

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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## Anish Kapoor Redecorates Versailles' Gardens

The British-Indian artist is causing a stir at the royal château with large modern sculptures on the famed 'tapis vert'



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Mr. Kapoor created "Sectional Body Preparing for Monadic Singularity" (2015) especially for the exhibition, which runs from June 9-Nov ...



By **TOBIAS GREY**

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**“IT’S VERY SHOCKING!”** an elderly Frenchwoman cries as she interrupts her promenade down the main axis of the [Gardens of Versailles](#) to point out a massive boulder, spray-painted a florid red.

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The towering rock on the “tapis vert”—a famed lawn on the grounds of the royal château, about 15 miles southwest of Paris—forms an integral part of “Dirty Corner,” a 197-foot-long, tapering, tubular steel structure created by Anish Kapoor. His sculptures will officially go on view in the gardens from Tuesday to Nov. 1.

After instructing a workman to sprinkle the painted boulder with some loose soil, the Indian-born British artist says, “It should feel as if it’s real. Someone said to me that they felt it has always been here. Of course there are other people who find it deeply offensive, but what the hell!”

Known for his bravado and for working on a grand scale, Mr. Kapoor caused a stir in Paris four years ago with his inflatable Leviathan sculpture—three giant, interconnected balloons—in the Grand Palais, a venerable, glass-roofed exhibition hall.

Back in France again, the 61-year-old artist has set himself another challenge with a focus on questions of size and proportion. “I think every work is to be measured by its scale,” he says. “Each object has to hold its own compared with its surroundings.” This time, however, he’s working in a hallowed setting of kingship and revolution, where every artwork is closely examined for significance.

Mr. Kapoor happens to share a March 12 birthday with André Le Nôtre, the 17th-century landscape architect who originally designed the gardens for Louis XIV. The Briton is the seventh contemporary artist to display his work at Versailles, after the likes of Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami.

“Le Nôtre, who I think is one of the great French artists, is utterly controlling,” Mr. Kapoor says. “Almost every little thing is designed to an abstract perfection, where nature itself is almost not nature. I’m interested in turning all that upside down. The whole show in a way is about reversal.”

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**A FRENCH REVOLUTION |** The towering rock on Versailles's 'tapis vert' forms an integral part of Anish Kapoor's 'Dirty Corner' (2011-15), a 197-foot-long, tapering, tubular steel structure. *PHOTO: LISSON GALLERY / GALLERIA MASSIMO MININI / GALLERIA CONTINUA / KAMEL MENNOUR / KAPOOR STUDIO / FABRICE SEIXAS*

It's also about making the invisible visible. Hence "Dirty Corner," which Mr. Kapoor describes "as a kind of flay, removing the skin of the tapis vert, which is exactly the opposite of Le Nôtre."

In the U.S., Mr. Kapoor's sculptures include downtown [Chicago's "Cloud Gate,"](#) which has acquired the nickname "the bean" for its shape and reflects the city's skyline in its stainless-steel surface. New York's Rockefeller Center and London's Kensington Gardens have exhibited his reflective "Sky Mirror."

The record auction price for Mr. Kapoor, who won the Turner Prize in 1991, is \$3.9 million for a large 2003 "Untitled" alabaster double-concave sculpture sold at [Sotheby's](#) in 2008. His collectors are spread around the world, not from one particular region, says Dina Amin, a senior director in Christie's postwar and contemporary art department in London.

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At Versailles, Mr. Kapoor has six works on display, four of which are in a line down the gardens' central axis. Situated closest to the palace, the mirror sculptures "C-Curve" (2007) and "Sky Mirror" (2013) invert everything they reflect. "Dirty Corner" (2011-15) is on the tapis vert. Farther down, "Descension" (2014), in a specially dug basin, endlessly spins a vortex of water that greets visitors with a deep, ominous rumble.

For the exhibition, Mr. Kapoor has created "Sectional Body Preparing for Monadic Singularity." Visitors can walk into the red PVC interior of the 23-foot-high, black wooden cube, set in a clearing parallel to the tapis vert.

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*'I think the job of an artwork is to say something in juxtaposition with the place where it's shown, though it's not for me to say what it is'*

—Anish Kapoor

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"Anish's disorder is very precise, and I admire the way he knows how something should be and how it shouldn't," says Alfred Pacquement, the show's curator. "If you think a little bit about the underlying themes of what Anish is proposing, there's the water of the whirlpool, mirrors which reflect the sun and the ruin of 'Dirty Corner.'" Overall, Mr. Pacquement sees the works relating to the events of the French Revolution.

Indeed, Mr. Kapoor's show takes a decidedly political turn with his installation "Shooting Into the Corner" (2008-9), the first contemporary artwork to be shown in the Jeu de Paume Room, just outside the palace and, in 1789, [the scene of an oath](#) considered a key step in the birth of French democracy.

The work, previously shown at the Royal Academy in London, includes a cannon shooting into a corner of the room a red, waxlike substance described by Mr. Kapoor as "very bodily, very physical." The artist adds, "It's an old cliché that a work of art changes its meaning depending on

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its location. But here's a real examination of that idea. I think the job of an artwork is to say something in juxtaposition with the place where it's shown, though it's not for me to say what it is."

A soupçon of mystery and a dash of potential controversy—Mr. Kapoor wouldn't have it any other way. "I don't need a nice place to show, and Versailles does not need decoration," he says. "Somehow one needs to engage in a problematic relationship with the space, not one that is a polite and nice display."



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**"Sky Mirror" (2013) inverts everything it reflects. KAPOOR STUDIO / KAMEL MENNOUR AND LISSON GALLERY / PHOTO:FABRICE SEIXAS**



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In "Shooting into the Corner" (2008-9), a cannon fires a waxlike substance that Mr. Kapoor describes as "very bodily, very physical." *KAPOOR STUDIO / TADZIO*



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"C-Curve" (2007) is another inverting mirror. "The whole show in a way is about reversal," Mr. Kapoor says. *KAPOOR STUDIO / KAMEL MENNOUR AND LISSON GALLERY / ...*



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A basin has been dug especially for "Descension" (2014), an endlessly spinning vortex of water. *KAPOOR STUDIO AND KAMEL MENNOUR / PHOTO:FABRICE SEIXAS*



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In 2011, the inflatable "Leviathan" filled the Grand Palais in Paris for the Monumenta contemporary-art show. *JACQUES DEMARTHON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES*



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Mr. Kapoor at Versailles. He is the seventh contemporary artist to exhibit there. Predecessors include Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami. *TADZIO*

