Anish Kapoor: The Formation of a Global Art

Owen Duffy
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/508

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
Anish Kapoor: The Formation of a Global Art

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Owen J. Duffy Jr.
Bachelor of Art History
University of Maryland, College Park, 2011

Director: Robert Hobbs
Rhoda Thalhimer Endowed Chair of American Art

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May, 2013
Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank his family and partner Laura Burton for their unyielding love and support during the past two years leading up to the writing of this thesis. He would also like to express his sincere gratitude to Robert Hobbs for his invaluable guidance throughout this project, as well as his committee members Dina Bangdel and Babatunde Lawal, whose constructive criticism, feedback, and encouragement were most helpful and truly appreciated. In addition, his thanks extend to Kathleen Chapman, Eric Garberson, David Golumbia, George Gittins, Janna Israel, Samina Iqbal, Colin Lang, Mitchell Merling, Michael Schreffler, and Bobby Scott Whipkey, all of whom have helped make his graduate school experience at Virginia Commonwealth University thus far both formative and memorable.
Table of Contents

List of Figures..............................................................................................................v
Abstract....................................................................................................................vii
Introduction...............................................................................................................1
  Literature Review..................................................................................................4
  Justification and Implementation of Thesis.........................................................13
Chapter One: Anish Kapoor, Minimalism, and Modern Painting..............................18
  Kapoor’s Biography...............................................................................................19
  Establishing the Art Historical Context of Kapoor’s Work....................................21
  The Death of Painting............................................................................................30
Chapter Two: Anish Kapoor as Painter....................................................................32
  Kapoor’s and Mark Rothko’s Use of Pigment.......................................................34
  Tragedy in Kapoor’s Art.........................................................................................36
  Holi, Carnival, and Transgression..........................................................................37
  Kapoor and the Sahasranama.................................................................................39
  *Untitled*, the Kabbalah, and the Ineffable Name of God......................................40
  Coleridge’s Symbol...............................................................................................43
  1000 Names and *Untitled* as Models of Transcendence.....................................45
Chapter Three: Anish Kapoor’s Art and Homi Bhabha’s Writings

Bhabha’s Diasporic Heritage

Bhabha’s Liminality in Kapoor’s Untitled

On Hybridity

Kapoor’s Mirrored Objects: Dismantling Fixity

Moving Beyond the Nation

Chapter Four: Anish Kapoor’s Art and Globalization

Revisiting Empire, Globalization, and Kapoor’s Art

The Healing of St. Thomas and Cultural Translation

Resolving Bhabha’s Theories with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s Empire

Resisting Empire’s and Globalization’s Processes

Conclusion

Bibliography

Figures
List of Figures


6. René Magritte, *This is Not a Pipe*, 1929 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

7. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1973 (The Tate Gallery)

8. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1980 (The Tate Gallery)


17. Anish Kapoor, *Cloud Gate*, 2004 (Millennium Park)

18. Anish Kapoor, detail of *Cloud Gate’s omphalos*, 2004 (Millennium Park)


20. Duccio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, c. 1308-11 (Museo dell’Opera del Duomo)


22. Takashi Murakami, *Mr. DOB All Stars (Oh My The Mr. DOB)*, 1998


Abstract

ANISH KAPOOR: THE FORMATION OF A GLOBAL ART

By Owen J. Duffy Jr., B.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013.

Director: Robert Hobbs, Rhoda Thalhimer Endowed Chair of American Art

This study intends to investigate British artist Anish Kapoor’s stylistic formation in relationship to globalization, positing its history as a multiplicity, comprised of several competing localisms, including: minimalism; the traditions of modern painting; and the artist’s own personal diasporic narrative. It will demonstrate how Kapoor is a transgressive global artist, concerned not only with rethinking the longstanding question of artistic form, but also with the enduring process central to the cultural formation of subjects. Overall, this thesis will propose that Kapoor’s art in particular can be comprehended by the special liminal position it occupies between such polarities as modern and postmodern art, painting and sculpture, East and West, national and trans-national, and local and global. By transgressing the borders that demarcate these discourses, Kapoor’s art enters an in-between state; through both formal and thematic strategies, his sculptural forms orchestrate viewers so they are able to move beyond distinct,
fixed, and stable meanings and view the works as eminently open to the different perspectives and radically diverse discourses they engage, making them truly global works of art.
Introduction

Indian-born British artist Anish Kapoor (b. 1954) had his first solo exhibition in 1980. The exhibition, which took place at the Paris studio of French artist Patrice Alexandre, consisted of his groundbreaking series of pigment-coated sculptures, *1000 Names* (1979-1985) (Figure 1), a series for which he first garnered serious international attention and acclaim. A number of scholars and critics have frequently associated the genesis of these sculptures, with their pulsating, powdery surfaces, to a three-week homecoming trip Kapoor made to India after graduation from art school in England.¹ Likewise, these authors have connected Kapoor’s sculptural forms and their spatial relationships with viewers’ experiences to American minimalism. While seeing again piles of colorful powders—which Hindus traditionally use to adorn images of deities—certainly would have made an impact on the young artist, and while it would be naïve to ignore how his now iconic early pigment works maintain a dialogue with minimalism, these works were not the result of any singular breakthrough. By focusing on the history of *1000 Names* and other early works of art by Kapoor, this thesis will demonstrate that the career-defining style that *1000 Names* initiated is a considerably more complicated, and far more remarkable reframing of a radically different twentieth-century artistic styles, as well as a number of East/West orientations, making this work truly global in its permeability of diverse perspectives.

