Early Works

Anish Kapoor

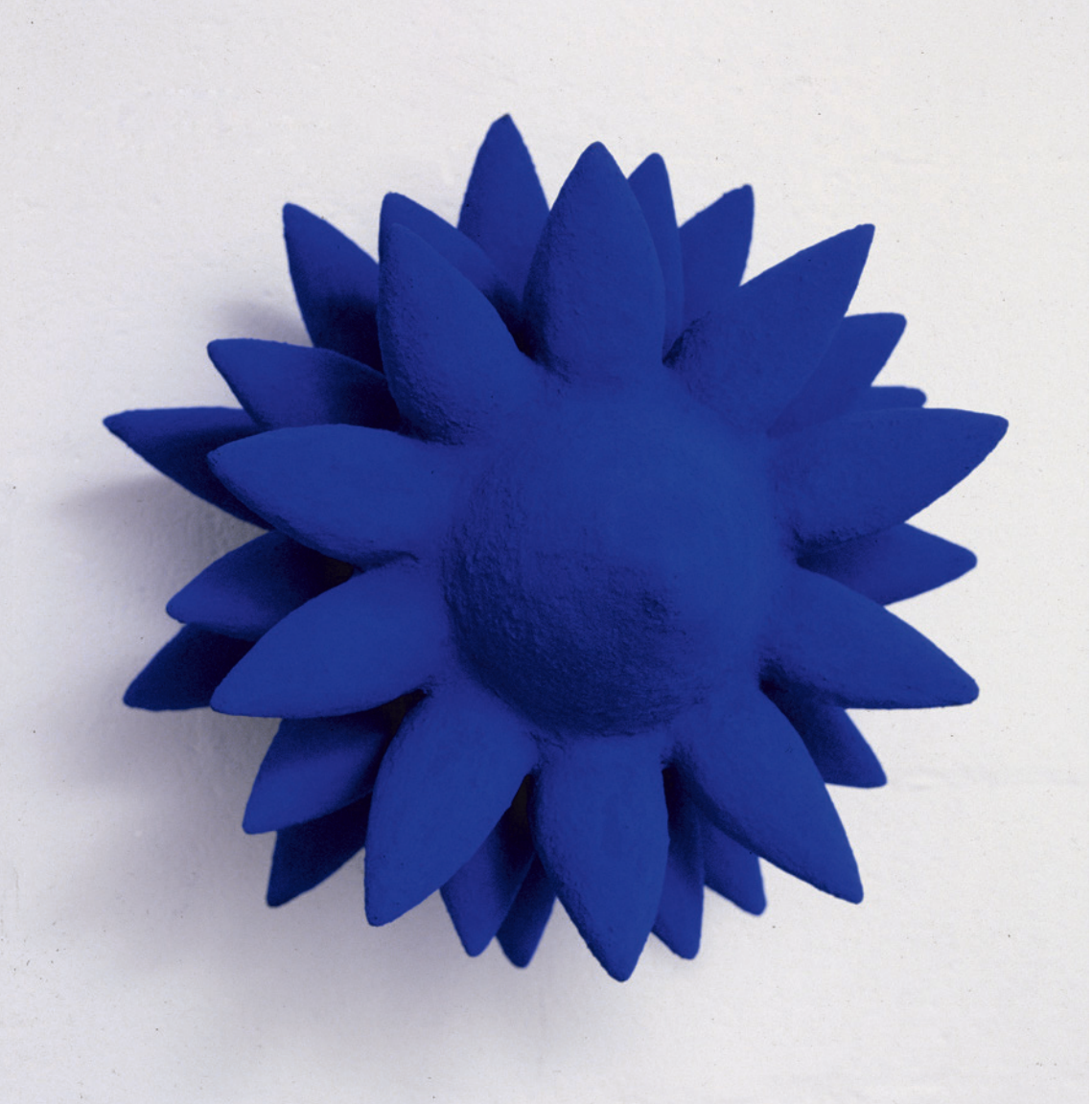


Fig. 1 (previous) *Part of the Red*, 1981
Fig. 2 *1000 Names*, 1983

Introduction

Anish Kapoor is the rare artist whose output is both staggeringly diverse—in medium, scale, and style—and readily recognizable, characterized by a paradoxical combination of variety and consistency. His work is, at its core, permutational—the ongoing exposition of a vast yet clearly defined set of ideas. This exhibition focuses on the genesis of these ideas, which have evolved continuously over the past four decades.

Kapoor finished art school in London in 1978. The sculptures that he made in the five subsequent years are varied in their form but alike, at least apparently, in their materiality. A tapering semicircle, ridged like the fin of a shark; a series of boxes nested into a kind of ziggurat; and a sphere with a lobed surface all appear to be made of pure, vibrantly colored pigment. Though distinct, the shapes also possess a kind of coherence: they are simple and universal, referencing architecture and the natural world. Kapoor made the first pigment sculptures in pairs—two works conceived together as components of a single installation. Later installations included three to six discrete objects, precisely arranged in relation to one another. All share a hieroglyphic quality: they bear loose (stylized, abstracted) iconic resemblance to objects in the world, but they also suggest a set of ciphers whose meaning is determined in equal parts by those associations and by internal or grammatical relationships. The sculptures suggest language's improbable capacity to adumbrate, through limited means, reality in its fullness.

