

As Anish Kapoor Opens Show in Seoul, He Considers Skipping China Biennial

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Anish Kapoor stands with recent works in "Gathering Clouds" at Kukje Gallery
(Image © Anish Kapoor / Courtesy of Kukje Gallery)

The British sculptor [Anish Kapoor](#) seems to make news everywhere he goes. Appearing in Seoul recently to discuss his new show, "Gathering Clouds," at Kukje Gallery he discussed not only the twisting, reflective stainless steel sculptures and gradient concave discs on view (through October 30), but also some of the hot topics that have been following him lately: His exclusive rights to the blackest of black materials, his "queen's vagina" controversy in Versailles, and, most recently, why he's thinking of dropping out of the debut Yinchuan Biennale in China to protest its censorship of fellow artist Ai Weiwei. Here are a few highlights from Kapoor's discussion with a small group of journalists at Kukje Gallery last week.

On whether he will withdraw his work from China's new Yinchuan Biennale, slated to open September 9, after news came that organizers uninvited Ai Weiwei from the event:

I'm going to dare to say what I really think about it, which is that since they excluded Weiwei I think it's problematic and, to be honest, I'm wondering if I'm going to take part. I think censorship is not acceptable. We need to stand against it. So even though the work's on the way I'm not sure I'll show it. One wants to support these things because it's a fledgling biennale and they're trying to do the right thing. But to take part means to be on the side of the authorities. I don't want to make too much of it, but at the same time it's problematic.

On securing the exclusive rights to Vantablack, the blackest black substance known:

I'm two years into the project with these people who developed what we think of as the blackest material in the universe, other than a black hole. Materials have mythology and this is a wonderful mythology. It's highly technical so the story reported is that I have exclusive rights to this material. I do, but let me explain; to say only that is not quite clear. It's complicated. I read a little piece in the newspaper about this super black material and I thought, 'this is for me.' I call the guy up and say can we work together. He didn't realize it had visual implications. It's made for the defense industry to mask stealth airplanes and to mask the interior of telescopes when you don't want stray light. They were only able to make bits and what we're trying to do is make them in a certain bulk. Color is so emotive and especially black. As we know from fashion and other ways, black has this emotive response.. I don't think it would be the same thing if it was white. Of course we all know about Malevich's square, which is in a way a ridiculous icon. It's almost as if what he's doing is not just making an object but making a shadow of an object. So there's something about it. Perhaps it's also that we possess black. Perhaps the darkest black is the black that we carry within ourselves... I suspect red's the same. I've worked with red a great deal for not dissimilar reasons.

On his two recent bodies of work on view now at Kukje Gallery in Seoul:

The main body of work are these twisted forms, which I've been making over a few years. I of course became interested in it because that twist always leads to concavity, so it relates to my deep interest in the concave mirrored form, which I've worked with a lot over many years. So at one level this is a simple, stupid idea, but it does something. It becomes something else, so I'm interested in that process. Small shifts are enough. Of course in other parts of my practice I like the idea that there's a lot to say. But in this show—it's not necessary to say too much most of the time. The other work in the show, "Gathering Clouds," is a work I made originally for small installation in the Venice Biennale... [Gerhard Richter](#) made a whole series of works out of gray paint. Is it possible to do it again after he did it? These are the kinds of challenges that I think are worth exploring.

On why his especially concave steel sculpture, "Dirty Corner," mounted in the gardens of Versailles, generated so much controversy last year and earned the label "the queen's vagina."

A public work can't just be a decorative bijou on the lawn. Somehow one has to do more than that, but the opportunities can be difficult. I've always tried to dig a little deeper. The latest was in Versailles. Although that's not a permanent work I seemed to offend everyone for some reason... I never quote Winston Churchill but I will. He said, 'Never waste a good crisis,' and this was a great crisis. I think what I did was to use the situation to bring a bit of disorder to those perfect gardens in Versailles—and they are marvelous—but I think the disorder I brought was respectful. It wasn't just chaos. You know, our cities are full of masculine objects. No one makes the slightest noise when there's another phallus on the horizon, but it seems a vagina is really a problem. All I needed to say was 'she'—I never said vagina—I said 'she sits here on the lawn' or something to that effect.