This study intends to investigate Kapoor’s stylistic formation in relationship to globalization, positing its history as a multiplicity, comprised of several competing localisms, including: minimalism; the traditions of modern painting; and the artist’s own personal diasporic narrative, culminating in a special conceptual framework unique to him. As a starting point, this thesis will build on philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s definition of globalization, advanced in their book *Empire* (published in 2000), as an overarching structure that constructs “a regime [comprised] of the production of identity and difference,” arising out of permeable national boundaries, encouraged by the global political and economic order they call “Empire.”

It will advance the idea that the highly personal, hybridized, diasporic narrative comprising Kapoor’s early art dialectically breaks down the false dichotomy of the global and local by blurring the borders between traditionally “western” and “non-western” discourses. Furthermore, it will demonstrate how Kapoor is a transgressive global artist, concerned not only with rethinking the longstanding question of artistic form, but also with enduring the process central to the cultural formation of subjects. Both of his reconsiderations can be considered precedents for interpreting the rest of his oeuvre. But, before attempting to demonstrate the connection between Kapoor’s art and globalization, it is necessary to review Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of globalization in *Empire*, and its theoretical positions central to this thesis and to suggest how they will be implemented.³

---


³ Hardt and Negri provide a helpful conceptualization of power in relation to globalization in *Empire*. While their post-Marxist critique of contemporary global society was deemed very useful in this case of this thesis, this book and its theories remain controversial, and some critics have found certain issues the authors bring up to be problematic. One of these issues is the term “Empire” itself. In one such close reading, found in the journal *Comparative Politics* Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jan., 2006), historian Alexander Motyl suggests readers should be “suspicious about the ubiquity of empire” since the term has been used throughout history to characterize several different political structures, from ancient Rome to colonialism and contemporary America. (229) Scholars also have identified issues with their project’s utopian aspirations. In the journal *Utopian Studies* Vol. 13, No. 1 (2002), literary
Analyzing Kapoor’s art and its relationship to globalization will help formulate an understanding of how his biography and art participate in the contemporary production of global identity. Hardt and Negri rightly declare that the processes of globalization do not merely result in cross-cultural homogenization, with only the local “preserv[ing] heterogeneity and difference.” This is a false dichotomy and Hardt and Negri understand globalization—a phenomenon propagated by Empire—as a social machine capable of generating a regime for the production of identity and difference. The processes of globalization de-territorialize national boundaries, exposing the permeability of borders and the illusion of national identity. The authors of *Empire* contend that reactionary localisms arise as a response to the processes of globalization. These regionalist movements are attempts to re-territorialize national boundaries and protect perceived differences, wrongly thought to be immune from the nexus that is global capital. These localisms are potentially dangerous responses, devolving “into a kind of primordialism that fixes and romanticizes social relations and identities.” For the purposes of this thesis, artistic localisms will not be considered necessarily “dangerous” and will not be viewed as reactionary to Kapoor’s artistic presence, but will be regarded as preexisting aesthetic modes. In the stylistic formation of his work, these localisms are subsumed, destabilized, and reconfigured within a system that functions like a transgressive, globalizing force that obviates any so-called purity of fixed, singular discourses. This ability to blur and blend approaches and modes allows his art simultaneously to exist in, obfuscate, and oscillate between such “western” discourses as post-minimalism and such “non-western” ones as post colonialism. Consequently, 

scholar Carolyn Lesjak critiques Hardt and Negri’s concept of the “multitude.” She proposes this re-presented proletariat, who can use the conditions provided by globalization and Empire to overcome these oppressive regimes, is the authors’ “weakest” theory because it is “not so much argued for as it is simply affirmed.” (151)

4 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 44.

5 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 45.
this reading and its emphasis on permeability will propose a framework for interpreting Kapoor’s oeuvre that conceptually and thematically connects the development of his early, delicate, pigmented works to such recent ones as his stainless steel sculptures. Analyzing his art in terms of globalization not only offers new insights into Kapoor’s art, but also dovetails with, and expands on, his own understanding of contemporary cultural conditions since “we live in a much more global culture, perhaps the beginnings of a real post-colonial culture.” To demonstrate why Kapoor’s art necessitates this new way of considering it, an examination of the major critical methods used thus far to approach his work is warranted.

**Literature Review**

Since the 1980s, Anish Kapoor’s art has been primarily analyzed in terms of several interrelated lenses and ideas, including the sublime, nothingness, the concept of the void, space, and phenomenology. Overall, however, there appear to be two general schools of thought regarding his work. The first is comprised of scholars who interpret it vertically as having some connection with transcendence or the divine. Other scholars generally critique such metaphysical approaches and opt for more horizontal analyses predicated on phenomenology and unlimited semiosis. This review of the literature involving these two approaches will establish a chronology of the scholarship on Kapoor while engaging with some of the more critical reviews, in-depth essays, catalogues, and pertinent books focusing on his art.