The dichotomy of limited means versus limitless possibility is also implicit in the title *1000 Names*, shared

by numerous sculptures and related works on paper that Kapoor created during this time. The title carries carries implications of sublimity: Germano Celant notes that 1,000 is a "symbolic number," a number that refers to plenitude.[1] As a title "1000 Names" also draws attention to the function and limitations of naming: by including the word "name" in a name, Kapoor underscores the artificiality of the relationship between words and what they signify. Yet these relationships, though contingent and arbitrary, are mutually constitutive. A name is a name only insofar as it refers to a thing, and our ability to conceive of any one thing as distinct from the holistic mass of *every*thing often relies on naming. Names are both inherently lacking, in that they are not identical to what they represent, and necessary, as emblematic of representation. Kapoor's sculptures sit squarely within this tension in that they refer to the world from a distance while patently occupying a place within it. As he has observed: "I continually come back to questions about the status of the object: How fully is it in the world? How much is it what it says it is and how much is it something else? Where is the real space of the object? Is it what you're looking at, or is it the space beyond what you're looking at?"[2]

Kapoor has often spoken of ritual as a mode of his work. Ritual actions are repetitive, structured, and prescribed, yet they move participants toward a state of enlightenment or inspiration. In some respects "ritual" is simply a characterization of Kapoor's serious work ethic, but it also suggests a particular understanding of how artistic inspiration comes to be: "the point is to work, to work, to work, to keep at it constantly. Because out of work things emerge—unexpected things, unplanned things."[3] The improbability of something fluid and alive emerging from something rigid is captured in Jewish tradition in the dichotomy of *keva* (regularity) and *kavannah* (intention, concentration, or devotion), both of which are considered crucial elements of religious practice. These two poles seem opposed to each other—rote versus inspiration—yet they support each other in vital ways. As the theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and the strength to say a word in the presence of God. But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight."[4]

For Kapoor, assiduousness becomes a way of making space for spontaneity, of creating conditions favorable for the emergence of ideas without knowing in advance what they will be. Drawing exemplifies the place where the ritualistic balance between something that is given and something that is responsive or open-ended can be most vividly felt. Kapoor notes that he draws almost every day: "I will do a drawing, and I won't necessarily know where it's going … I'll leave it on the wall and just do something else, and then out of the corner of my eye—without even realizing it, I'm picking it up … I have learned over the years that I will not let work out for the studio until I have lived this process." The givens are the artist's decisions to draw daily and to keep the drawings around. The looseness of the drawings and the "looking when you are not looking"

Fig. 3 *1000 Names*, 1979–80

Fig. 4 *1000 Names*, 1979–80

create space for chance. Different drawings suggest different points of equilibrium among these elements: in some, the material is allowed to do its thing, and the drawing is in fact *about* "how the hand moves, how liquid or otherwise the paint is." In others, the work seems more in the service of some formal idea or psychic state. The freedom to follow these various inclinations, consecutively or all at once, is key. This state of play is the primordial soup in which the building blocks of form begin to coalesce, like the particles of pigment that resolve, through accretion, as sculptures.

Perhaps the regularity of drawing as a part of Kapoor's practice, along with the balancing of different modes that it offers, gives it an outcome that also resembles one that typifies ritual, namely, the potential to subdue the ego. Kapoor's denial of his own voice or even agency as the fulcrum of the work's meaning (as exemplified in his winking credo, "I have nothing to say") suggests that he sees this as a desirable or even a necessary outcome: "I want the work to find languages for me." Kapoor's stance is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus's injunction that the personality of the artist must "refine itself out of existence."[5] As Kapoor puts it, "It's this singular presence that I am after. I'm looking for an absolute condition that is beyond what I know or think or want or propose. It is itself."

Still, the work embraces references that are specific to Kapoor's life and experience. Mountains, for instance, are a frequent presence in the early works; Kapoor points to the years he spent as a child in Dehradun, a city at the foothills of the Himalayas. Likewise his use of pigment, which began after Kapoor returned from a visit to India (his first after five years away). A bumpy sphere recalls the stylized "snail-shell curls" commonly found on representations of the Buddha, particularly those from Northern India. These specific references abide in the work without compromising its universality. If anything, their elemental feeling seems to point backward, to deep truths of the world or of human orientation toward the world that subtend all cultural production. Kapoor acknowledges that the early drawings, in particular, can be related to the "free association of psychoanalytic drawings." As the work progresses, however, "the language forms itself … almost as if it then frees itself of the need to display a descriptive language." Kapoor's artistic vocabulary, which can be seen taking shape in his early works, is perhaps best described as drawing from nature and culture in a recursive relationship. In *As if to Celebrate, I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* (1981, Fig. 10), a trio of ridged cones suggest mountains transmuted into architecture. Other works offer streamlined or abstracted versions of shapes that remain unmistakably organic: the rounded, tapering shape in *Part of the Red* recalls a wasp's nest [Fig. 1]. *White Sand, Red Millet, Many Flowers* (1982), meanwhile, contains a shape reminiscent of a termite mound [Fig. 2]. In fact, insect architecture offers a model of intelligence—and intention—that is diffuse and impersonal. The pigment sculptures overall—to the extent that they appear to be agglomerations of millions of tiny granules—convey the sense that they could have

been assembled by swarms of bees or ants, a notion that is playfully underscored by the presence of architecture at tabletop scale. Others move in the opposite direction, evoking organic forms as they might appear under a microscope. All are pervaded by a sense of self-sufficiency, of "itselfness," that suggests, perhaps, the successful abnegation of the artist's self.

