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Monumenta: Anish Kapoor

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Anish Kapoor has spent more time grappling with monumentality than most artists: among countless epic commissions, he has taken on Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, Marsyas, 2002, made the huge, shimmering Cloud Gate, 2004-06, for Chicago's Millennium Park and proposed a tower for the London 2012 Olympic park.

So he is a somewhat inevitable choice to tackle Monumenta at the Grand Palais, Paris. Kapoor's sculpture, which is due to be unveiled on 11 May, enters a canon of works marked by a certain weightiness, both literally and metaphorically: previous Monumenta installations featured Kiefer's meditations on dark history and poetry (2007), Serra's towering steel hulks (2008) and Boltanski's ominous pile of clothes (2010).

Kapoor says that he is conscious of the commission's growing momentum: "It's a significant event in the sense that I am now the fourth artist doing it.

One tries to build on that history and take it further, and if you like, challenge that particular history, and rethink it." The Grand Palais itself poses another equally imposing challenge.

"It is possibly the most beautiful glass building of the period, probably the most beautiful one



Design of ArcelorMittal Orbit for London's Olympic park

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anywhere," he says, adding: "One of the things about that space is that the light is strong.

It is almost brighter than being outside, and it's almost bigger than being outside. That is a curious thing that happens in the space, so dealing with it is a challenge." After five visits to the Grand Palais, Kapoor began to formulate ideas using a scale model, a discipline that, rather than limiting the artist, gives him greater freedom, he says.

"You don't have to be restricted in models to 'can it be done?' All that practical shit comes later. The problem is just to approach the volumes with certain solutions.

It's the same old problem that I am always dealing with: the idea of making a certain kind of contemplative space, that's what I am really into, what it is really about.

Through that, things occur, and it slowly gets more practical." For Monumenta, Kapoor's earliest experiments with the model have provided the basis of the work: "Often, the first idea is the best," he says.

But he will only hint at the nature of the final piece. "The whole adventure of the work is in very particular relation to the architecture.

It's more than in dialogue, it's a kind of inversion of the architecture," he says. "It's a kind of closing down of the space and a reopening of the space: so, it is a single volume." Kapoor's approach to the Turbine Hall, Marsyas, was also a single piece. Did that sculpture inform his approach to the Grand Palais? "One doesn't toy with one's history, that's not the problem," says Kapoor.

"It is not what I did before or didn't do before that matters. What matters is how one deals with the very real questions at hand in that space." The funding of Monumenta (its budget is undisclosed) comes from three sources: the French state, funds from a host of sponsors, ranging from the French wing of the Japanese tobacco company JTI to bankers Neuflyze OBC, and ticket sales—admission is €5.

"This project is hard to fund," Kapoor admits. "It is there for a relatively short period of time and to deal with that space is always an expensive business.

Raising money in this day and age is jolly difficult, so I am amazed we raised it." He is palpably exasperated at having to raise money for his projects.

"I do not want to deal with it. It is not what artists should be asked to do, frankly, but this particular project requires it.

It becomes part of the process, which is a nightmare, an absolute nightmare," he explains. "I guess, sometimes, when you want to take something on, you feel the need to take it on, that is what you have got to deal with." n Ben Luke Categories: Contemporary (1970-present)