Until the mid-1980s, Kapoor’s scholarship consisted of periodicals and exhibition reviews. School of the Art Institute of Chicago art historian Michael Newman’s 1984 *Flash Art* article “Discourse and Desire: Recent British Sculpture,” provides one of the first serious, albeit

---

brief, critical examinations of Kapoor’s work. Newman suggests Kapoor’s art is analogous to the goals of early abstract expressionist painters. He opines that Kapoor fuses the absorption of color-field art with the theatricality of the literal object (as critic Michael Fried characterizes minimalism), thereby dramatizing the experience of viewer’s presence. Newman also connects Kapoor to French theorist Jacques Derrida, who deconstructed presence, origin, and being as components of a theatre predicated on the careful excision of absence, descent, and nonbeing.

When scholars and critics have looked at Kapoor’s early works, they have emphasized the processes behind their fabrication, their art historical relationships, and the works’ possible meanings through a variety of methods. For instance, in the 1986 catalogue accompanying an exhibition of Kapoor’s art at the Kunstnernes Hus in Oslo, noted international curator Lynne Cooke writes in the essay “Mnemic Migrations” that individual objects from Kapoor’s 1000 Names ambivalently and analogically relate to a greater whole when she points out that “each one of these works…signals that it belongs to something greater…than can be realized in any one particular instance.”

“Because of the relationship between intention and meaning [in this series],” Cooke mentions Kapoor’s interest in American minimalist Donald Judd’s (1928-94) work (particularly an Untitled from 1973, with cadmium red paint) and says that they are linked by their “inclusive approach to content, the active use of metaphorical, analogical, and metonymical allusion.” She also theorizes that a reliance on symbolism defines the pigmented works, even though they are “never visualizations of philosophical precepts.”

---


Later that year, curator Helaine Posner wrote *Anish Kapoor: Recent Sculpture and Drawings*, a catalogue supplementing an exhibition at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Though the author opens by pointing out that the works strive for unity and wholeness, she seems to be in opposition to Cooke, since she believes Kapoor’s art evokes an experience of spiritual transcendence through sensory experience. She goes on to say his objects are also highly eroticized and sexual in nature.

Pier Luigi Tazzi, an Italian independent writer and curator, writes the 1992 essay “Breath of Air, Breath of Stone” for Kapoor’s first major traveling museum exhibition in the United States where he employs a more creative, fiction-like approach to this artist’s œuvre by conjecturing that his work conquers the “masochistic threshold,” defined as the “recognition of... unhappiness as consubstantial to existence.” Moreover, the author concludes with the metaphysical suggestion that Kapoor’s “absolute remains clad in its sacred garb.”

In his extended essay “Artist as Sacerdos,” Italian critic Germano Celant takes an approach different from Cooke’s where he characterizes Kapoor as a type of priest who “builds towers and pyramids to unite the heavenly and earthly, the human and the divine” through a type of ritual. Celant suggests Kapoor is searching for an absolute metaphysical language, thus not aligning himself with minimalism, but more with *arte povera*—the 1960s Italian art movement Celant is renowned for championing—which places strong emphasis on meaning as embedded within discrete materials. According to this author, Kapoor strives for a sensibility of infinity, but

---

10 Germano Celant. “Artist as Sacerdos,” XII.
never attains this ultimate goal, when he transforms “symbol into reality” by “rendering
metaphors of light and creation as physicalized elements.”

1998 is a significant year in the trajectory of scholarship on Anish Kapoor’s art.
Comparative literary specialist Homi Bhabha begins writing about
the artist, entering the debate with his essay, “Anish Kapoor: Making Emptiness.” He begins by remarking how frequently
critics interpret Kapoor’s work vertically as a way of disavowing interpretations, thereby linking
Kapoor’s objects to transcendental and absolute experiences. Though Bhabha does not disagree
with any one specific interpretation of Kapoor’s art, he may be responding to Celant’s
interpretation of Kapoor’s art as a mediator between the human and divine. Instead of invoking
transcendence, Bhabha favors a horizontal approach, where meanings are determined in relation
to other signs within a given system. Furthermore, Bhabha understands Kapoor’s art as
indicative of a disruptive sense of space and time. To comprehend Kapoor’s void-like works,
Bhabha examines Heidegger’s parable of the jug and suggests that the void occurs in the
indiscernible instance when material (clay) and non-material (air) touch. He stresses the role of
vertigo in Kapoor’s work as being more extreme than negative space can produce. For Bhabha,
Kapoor’s sculptures are signs of emptiness and not images or symbols of absence and/or
presence. Bhabha also proposes that Kapoor’s art can move diagonally, creating a “displaced
movement of thirdness,” which “inscribes something that remains nameless, that moves the
material beyond itself.” Bhabha concludes by noting that Kapoor’s art, which he dubs “truly
made,” enters this third, transitional, and in-between space, thus making a possible reference to
his own theories about liminality from his book *The Location of Culture* where he characterizes

it as a vertiginous social and temporal space “in-between” nations where cultural differences are negotiated.