The bewilderment produced by this deep but nebulous sense of familiarity tracks with Kapoor's aim to create—out of wood, pigment, *stuff*—objects with "metaphoric potential." This is the "fundamental transformation—alchemical, mysterious, magical" that he posits as the necessary and sufficient condition for art. Heschel argued that ritual, precisely in its repetitiousness, helps us to locate the sublime within the everyday: "The mystery is an ontological category," one present and available to be experienced "everywhere and at all times … We do not come upon it only at the climax of thinking or in observing strange, extraordinary facts but in the startling fact that there are facts at all: being, the universe, the unfolding of time. We may face it at every turn, in a grain of sand, in an atom, as well as in the stellar space. Everything holds the great secret."[6] The sheer materiality of Kapoor's pigment sculptures exemplifies Heschel's point. The pigment's granularity and the dusting around the sculptures' bases that suggests the role of gravity in their fabrication makes them appear fragile and provisional: we sense that a gust of wind might scatter them into nonexistence. Yet these works vibrate with energy. They are imbued with an exhilarating sense of possibility, as if each form has all other forms immanent within it. The primary colors of Kapoor's palette underscore this: like the four bases that constitute every strand of the DNA of everything that has ever lived, they are sufficient to produce seemingly infinite variety. In these works, and through deceptively simple means, Kapoor prompts us to wonder at this mystery in its own right—as replete in a grain of pigment as in a mountain.

Shira Backer

1 Germano Celant, *Anish Kapoor* (Edizioni Charta, 1995), xii.

2 "Anish Kapoor in Conversation with Nicholas Baume," in Nicholas Baume, ed., *Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future* (ICA Boston/MIT Press, 2008), 43.

3 This and all following quotations by Anish Kapoor are from Darsie Alexander's interview with the artist in the present volume.

4 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (Scribner, 1954), 64–68.

5 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

6 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*: *A Philosophy of Judaism* (Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 57–58.

Anish Kapoor in Conversation with Darsie Alexander

February 29 and April 17, 2025

Fig. 5 *White Sand, Red Millet, Many Flowers*, 1982

Darsie Alexander I've been looking forward to this conversation and to rewinding the clock to a very early time in your career. So much about your work has changed—the scale, the visibility, the materials—but the components and forms have a lineage that harkens back directly to your work as a young artist in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Can you take me to that moment and to the inception of the pigment works in particular? Where you were in your life when you made them?

Anish Kapoor I had just left Chelsea School of Art in 1978, and the questions on my mind were: "How do I deal with my youth, my childhood?" and, "What does it mean to be an artist of my origin working in the UK?" At one level, my instinct was to completely ignore it and look for a formal language that made for a way forward. Duchamp was a great influence. *The Large Glass*, more than any other; the symbolic, metaphoric, alchemical works; the ones that do opposites—male and female. I went back to India after about five years in the UK, and I thought that maybe it's possible something comes from this. I started working with pigment when I returned to the UK. The forms I was making were all red and white, opposites in a way, geometric and quite formal. I was an object-maker at art school, and so I made objects in pigment and had the pigment spill onto the floor, forming a halo. I was experimenting with what pigment does. But most important was the metaphoric, the oneiric, the sense of the object having otherness. Then, very quickly, came the idea of the iceberg—most of the object is unseen, behind the wall or under the floor,

and what emerges and what is seen is just a fragment. The half-said, the almost-fully-present, fascinated me and still does.

Darsie Alexander The iceberg metaphor is interesting in light of the fact that it foreshadows the monumental scale your later work would achieve, but at this stage it was about the seen and unseen, the inside and outside. The works from this early period are incredibly delicate, with the colors possessing a kind of intensity and purity through the pigment that was really unparalleled.

Anish Kapoor Pigment is very fragile, to touch is to destroy. The aim, following on from LeWitt, Judd, and others, is to remove the hand. It's not about the gesture; that's something else. When I put pigment on, I flick it, gently and lightly, and it forms a velvety, fragile surface. I'm interested in those tensions—the tension of the half-revealed object, the tension of a surface that tells you that the object is fragile. And then of course the emphatic presence of color. Red has been central for me from almost day one. It is present. I have always seen red as the center, with yellow and black sitting on either side.

Darsie Alexander It's interesting to think about Judd and LeWitt and the Minimalists. So much of their work was about removing the handmade or the gestural form. Your work is gestural in its application but not its surface.

Anish Kapoor Not so different from Judd's spray-painted forms. The point is that in erasing the hand or touch from the work, it makes a reference. Perhaps in the case of Judd and LeWitt it is an industrial reference, but in my case it is a ritual reference. The hand goes in many different directions. I think that is very important. I believe deeply that we are religious beings, that we carry within ourselves the mystery, the masked fear, that sits behind the ritual act. The fear of death. The hand acts to affirm both the body and the metaphysical body, the one that isn't present. And the two materials that are central to ritual are earth and blood, so red and black.

Darsie Alexander I'm thinking about this wonderful early work, a drawing with an imprint of your hand on its surface [Fig. 6], red against a white background, which I take to be a kind of declaration: "I am here. I am making a mark here." But also, "I am here as an artist. I make impressions." You've spoken about ritual before, and you've talked about earth and blood, but you've also described yourself as quite ritualistic in your daily life, adhering to patterns for what you wear in the studio, when you eat, etc. Order is also a version of ritual.

Anish Kapoor The palm in the work you are referring to is of course a very old gesture. I'm thinking of aboriginal cave paintings, the hand on the wall. It goes a long way back. It's a curious declaration, because it's not about me, it's about the condition of being. I think that is one of those central issues. My instinct as an artist is that

Fig. 6 *1000 Names*, 1979–80

Fig. 7 *1000 Names*, 1980

Fig. 8 *1000 Names*, 1979–80

Fig. 9 *1000 Names*, 1979–80

I have nothing to say. I want the work to find languages for me. They are my psychic languages. I guess one cannot avoid that. For example, one of the things that occurs again and again is the mountain. Many of these works have mountainesque references—shapes, forms. From the age of twelve I grew up in a place called Dehradun. All around us were the Himalayas, and in the distance you could see Annapurna and the other gigantic peaks, so the mountain was always present. It's almost as if the mountain is a building, an object, a place—it's not just a landscape. In a sense, it offers all sorts of other metaphoric possibilities.

