many disparate strands of art, thought and culture, and he does it seamlessly. He is a brilliant and unpredictable if sometimes ingratiating synthesizer who has simultaneously refined, repurposed and betrayed some of the dearest beliefs and most despised bêtes noires of late-20th-century sculpture.

It has probably aided this project that Mr. Kapoor, who is 54, did not begin life in a Western culture. He was born and grew up in Mumbai when it was still called Bombay, and in 1973 moved to London, where he studied art and then took up residence. He is a decade or so older than most of the Young British Artists, who took the art world by storm in the early 1990s, and his sensibility is markedly different: he greatly prefers gentle seduction to shock tactics.

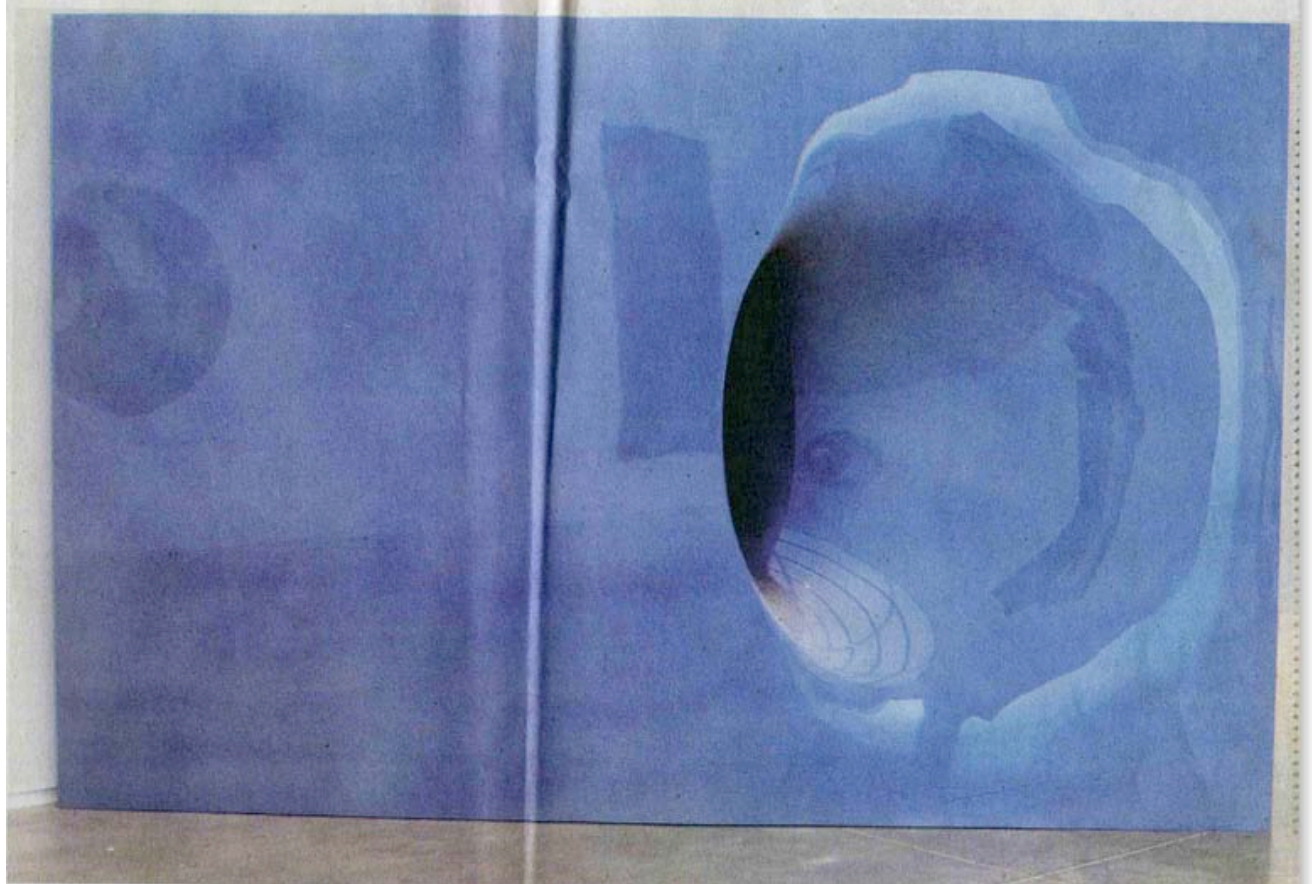
His sculpture is in many ways one long ode to the modernist monochrome and its emphasis on purity and perception, enacted in three-dimensional space. It carves, colors and complicates space in different ways, adding interactive aspects and pushing that purity