One can argue that Bhabha’s essay changed the trajectory of Kapoor’s scholarship, since art historians subsequently began to look at phenomenological approaches and to move away from making metaphysical connections. In a 2001 dissertation entitled “Nothingness in Art: Mark Rothko, Yves Klein, Robert Ryman, Anish Kapoor, Eva Hesse,” British art historian Natalie Kosoi hypothesizes that Kapoor’s work simultaneously conceals and represents nothingness. She uses Heidegger’s idea that anxiety reveals nothingness, as well as Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida’s notion that nothingness in art is representative of the background on which forms lie. Consequently, Kapoor’s art produces its anxiety by blurring the figure/ground relation, establishing a potent “slipping away” in the works. On the other hand, in certain instances, Kapoor’s art can be seen as representing nothingness by depicting only the ground for absent forms to reside. Untitled (1990) (Figure 2) and Void (1989) (Figure 3) would be examples of the former, while Adam (1988-89) (Figure 4) and Void Field (1989) (Figure 5) characterize the latter perspective.

In her 2003 book, Out of Minimalism: The Referential Cube: Contextualizing Sculptures by Anthony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, and Rachel Whiteread, Swedish art historian Malin Hedin Hayden regards Kapoor’s sculpture as theoretically, idiomatically, and thematically founded on American minimalist ideas from the 1960s, thereby expanding on Cooke’s comparisons. According to Hayden, Kapoor’s art, in the wake of minimalism, relies on the corporeal acknowledgement of its viewers, thus remaining predicated on the external. Furthermore, Kapoor’s work “instantiates Minimalist ideas of aesthetics and modes of address by way of display manners…the viewer’s performance becomes unavoidable” as the “meanings resulting
from the performance of the viewer.”¹² Hayden suggests Kapoor’s use of “colour in nearly all his works may be grounds to define them as paintings, but using raw pigment as a tactile material in its own right immediately places this categorization in doubt.”¹³ While many scholars and critics, such as Newman, Cooke, and Celant, have made brief comparisons about Kapoor’s work to such aesthetic predecessors as the color-field abstract expressionists Barnett Newman (1905-70) and Mark Rothko (1903-70) as well as Judd, and arte povera, until this point, Kapoor’s art has received relatively little historicization.

Opposed to historical contextualization, Andrew Teverson’s 2003 essay, “The Uncanny Structure of Cultural Difference in the Sculpture of Anish Kapoor,” published in the journal Gothic Studies, reasons Kapoor’s art can be seen as symbol of “all that it is unable to embody.” Utilizing more of a theoretical approach, Teverson contends that the most important aspects in Kapoor’s work are its dualities, especially presence/absence (the void), and the places where these binaries breakdown (the liminal zone), demonstrating the impossibility of such polarities. A phenomenological consequence of Kapoor’s works, Teverson says, is vertigo, which resonates with the sublime. At first the author connects Kapoor to Kant’s definition of the sublime experience. “In Kant’s aesthetic, as in Kapoor’s aesthetic,” writes Teverson, “it is possible to understand the sublime experience as a moment in which the viewer, having been overwhelmed by the object, is elevated beyond the immediate sensory experience of the object, and becomes aware of the possibility of something larger that the object can allude to but never embody.”¹⁴


However, according to Teverson, Kapoor breaks away from this idea, for he views Kapoor’s sublime as a “realization…of the state of transitionality and liminality” which Teverson views philosophically as being closer to Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition of the modern sublime or “the fact that the unpresentable exists.” Teverson is also the first scholar to connect Homi Bhabha’s theories with Kapoor’s art, suggesting the works are manifestations of Bhabha’s ideas of the liminal space, where cultural formation is always incomplete and never fixed. Kapoor’s art is thus seen as demonstrating the complexities of defining cultural identity in contemporary Britain. Thematically, this sophisticated essay acknowledges Kapoor’s allusions to the divine and sublime, but does not make the absolutist metaphysical connections that some of the earlier texts do. Indeed, Teverson builds on Bhabha’s spatial inquiry.

Published in the collection of his 2003 A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Kirk Varnedoe’s 2006 book, *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock*, is an instructive and comprehensive survey of western art from the end of World War II to the present, and while he admits “no pretense for inclusiveness,” he omits Kapoor entirely from his extensive chronicling of post-minimalist history. Varnedoe’s overt purpose with these lectures was to legitimize abstract art’s role in society. He contends it is vital because abstract art has, especially in the last fifty years, “demonstrated that [human] intelligence innovates not by making things out of whole cloth or discovering new things about nature, but by operating with and upon the repertoire of the already known.” When charting the post-minimalist abstract art of the 1970s and 80s, Varnedoe characterizes the work of the period as predicated on irony, contextualizing the work of Peter Halley, Sherrie Levine, Roy

---


Lichtenstein, Haim Steinbach, and Phillip Taafe, among others, but does not mention Kapoor, who often deploys irony, as this thesis intends to demonstrate in the next chapter, and should therefore be inscribed into this history of critical writings about his art and also the major issues with which it is concerned.

In 2008, Alexandra Von Stosch and Rainer Crone co-authored “Sublime Shifts From Color to Darkness,” included in the volume Anish Kapoor: To Darkness: Svayambh. In their text, these authors discuss this art’s relationship to European Romanticism, the sublime, and the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and Barnett Newman. However, they also assert that their essay does not intend to position Kapoor as a Romantic, but rather intends to serve as an opportunity to question a transcendental approach to his art by opening up a broader dialogue. The authors emphasize a relationship between Kapoor’s work and the Burkian sublime, though they never define the sublime specifically, saying Kapoor’s use of color and light and dark are what link him to it—together with a genealogy traced from Friedrich to Newman. The authors also suggest Kapoor’s work is in direct opposition to Judd’s since it ultimately confronts Kapoor’s own sense of “Being.”