Making a pigment work is highly ritualistic. I place the object perfectly, and then I put the pigment on and very carefully make the halo that sits on the floor. Getting that right is not straightforward and is a very particular kind of concentration. It's almost as if I am making a painting in real time every time I show the work. To get it right is not easy. It is delicate, very particular, and has deep ritual overtones.

Darsie Alexander I imagine you can get into a kind of state going through the process of slowly realizing these objects in space, the meticulous application of color. The physical activity of making the work must itself involve complete calm and focus, where you are giving yourself over entirely to the process.

Anish Kapoor I'm thinking of Jackson Pollock, painting ritualistically, dripping that stuff. What is he doing? It is my sense that he is painting with blood and semen. It is very sexual. And then he does this incredible thing—which only an artist can do. He puts it on the wall. He turns earth into sky. When you look at a Pollock, a good one, they are always cosmic. What he has done by that very simple act, from horizontal to vertical, is to turn earth into sky. That is a fundamental transformation—alchemical, mysterious, magical. If we are any good as artists, that is what we have got to do. Otherwise, who cares?

Darsie Alexander I want to ask you about the ensemble-like configurations of that early work and how they function in space. You place these objects in dialogue with one another as groupings, and that was a clear choice. But then at a certain point, you stopped, and the forms became bigger and more individualized. I've heard you say that you developed an aversion to the idea of "compositions." Tell me about this progression, and how your work has related to the idea of space, both between the objects and within the context of the gallery or studio.

Anish Kapoor Perhaps it is a modernist horror, but I have a horror of composition. That is not what it is about. Once I tumbled into making the pigment works, the language changed. Many of the early pigment works were red and white, and they were often paired. Then there were periods when they were singular objects, like those in the *1000 Names* series. They began to coalesce into groups of objects, for example: *As if to Celebrate, I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* [1981, Fig. 10] or *White Sand, Red Millet, Many Flowers* [1982,

Fig. 5]—the titles refer to the ritual process. They began to coalesce as objects, often in male-female pairings. The work *Part of the Red* [1981, Fig. 1] has one red object in the middle of a blue field. That is a formal proposition; it is laying out a series of organic forms in relation to each other.

If these works are any good, they go beyond composition, like poetry. A good poem is a singular thing. It is almost not made of words, and it is full of tension. It's this singular presence that I am after. I'm looking for an absolute condition that is beyond what I know or think or want or propose. It is itself.

Darsie Alexander I want to shift gears to ask you about your mother and your time in Israel.

Anish Kapoor My mother was Iraqi-Jewish. They lived in Iraq for centuries, and then things went sour—or maybe in post-colonial times, they began to feel that the shores were brighter elsewhere, and so the family moved to New York. My grandfather hated it, and he went back to Baghdad and then decided to go east but in utter poverty. To be poor anywhere is difficult, but to be poor in India, my God, that's really hard, but there was a vibrant Jewish community. My mother was six months old when they landed in Bombay, and the community was supportive. Eventually, my grandfather took a position as the hazan in the synagogue in Pune, so they left Bombay, and slowly it all fell into place for them.

Fig. 10 *As if to Celebrate, I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers*, 1981

My mother was a modern person, cosmopolitan, and tied to her Jewishness but not an observant Jew despite the fact that her father was active in the synagogue. She eventually met and married my father, who was born a Hindu, though he was completely uninterested in his Hindu origins. So they were cosmopolitan, modern people.

Darsie Alexander When were they married? Can you elaborate a bit more on your parents and childhood?

Anish Kapoor My parents married in 1952 or '53. I was born in '54. My father was in the Navy. He was in the British Navy originally and then in the Indian Navy. He was a hydrographer, which is ocean map-making—delving into the depths of what can't be seen, as I hope I am doing. We were in Bombay, and my father was away at sea a lot at that time. In the Navy he was on the scientific side, but we ended up traveling everywhere all the time. God knows how many homes in no time at all. Eventually he became the chief hydrographer to the government in India and we moved to Dehradun, which was miles and miles away from the sea. In the old days, before air-conditioning, it was in the cooler north of India, so accurate maps could be drawn there because the paper didn't warp with the high temperatures as it did elsewhere.

We hardly ever went to the synagogue. We were the Jewish boys at school, and there weren't any others. India at that time—Indian society—was tolerant, not just of

Jews but of Muslims, of everybody. I say "was" because it is sadly not that way any longer because of the despicable politics in India in the last ten to fifteen years.

In the early '50s, the aliyah office [Jewish Agency] opened in Bombay. There was a significant Jewish population in India at the time. Within ten years, few remained because they had all gone to Israel, and most of them stayed there. Others ended up in Australia, Canada, or elsewhere. It was sad because the community had had its own particular kind of Indian-Jewish, Baghdadi-Jewish way of life—and delicious, wonderful food that was halfway between Indian and Middle Eastern.

My mother had a sad obsession with getting us out of India. My brother Roy and I were put on one of those planes going to Israel. We were three brothers actually, but the youngest was five years younger, so he stayed with our parents. I was sixteen, and Roy was fifteen. It was awful. We went to a kibbutz, learned Hebrew, and went to university. Like all good Indian boys, we were expected to take on a profession. Mine was to be engineering, so I went to Be'er Sheva, which is the largest city in southern Israel. I lasted only three months. I had a terrible time and had the most awful nervous breakdown.