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Anish Kapoor: The Sculptor as Magician



The front of "Marsupial," one of 14 sculptures by Anish Kapoor included in a new exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

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LIBRADO ROMERO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Here for Alba" is part of a Kapoor show at the Gladstone Gallery on West 24th Street in Manhattan.

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back and forth between votive and technological, East and West.

Mr. Kapoor has paid homage to Minimalism's faith in weightless volumes, abstraction, specific materials, saturated color and simplicity of form. But he has also explored different materials' capacities for visual illusion, the biggest of Minimalism's no-nos and a tendency that encroaches on territory pioneered by installation artists like James Turrell. Mr. Kapoor's use of dry pigments echoes Process artists like Alan Saret and Wolfgang Laib, although it has a long history in Hindu rituals.

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And despite the high degree of abstraction in his art, living form, if only the viewer's body, is always implied. Perhaps this is why Mr. Kapoor largely bypassed the immense installations and environments favored by so many sculptors of the last 30 years. Instead he has displayed a knack for compressing his various effects into reasonably portable if not exactly domestic-scale objects, even if they are temporarily set into walls or floors. Their scale can make them seem all the more magical, focused and intimate.

In "My Body Your Body" a rectangular cavity set in a wall with an indeterminate interior coated in deep blue pigment confronts us like an upright coffin, but also like a doorway to another world. In "Marsupial" a large slab of dappled lavender resin angles out from the wall, not unlike an eccentric collaboration between Richard Serra and John McCracken; but it also has anthropomorphic aspects. One side presents a slanted pouch but also a wormhole of space; the other bulges toward the wall, like the head or ear of someone straining to eavesdrop on a conversation in the next room.

Above all Mr. Kapoor surpasses many of his forebears in the restrained accessibility of his art and the ways its

"Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future" continues through Sept. 7 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, 100 Northern Avenue, Boston; (617) 478-3100, icaboston.org. Mr. Kapoor's new work can be seen through June 21 at the Gladstone Gallery, 515 West 24th Street, Chelsea, (212) 206-9300, and through Aug. 15 at the Gladstone Gallery, 530 West 21st Street, Chelsea, (212) 206-7606; gladstonegallery.com.

ONLINE: SLIDE SHOW

Additional images from the shows mentioned in this review:

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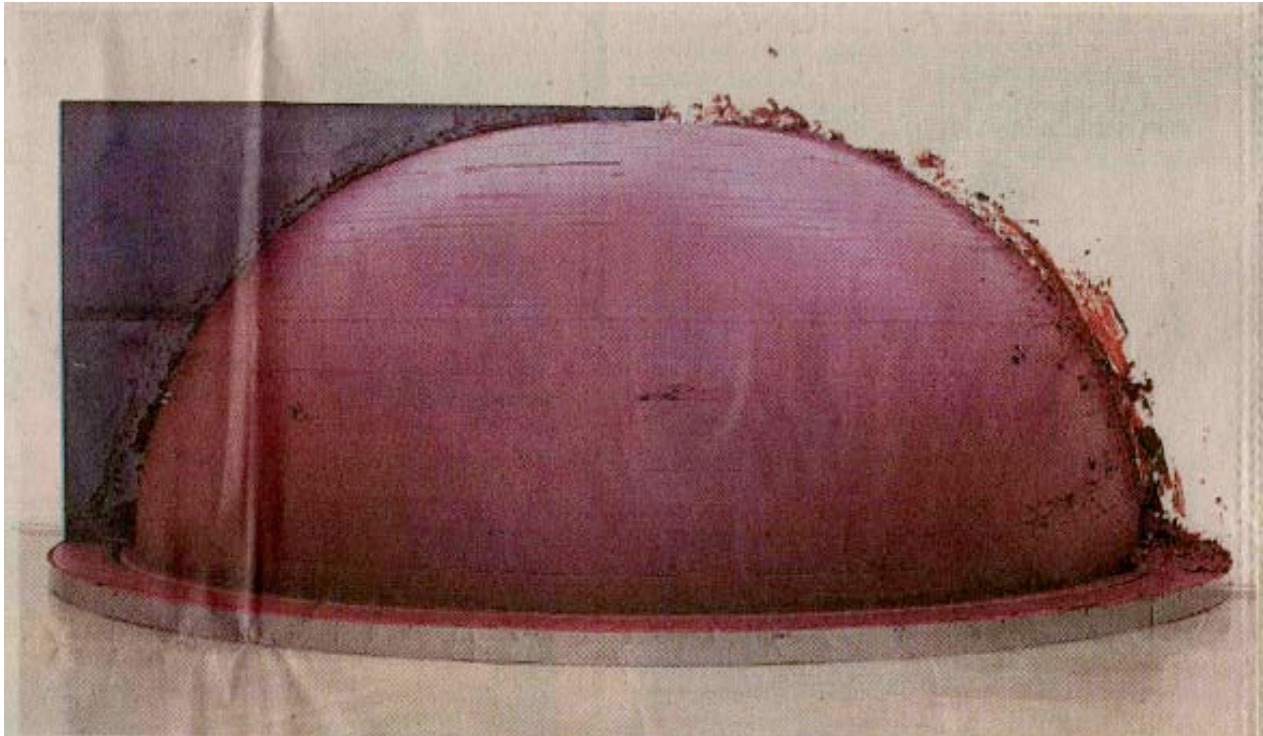
formal conundrums and surface pleasures open subtly to deeper forms of thought. This is most publicly evident in Mr. Kapoor's wildly popular "Cloud Gate," an enormous, shiny, pillowlike archway (known as the Bean) at Millennium Park in Chicago. One of the larger pieces at the institute is "S-Curve," a double curve in polished steel that resembles a middle-size wall. As in a similar single-curve piece at Gladstone's 21st Street space, the steel curves both horizontally and vertically, creating a concave and convex face (two of each in Boston).

The inclination to liken these works to fun-house mirrors lessens as you realize that the opposing curves are as different as night and day, order and chaos, Classicism and Expressionism or even heaven and hell. As you pass the concave sections of the piece in Boston, the very floor seems to rise up and harrow your malformed reflection. Yet one convex side at least serenely reflects your familiar self and about half the works in the show on an expanded plane, granting the slightly crowded installation a startling spaciousness.

Especially good, when seen in reflection or directly, is an untitled piece from 1998 in fiberglass painted matte white. It is essentially a cavity without a wall. From one side it presents a luminous egg shape the size of a small Airstream trailer; its proportions and profile change as you move around it. Suddenly you realize that the other side is rela-

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Mr. Kapoor's "Past, Present, Future," the work from which the Boston show takes its name.

tively flat and that a large perfect rectangle has been cut in its thin shell, revealing an ambiguous interior of shadowed whites. It's an egg with architecture where a space-age Punch and Judy might pop into view any second. This work is balanced by the nearby "When I Am Pregnant," an equally indeterminate white bump on a white wall.

Mr. Kapoor's passion for red, the

most passionate of colors, is certainly evident in Boston, but it dominates his show at the Gladstone Gallery's flagship space on West 24th Street. An enormous pocked horizontal chunk of red resin measuring more than 4 feet in diameter and 33 feet in length resembles a much-abused lipstick until the title — "Blood Stick" — turns it rather melodramatically into a giant's club. But you

can get lost in the metallic red interior of the cooling-tower enclosure that is "Here for Alba," and a large tear-shaped wall piece titled "Drip," also in metallic red, implies both blood and another abstract pregnancy.

You can take issue with the individual works in both of the gallery shows, but their ambition is considerable and fully corroborated by the display in Boston.