More than a decade after his “Anish Kapoor: Making Emptiness,” Bhabha revisits this artist’s work in his 2009 Elusive Objects: Anish Kapoor’s Fissional Art, in which he questions the “politics of identity”—a strategy, which, Bhabha claims, has affected the critical reception of Kapoor’s art, constraining its originality by placing it in a pre-fabricated metaphysical framework. Bhabha appears to be reiterating some of his cautions about considering Kapoor’s art as transcendental and vertical in his first essay on the artist; and this tactic suggests Bhabha is reacting to such recent scholarship as Teverson’s piece that explores such themes. Bhabha warns against the problems of interpreting Kapoor’s art as transcendentally related to Buddhism,
Hinduism, or some esoteric form of late Romanticism. Additionally, he points out that trying to establish connections between Kapoor’s work and thought of Kant, Nietzsche, Artaud, Freud, Lacan, and Derrida, among others, is ultimately an attempt to classify Kapoor’s art as transcendental. Bhabha refers to *1000 Names* as “Non-objects”—an approach not encountered before in his writings—and conceives them as a series intended to produce associative meanings, thereby setting off a chain of significations. Bhabha also characterizes *1000 Names* as “incomplete,” thereby alluding to each object functioning as an archival fragment, and never forming a total whole.

In his 2009 essay, “To Fathom the Abyss,” British art historian and critic David Anfam appositely suggests complex ambiguities as the key to understanding Kapoor’s works in general and *1000 Names* in particular. While recognizing Kapoor’s trip to India as a catalyst for *1000 Names*, Anfam is careful to point out that people should not make his sculptures simply exotic since the use of pigments are not unique to the Indian subcontinent. Building on this, Anfam notes the objects of *1000 Names* (and similar works of art) assume a transcultural visual vocabulary, “beckon[ing] beyond India, recollecting Mesopotamian ziggurats, Aztec and Egyptian pyramids, obelisks, the multi-breasted antique ‘Diana of Ephesus’ statue, seed pods, and so on.” The titles Kapoor chooses, according to Anfam, are crucially important to the art’s playfully ambiguous nature, and in this vein he regards *1000 Names* as a generic title, only “ostensibly” referring to the “one thousand names of the Hindu god Vishnu.”

---

17 Bhabha’s characterization of *1000 Names* as “non-objects” is curious, especially since Kapoor has dubbed a specific series of his stainless steel works begun in the first decade of the twenty-first century as “Non-objects.”


19 Anfam, “To Fathom the Abyss,” 94.
title 1000 Names hints at wider issues, including the Judeo-Christian propensity for naming things into existence and the Egyptian myth of the creator god Ptah.

**Justification and Implementation of Thesis**

This thesis will expand the discipline’s understanding of one of today’s most important artists as evidenced by both the number of exhibitions in which his work has been shown and the quality of institutions supporting it. By implementing a dialectical approach, which, for the context of this thesis, will be defined as a non-transcendent synthesis of opposing discourses, it will demonstrate the incompleteness of relying on only transcendental or formalist approaches, if one seeks to understand his oeuvre in its totality. Although it has been historically linked to transcendence, as well as the vertical and the symbolic, this thesis proposes the dialectics of Kapoor’s work will be framed as non-transcendent, since they ironically allude to the vertical. This view of his art is crucial to understanding how it occupies a liminal position in relation to the modern, and its emphasis on allusion and transcendence—and also to the postmodern—which ironizes these themes.

Moreover, the circumstances in which Kapoor enters the global contemporary art scene in the 1970s need to be considered a crucial component in the art historical perception of his work. Contextually, the artist has either been regarded in the past as a theoretical perpetuator of American minimalist ideas, as Hayden has proposed, or has been entirely omitted from post-minimalist histories altogether (as Varnedoe did in *Pictures of Nothing*). Inscribing Kapoor’s sculpture into a dialogue with both minimalist sculpture and post-World-War-II painting, as this thesis intends to do, will not only widen conceptions of how he rethought the idea of “painting” after the so-called postmodern turn—predicated on unlimited semiosis and, at times, ironic
approaches—but it will also help to clarify the artist’s place in western art historical discourse. As part of its examination of Kapoor’s art, this thesis will also explore his diasporic identity. In addition, it will claim that the importance of Kapoor’s South Asian heritage has often been understated or incorrectly applied. By examining the relationship between his art and Homi Bhabha’s writings, this thesis aims to discern why this theorist has chosen to focus on this work, as well as why his Indian background is important—a topic heretofore accepted but not interrogated, and one requiring careful critical analysis.