I decided to go back to the kibbutz, and within a few months I somehow managed to get myself a little studio. They were very generous about that. This is Kibbutz Gan Shmuel, which at the time was left-wing, employed many Palestinians, and had an open, modern attitude. It was amazing. I was there for about three years, then I applied to Bezalel Academy, the art school in Jerusalem. They rejected me, thank God! I decided with a friend to try to get to London, so we flew to Turkey, and as one did in those days, hitchhiked from Istanbul to London. I can't believe I did it, actually. That was April of '73.

I got myself a job selling ice cream and managed to get into Hornsey [College of Art], which was incredible. I started making sculpture almost from the first day. In England, after your foundation year, you get to choose whether you are going to do fine art, design, or whatever else. So I stayed on at Hornsey and did sculpture. Great fun, I loved it. Suddenly I knew that I was doing the right thing. My poor father freaked out. He didn't know how to deal with the possibility that I would never make a living. In those days there couldn't have been half a dozen people in London who made a living as artists. Almost everybody taught, and I thought that was what I would do too.

Darsie Alexander Movement and upheaval characterized your early life. Now many years later, you're very settled. There's a steadiness and discipline to your life now. Perhaps it's somehow connected to living with a certain degree of change and uncertainty when you were younger.

Anish Kapoor I have been homeless my whole life. My only home is my studio. I maintain for myself a continuous practice. I do not care whether it is good, bad, or indifferent. That is not the point. The point is to work, to work, to work, to keep at it constantly. Because out of work things emerge—unexpected things, unplanned things.

Darsie Alexander I'd like to talk about the drawings. Having spent time in your archive, where hundreds of works on paper live in large, well-organized flat files, I was astounded by the scale and number of these works. This has clearly been a very important part of your practice. Within this volume of material, I found constellations of drawings that relate to one another—your "surrealist family," your "1000 Names family," your "roots and trees family." When you were starting to become an artist, were the drawings a way to sketch ideas, or were you thinking about drawing as an entity and product unto itself?

Anish Kapoor When I look at the drawings I did as a student, what I see in the best of them is a certain will to two or three things. One is, without even realizing it, something to do with ritual practice, objects identified as having metaphoric potential—often perfectly ordinary objects. The other is, of course, the body, which keeps occurring to this day. And the third is this process of the making of an object or the placing of an object or the performing of an object—a sense that objects in art especially are never, if they are any good, just present. They have double lives with metaphoric possibilities, and it is the viewer who brings the fulfillment of meaning.

Darsie Alexander Are the drawings a bit of a template? Are you testing out visual relationships in the drawings as a step toward the sculptural works?

Anish Kapoor Not necessarily. Often a drawing is a drawing—in itself. It's about how the hand moves, how liquid or otherwise the paint is. It's a particular type of form. In this period many drawings are pigment and water mixed without any binder. They are almost completely free. It's a way of giving form to a certain preoccupation. And then of course color plays a very big role. Color is radiant, it is real presence. But I am deeply concerned with form, its shape, its possibility of object and of the body.

Darsie Alexander It seems like the very early '73 to '78 drawings, the ones I call your "surrealist family," reveal a process almost like sketching [Figs. 11, 12]. You can see the graphite and the activity of drawing. Then the forms start to become more distilled and flatter, whereas that first family of drawings has a sort of volumetric spatial quality. There's a shift where the drawings start to feel a little more like painting [Figs. 13, 14]. They get more abstract. In those early drawings, there are certain shapes that are congealing, certain forms that will become emblematic for you, but they're not cemented yet. The drawing process seems to be giving you that chance to feel through the possibilities of the shapes, which then click in place. Suddenly you have these emblematic forms that become their own kind of language, whether it's the lozenge or the crescent-moon shape [Figs. 8, 9], for example.

Anish Kapoor I was looking for a language, and it took a while for it to form. But drawing is something I still do almost every single day. There are thousands of drawings in my archive. I find drawing to be a register for my state