Chapter one will chronicle and examine the context of Kapoor’s foundational years in London, in order to reveal how his position in western art represents a reaction to the American minimalisms of Judd and Robert Morris (b. 1931), as well as Rothko’s color-field abstract expressionist painting. It will propose that these western modes of art, which assumed positions of prestige in the 1970s British art scene Kapoor entered, can be read as localisms with which Kapoor’s global art engages. Like the localisms Hardt and Negri identify as movements that seek to maintain perceived differences when faced with the imminence of globalization, minimalism and color-field abstract expressionism can be understood as separate discourses that Kapoor’s art exposes as permeable. If one interprets these contending localisms and their connection to the artistic debates occurring during the western world’s transition from modernity to postmodernity, as chronicled in Douglas Crimp’s essay “The End of Painting” and Yve-Alain Bois’s *Painting as Model*, Kapoor’s art can be understood as innovatively re-presenting painting under the guise of sculpture at a time when critics and theorists were predicting the “death” of abstract painting.

After establishing how Kapoor’s art can be viewed as reacting not only to minimalism, but also to prognostications of painting’s termination, chapter two will analyze how Kapoor’s art conceptually relates to the traditions of modern painting Rothko championed. Kapoor’s work
suggests meaning through implicit—and often ironic—allusions to themes Rothko explored, such as Nietzsche’s view of tragedy as a type of Dionysian immersion. However, Kapoor accomplishes this re-presentation of painting via decisively globalizing and transgressive tactics, blending a number of regional practices with modern painting. These localisms include such rituals and traditions practiced in India as the Hindu festival of Holi, which will be introduced as theoretically dovetailing with Russian literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895-1975) study of carnival as a period of transgression where hierarchies are overturned and conventions are undone. Additionally, elements of Kapoor’s Jewish heritage will be seen as correlating with his syneretic approach, particularly Kabbalistic beliefs alluded to in such works as Untitled. Rather than merely perpetuating painting’s grand western vanguard narrative when he utilizes metaphysical allusions similar to Rothko’s, Kapoor employs a series of material and conceptual contradictions in 1000 Names and Untitled to defamiliarize aspects of avant garde in these enigmatic and powerful objects, similar to French critic Michel Foucault’s suggestion in his analysis of René Magritte’s This is Not a Pipe (1929), where he regards it as a heterotopic situation created when there is a friction between language and painting.20

Chapter three will examine how Kapoor’s art functions in post-colonial terms as the locus of hybridity—liminal spaces of discursive mixing, capable of dismantling not just the aesthetic or theoretical dichotomies explored in the previous chapter, but also the fixity created by cultural (and national) boundaries. This chapter will look at how Kapoor’s art specifically relates to the theories of Bhabha, who shares a similar diasporic background with the artist, and as mentioned

20 Michel Foucault’s book This is Not a Pipe (1981) provides readers with an innovative way of critiquing the relationship between art and language. In his text, Foucault characterizes Magritte’s iconic work of art via a decisively postmodern reading, framing the painting as both an affirmation of simulacrum and a denial of a “real” pipe. For Foucault, This is Not a Pipe uses language to produce ambiguities and deception. As will be discussed in chapter two, what is striking about Magritte’s painting, are the visual and textual incongruences Foucault dubs “heterotopias.” These are “disturbing” phenomena, using Foucault’s terms, where the words and work are at odds with one another, thereby showing the impossibility to pinpoint a singular “true” perspective.
earlier, has written extensively about his art. Revisiting the symbiotic and complimentary post-colonial dialogue between Bhabha and Kapoor will be a crucial step toward positing how the latter’s works put in play the formation of subjects under the apparatus of globalization.

Chapter four will explore how Kapoor’s art specifically relates to the theories of globalization proposed by Hardt and Negri. Kapoor’s work is grounded on transgression, and this chapter will contend that these transgressive qualities are indicative of globalization’s effects outlined in Empire. Though certain local ideas are reinforced in Kapoor’s work, similar to the regional phenomena in countries subject to the processes of globalization, his art ultimately dismantles the false dichotomy of the local and global Hardt and Negri challenge, in a manner that parallels the challenging of the self/other binary found in Bhabha’s critiques. Moreover, Kapoor’s oeuvre can be seen as an ongoing process of cultural translation, a phenomenon prevalent in the era of globalization, where he reframes the cultural particularities of Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity. In doing so, Kapoor’s art offers resistance to the global power theorized by Hardt and Negri through defamiliarization, thus allowing his work to become about the ideology of globalization, in French theorist Louis Althusser’s terms, rather than simply an object of its processes.21 Thus, such an analysis will reinforce Kapoor’s position as a thoughtful and self-aware global artist whose work can be understood in terms of the contemporary production of cultural identity and difference theorized by Hardt and Negri as well as by Bhabha.

21 In Robert Hobbs, “Looking B(l)ack: Reflections on White Racism,” 30 Americans, (Miami: Rubell Family Collection, 2008), the author cites Althusser’s “A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daseré” where the theorist discusses art and ideology. Althusser suggests art can engages viewers in an act of perceiving rather than knowing. Art, for Althusser, maintains a certain kind of distance from the viewer, and is thus detached from the ideology of the perceiving subject. Hobbs, picking up on Althusser’s theory, contends that because of art’s “wonderfully absurd opacity of its media and form” it does not interpellate subjects. Bringing in French theorist Jacques Rancière’s thoughts about art and ideology as oscillating between its “arresting form” and “connections with external semiotic meaning,” Hobbs concludes that art provides viewers with enough distance to make ideology the subject of the art rather than its object.
Overall, this thesis will propose Kapoor’s art in particular can be comprehended by the special liminal position it occupies between such polarities as modern and postmodern art, painting and sculpture, East and West, national and trans-national, and local and global. By transgressing the borders that demarcate these discourses, Kapoor’s art enters an in-between state; through both formal and thematic strategies, his sculptural forms orchestrate viewers so they are able to move beyond distinct, fixed, and stable meanings and view the works as imminently open to different perspectives and the radically diverse discourses they engage, making them truly global works of art.
Chapter One

Anish Kapoor, Minimalism, and Modern Painting

This chapter will chronicle and examine the context of Kapoor’s foundational years in London, in order to reveal how his position in western art represents a reaction to the American minimalisms of Judd and Morris, as well as Rothko’s color-field abstract expressionist painting. Moreover, it will argue that these western artistic modes, which assumed positions of prestige in the British art scene Kapoor entered in the 1970s, can be thought of as localisms with which Kapoor’s global art engages. One can see these contending discourses and their connection to the artistic debates during the western world’s transition from modernity to postmodernity in the terms chronicled by Crimp’s “The End of Painting” and Bois’s *Painting as Model*, as a discourse engendered, in part, by Ad Reinhardt’s well-known and prescient statements where he anticipated “in the future…the university academy as the proper place for the artist.” However, rather than becoming academic, Kapoor’s art innovatively re-presents painting under the guise of sculpture at a time when critics and theorists were predicting the “death” of abstract painting. Despite Kapoor’s utilization of the three-dimensional and spatial strategies found in Judd’s and Morris’s work, as Cooke and Hayden have noted, this thesis will advance the idea that Kapoor’s early pigment works in fact do exert stronger thematic, conceptual, and material associations with historical painting approaches than they do with sculpture. But, before attempting to demonstrate how Kapoor manages to conflate painting and sculpture into a striking new entity, it

---

is important to review the artist’s biography, which will prove not only useful for determining how he entered the 1970s British art scene, but also crucial in subsequent chapters when regarding his art in relation to his own diasporic narrative.

**Anish Kapoor’s Biography**

Since Kapoor’s *1000 Names* and his other pigmented works first attracted criticism in the early 1980s, critics have stressed the importance of the artist’s Indian heritage in the development of this series. However, Kapoor inherited diverse social, ethnic, and religious traditions, and his upbringing was not defined by a single culture. The artist was born in Mumbai, India in 1954 to a Hindu-Punjabi father (who was a hydrographer in the Indian Navy) and an Iraqi-Jewish mother (who was the daughter of a rabbi and an avid painter) and was the first of three boys. In 1966, Kapoor’s family moved to Dehradun, an isolated city, set in the rural foothills of the Himalayas, over a hundred miles north of New Delhi, where he was enrolled in the Doon School, a prestigious and academically rigorous all-boys boarding academy, founded in 1935, and modeled after one of England’s oldest and most respected boarding schools, Eton College. The Doon School has defined itself as promoting a strong, secular ethos, honesty and integrity, and inclusivity regardless of caste, religion, or social status. It has several illustrious alumni who graduated before Kapoor, including former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi (class of 1962), the sculptor Latika Katt (class of 1966), and multimedia artist Vivan Sundaram (class of 1961). After graduating from this secondary school in 1970, Kapoor immigrated to

---


24 It may be of interest to readers that Latika Katt is female, and attended the Doon School as a minority in the traditionally all-boys school. Furthermore, the school has also graduated a host of actors, politicians, businessmen, and athletes, both before, during, and after Kapoor’s time there.
Israel, and began working on a kibbutz, a collective (and idealistic) community centered on agriculture. During his time there, Kapoor began studying engineering, but soon dropped this pursuit. In 1973, he decided to become an artist and left Israel, because there were, in the artist’s words, some “internal tensions.” Kapoor explains his conflicted experiences in an interview: “I’d grown up in India as a Jew, so I’d always been a ‘bloody Jew’, and then I’d gone to Israel where I’d expected to be a Jew amongst Jews and I turned into a ‘darkie’. I had to realize, ‘I’m not like these other Jews. Just because I’m dark skinned, I’m a different kind of Jew.’” He then hitchhiked across Europe and eventually settled in London, where he enrolled in the Hornsey College of Art, and later attended the Chelsea College of Art and Design, one of London’s preeminent art schools whose alumni include such notable artists as Anthony Caro, Laura Ford, Mike Nelson, and Gillian Wearing. At the Hornsey College of Art, he found a mentor in the Romanian-born British sculptor, installation, and performance artist Paul Neagu (1938-2004), who is best known for wooden objects he called “Hyphens,” a series of open rectangles supported by three legs. Kapoor has cited Neagu as significant to his development, because he “opened up certain ways of thinking about what it means to be an artist – the mission, if you like.” After completing his studies at Chelsea College in 1979, Kapoor returned to India for

---


27 Matt Price, “Chronology,” Anish Kapoor, (London: Phaidon, 2009), 493. The importance of Neagu to Kapoor was so great that after his mentor’s passing in 2004, Kapoor wrote his obituary, which was published in the Guardian on June 27, 2004.
three weeks—a trip which scholars frequently describe as seminal to the creation of Kapoor’s pigmented works of art.\textsuperscript{28}