Fig. 11 *Untitled*, 1973–78

Fig. 12 *Untitled*, 1973–78

Fig. 13 *Untitled*, 1989

Fig. 14 *Untitled*, 1987

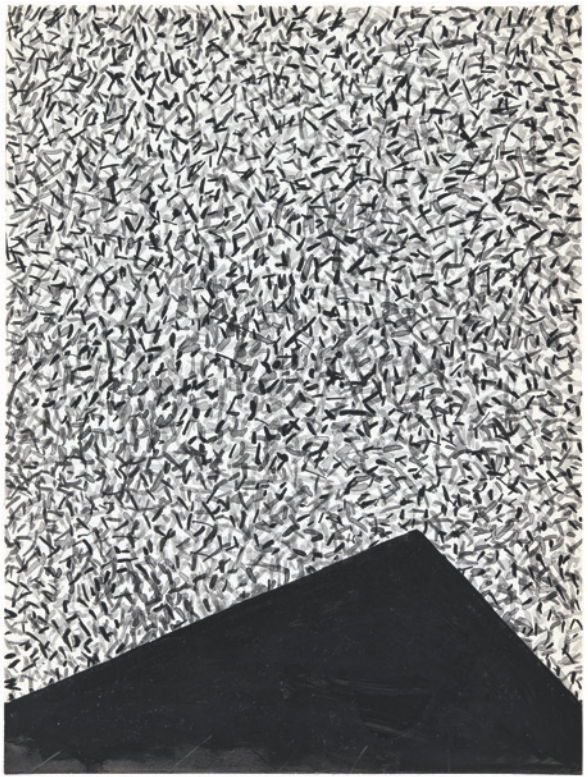


Fig. 15 *Untitled*, 1973–78

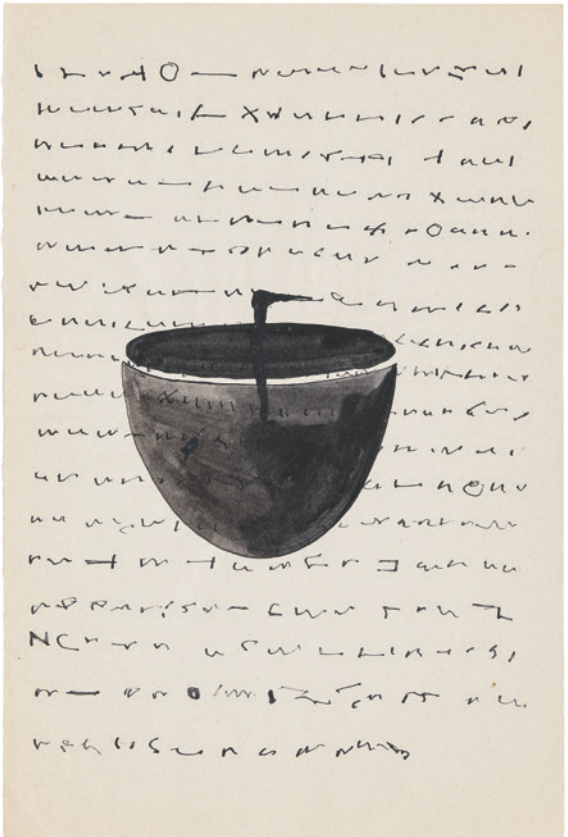


Fig. 16 *Untitled*, 1978

of being, or rather the state of play in relation to what I think I'm after, whether I'm making paintings, sculpture, or whatever else. I draw on the studio wall, and those drawings are really important to me. I will do a drawing, and I won't necessarily know where it's going, nor does it matter that much. I'll leave it on the wall and do something else, and then out of the corner of my eye—without even realizing it, I'm picking it up. There are some drawings that become pertinent and they get taken forward, and there are others that do not. That's an important process. I have learned over the years that I will not let work out for the studio until I have lived this process. Watched it and watched it. Six months is what I like to say, because what happens is that looking when you are not looking. That is the time when it says okay or not okay.

Darsie Alexander Having these drawings in your studio in the range of your peripheral vision makes the process almost subconscious, tapping into a different part of your imagination and your sight. I was thinking about this when I saw an image of one of your early studios, maybe from your student days, and the floors were covered in flecks of debris and scattered forms. There were drawings directly on the wall as well. It seemed that you were thinking about the drawing as part of the Gesamtkunstwerk, as part of a larger whole.

Anish Kapoor It's a means by which momentary psychic space can be recorded. One of the wonderful things about drawing is that it is not only what the hand does carefully, but that it allows this much bigger gesture. Many of these drawings don't have any pencil in them at all. They're not drawn in that sense.

Darsie Alexander In some drawings, though, the hand is very careful—as in the group of black ink drawings that are very calligraphic, with squiggles of line that evoke hieroglyphics or Hebrew lettering. Several of the black ink drawings combine these lines with architectural shapes evoking windows and corners, for example.

Anish Kapoor I was making a work that had a room divided by a curtain, one side of which was a series of forms, and the other side was a series of completely broken forms. I imagined when I did this drawing that the curtain was splattered with paint, so you could half see through it, and it was a corner, two corners that were separated by a curtain. I was drawing something physical there, trying to understand how I could make it [Fig. 15].

Darsie Alexander What about the ones that appear more like writing? There's one that has a sort of vessel in the foreground, and then there's writing, almost like concrete poetry [Fig. 16].

Anish Kapoor There's a long history of objects—Islamic objects, religious objects—that have writing associated with them, and the bowl or vessel was getting at this idea of a receptive space. I was getting at this idea of the hand and the object.

Darsie Alexander Let's get to the *1000 Names* drawings. Obviously, there's a connection to the sculptural series with the same title. As a group, the drawings share common threads: they're red, they're architectural, and they're iconic in terms of "Kapoor forms" like the crescent [Figs. 8, 9]. But they can also be quite playful and airy. Some of the shapes even appear to be floating, untethered within a celestial space. It's such a distinct body of work.

Anish Kapoor When I started making the *1000 Names* series, I'd found a language that felt real to me and in which I could be free, in which I could be open. But the drawings were a continuation of my sculptural practice. I made them, again, with complete abandon, and I think that's pretty obvious. There are others that are much more formally concerned.

Darsie Alexander I always think about Pollock's psychoanalytic drawings and the way that drawing was, for him, a way of tapping into a deeper psychic state. Do you have a relationship to the psychoanalytic drawing story?

Anish Kapoor I have a very strong one. When you think of Pollock in that relation, once he moves out of surrealism, that almost immediately disappears, and I'm drawing a very similar parallel. The early drawings do have some relationship to the free association of psychoanalytic drawings, and then the language forms itself. It's almost as if it then frees itself of the need to display a descriptive language. It emerges in different forms, so if the earlier works were male and female, I'm going to say so are the *1000 Names* drawings, except the language has changed; it's become much more symbolic and much less figurative. Why red and white? Red and white are classic opposites. The language is there at every level, but it has turned a page; it's another form, another way. It doesn't read as free association. The search is much more directed.

Darsie Alexander Let's flash forward to the 1980s. I came upon this group of drawings that you made in the late '80s, and have a very glossy red surface [Figs. 17, 20, 21]. There are veins seeping through the texture of the paper like tree branches or the inside of a heart. They feel more organic, more like bodies. How do those fit in?

Anish Kapoor First of all, color plays a completely different but key role. Almost all of them are made with two colors—black and red—and there's a sense, of course, of the body: the artery, the vein, and the way it reaches out, the black invades. There is in a sense a naturalistic language, but then there's also a sense of wanting the paper to glow, that is what they are after.

Darsie Alexander There's a gloss—almost a veneer—from the varnish on some of them. Where were you when you were making these?

Anish Kapoor The '80s were really interesting in the sense that my fellow artists and I found ourselves able to live

Fig. 17 *Untitled*, 1989

Fig. 18 *Untitled*, 1990

Fig. 19 *Mother as a Mountain*, 1985

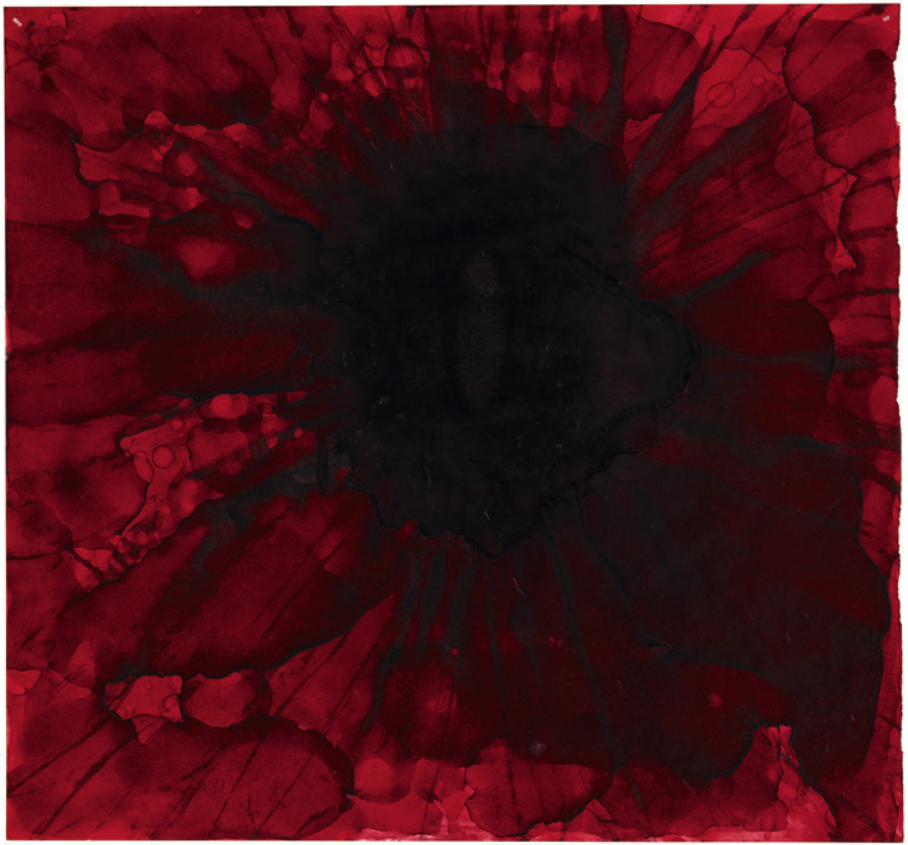


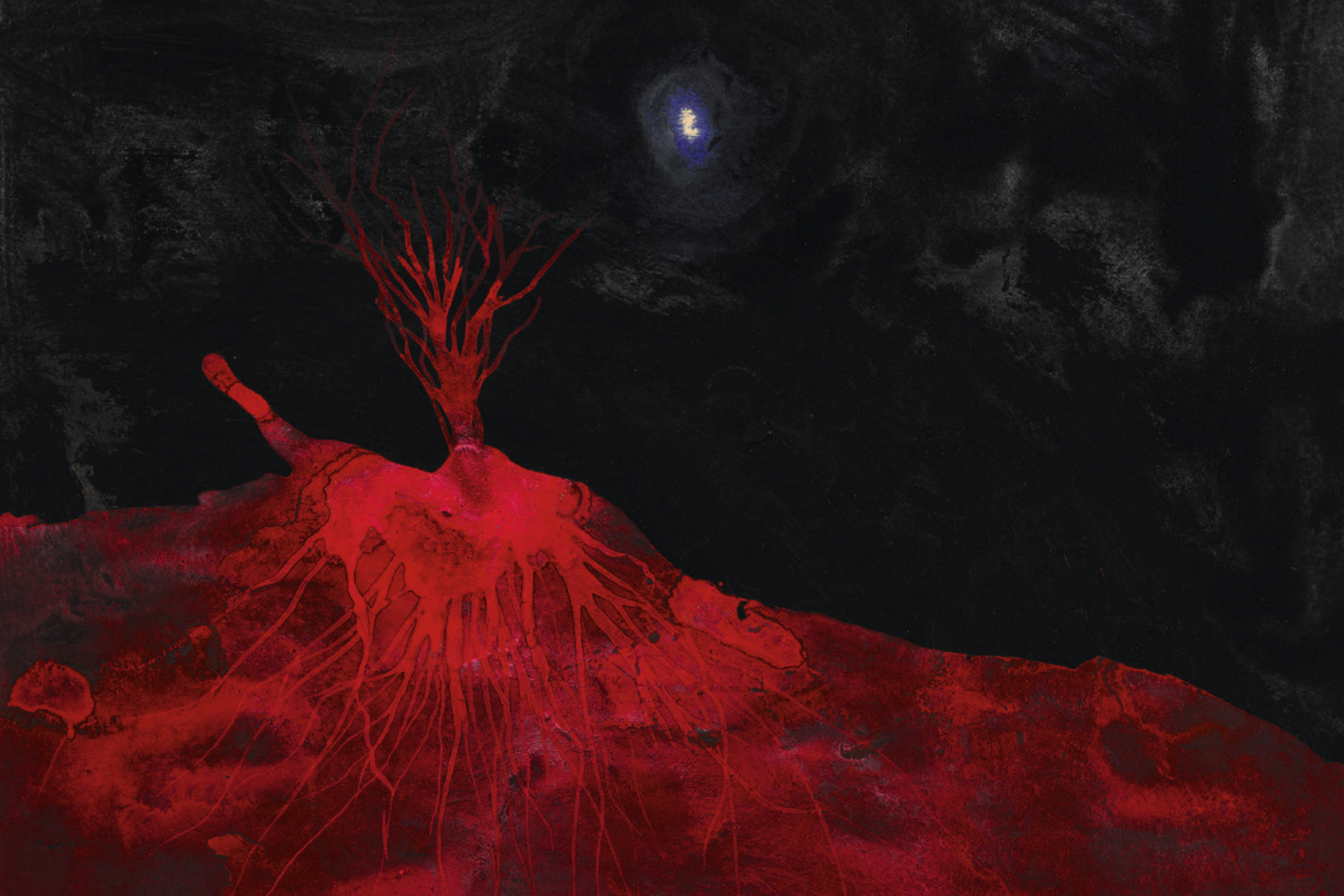
Fig. 20 *Untitled*, 1989

off our work. Who would've thought that was possible? In the '70s, it certainly was impossible. By the late '80s, there was the sense of a mission. I began to work in other materials, including stone. I was doing shows. I represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1990. The work somehow came into its own language by then, and drawing continued as an experimental, tentative process.

Darsie Alexander The '80s were a fascinating decade in the New York art scene and also the period when you started to find a much broader audience for your work. You started to have success in terms of exhibitions, visibility, the market. But were you showing the drawings, or were they private?

Anish Kapoor After the Venice Biennale, I did a drawing show at the Tate in 1991 with Jeremy Lewison. The critic William Feaver wrote about the show, saying it was the worst show the Tate had ever done. And I must say, at first it completely floored me. I thought, "How awful!" But not long after, I thought, "Wow, this is great. I love that he doesn't get it at all and doesn't want to get it." It taught me a very important lesson about how not to listen to what others have to say.

Fig. 21 *Untitled*, 1988 (detail)



List of Works

Fig. 1 *Part of the Red*, 1981
Mixed media and pigment
28 ¼ × 118 ⅛ × 157 ½ inches
(72 × 300 × 400 cm)
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo, the Netherlands

Fig. 2 *1000 Names*, 1983
Mixed media and pigment
23 ⅝ × 23 ⅝ × 23 ⅝ inches
(60 × 60 × 60 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 3 *1000 Names*, 1979–80
Gesso and pigment
on paper
12 ½ × 9 ⅜ inches
(31.8 × 24 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 4 *1000 Names*, 1979–80
Gesso and pigment
on paper
12 ⅝ × 9 ⅜ inches
(32 × 24 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 5 *White Sand, Red Millet, Many Flowers*, 1982
Mixed media and pigment
39 ¾ × 95 × 85 ½ inches
(101 × 241.5 × 217.4 cm)
Arts Council Collection,
Southbank Centre, London

Fig. 6 *1000 Names*, 1979–80
Gesso and pigment
on paper
16 ½ × 11 ⅞ inches
(42 × 30 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 7 *1000 Names*, 1980
Gesso and pigment
on paper
16 ½ × 11 ⅞ inches
(42 × 30 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 8 *1000 Names*, 1979–80
Gesso and pigment
on paper
12 ½ × 9 ⅜ inches
(31.8 × 23.8 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 9 *1000 Names*, 1979–80
Chalk and gouache
on paper
16 ⅝ × 11 ⅞ inches
(42.2 × 29.9 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 10 *As if to Celebrate, I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers*, 1981
Mixed media and pigment
42 × 120 × 120 inches
(107 × 305 × 305 cm)
Tate: Purchased 1983

Fig. 11 *Untitled*, 1973–78
Gouache and ink on paper
12 ½ × 9 ⅜ inches
(31.7 × 24 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 12 *Untitled*, 1973–78
Gouache, ink, and pencil
on paper
12 ½ × 9 ⅜ inches
(31.7 × 24 cm)
Collection of the artist

Anish Kapoor's studio, 1980

Fig. 13 *Untitled*, 1989
Varnish and pencil on paper
27 ¼ × 22 inches
(69.4 × 56 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 14 *Untitled*, 1987
Gouache and earth
on board
10 ¾ × 8 ¼ inches
(27.4 × 21 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 15 *Untitled*, 1973–78
Ink on paper
12 ⅝ × 9 ⅜ inches
(31.9 × 23.9 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 16 *Untitled*, 1978
Ink on paper
15 × 10 inches
(38.1 × 25.5 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 17 *Untitled*, 1989
Varnish and gouache
on paper
27 ⅝ × 19 ⅝ inches
(70 × 49.8 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 18 *Untitled*, 1990
Ink on paper
27 ½ × 19 ⅝ inches
(69.9 × 49.8 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 19 *Mother as a*
Mountain, 1985
Mixed media and pigment
55 × 91 ½ × 40 ½ inches
(139.7 × 232.4 × 102.9 cm)
Walker Art Center,
Minneapolis
T. B. Walker Acquisition
Fund, 1987

Fig. 20 *Untitled*, 1989
Mixed media on paper
19 ⅝ × 21 ⅛ inches
(49.8 × 53.5 cm)
Collection of the artist

Fig. 21 *Untitled*, 1988
Gouache on paper
21 ⅞ × 22 ¾ inches
(55.7 × 58 cm)
Collection of the artist

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Shira Backer, *Leon Levy*
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Jewish Museum

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