**Establishing the Art Historical Context of Kapoor’s Work**

In order to understand the art historical context of Kapoor’s early years in London, and the works he created at this time, as well as the aesthetic vocabularies these works reference, it helps to recount the narratives of color-field abstract expressionism and minimalism, two opposing, yet then dominant styles in London, which this thesis will reason his art dialectically resolves.\textsuperscript{29} But, before examining these histories, it would be helpful to introduce the theories of literary critic Harold Bloom from his 1973 volume *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* in order to appreciate the pressures and conditions a young artist, like Kapoor, would have encountered when he entered the London art scene in the 1970s. Bloom contends that new poems emerge from old ones, and the principal challenge of fledgling poets is to differentiate themselves from established masters. When confronted with this quandary, young poets fashion imaginative spaces for themselves by creatively misreading their predecessors. If the poet accomplishes a successful misreading, it is possible for her or his voice to be heard, regardless of whom the precursor may be. If Kapoor’s early work is perceived through this lens, then his art can be viewed as a successful and creative misreading of Judd’s sculpture, and more importantly,

\textsuperscript{28} According to Matt Price, during this homecoming trip to India, Kapoor went to the town of Haridwar, which is only one hour from the Doon School, and visited a temple where he witnessed raw pigments being ritually used.

\textsuperscript{29} The use of the 1960s term “color-field painting” for one branch of abstract expressionism was stated by art historian Irving Sandler in his 1975 book *The Triumph of American Painting*. He suggests color-field painting was one of the two mainstream abstract expressionist movements, the other being “gesture painting,” which included Jackson Pollock and Willem DeKooning. Color-field painting “tackled form problems that were more difficult than those that confronted the gesture painters.” (148). They wanted to maximize visual impact and the immediacy of colors, says Sandler, and they accomplished this by applying color in large expanses to canvas, “saturat[ing] the eye.” (148) (Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*, (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970)
Rothko’s paintings. In doing so, Kapoor is able to carve out his own, unique, position in the history of art at the end of an era, during the so-called post-modern turn, as will be demonstrated in the following pages.

To begin ascertaining the competing ideas forming this artistic context, it is necessary to examine the disparate theoretical positions established by Judd and Morris – whose conflicting ideas about the minimalist object, one can argue, Kapoor employs dialectically, before amalgamating them with the certain thematic and formal qualities of Rothko’s color-field abstract expressionism. In his book, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, James Meyer, hypothesizes that minimalism is “best understood as a dynamic field of practices” and, more crucially, is predicated on essential “differences.” Judd’s theoretical position is most apparent when his art is considered in relation to Morris’s. Judd outlined his philosophic program in his 1965 essay “Specific Objects.” Responding to modernist art critic Clement Greenberg’s (1909-1994) advocation of medium specificity, Judd claims “half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture.” After rethinking Greenberg’s integrity of the medium in terms of new materials and criticizing painting’s illusionistic qualities, Judd asserts that “actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface.” Judd reaffirmed such assertions in his own art by working to remove metaphor, by refusing to subsume his work under any singular medium, and, letting the physical presence of his objects communicate their meaning, a notion reinforced by his refusal to name them either painting or sculpture.

---


The constituent materials of Kapoor’s early work, *1000 Names*, do not conform to a particular medium and overall graphs parallels in many ways to Judd’s penchant for seriality, even though the series differs from Judd’s approach by asserting a corporeal awareness of the viewer’s body, evidenced by their ever-changing and tight compositional arrangement that almost always forces the viewer to be cognizant of her or his path through the gallery space. This relationship between the viewer and the object extends the minimalist ideal approach Morris outlined in his two-part 1966 essay “Notes on Sculpture.” Just as Judd’s essay was a reaction to Greenbergian modernism, Morris’s essay was a response to Judd’s “Specific Objects” and its assertions about how the best recent art was neither painting nor sculpture. According to Morris, his work – which had frequently been considered to be conceptually and formally similar to Judd’s – was categorically sculpture, thus distancing himself from the in-between genre Judd described as specific objects, even though both artists worked with a reductive visual vocabulary to create works in which the whole was greater than its parts. Purposefully proportioned to the human body and painted an unremarkable grey, Morris’s *Column* and works from the famous 1964 Green Gallery show in New York were intended to provoke an “awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work.” Meyer identifies Morris’s arguments in “Notes on Sculpture” as “inflected with the language of phenomenology.” Phenomenology, particularly that of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Meyer asserts, “offered Morris a language for theorizing co-extensive spectatorship, a perception that encompassed, that made inextricable, the body and what it perceives.” Published in English in 1962, Merleau-Ponty’s


*Phenomenology of Perception* theorizes that objects in the world are not simply neutral and passive things for our contemplation. Rather, every object provokes a reaction in us, be it favorable or unfavorable. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “any perception of a thing, a shape or a size as real, any perceptual constancy refers back to the positioning of a world and of a system of experience in which my body is inescapably linked with phenomena.”36 Corresponding to such an idea, Morris “conceived a viewer...[as] an integral participant in the work [and] not a passive beholder” so that his sculpture makes this individual aware of her or himself as one among many “perceiving subjects.”37

Both Judd’s and Morris’s art assumed positions of prestige in the English art scene during the 1970s. When Kapoor was in art school, Judd was actively showing with London’s Lisson Gallery, with solo shows in 1974 and 1975.38 By 1980 several of his works had been acquired by the Tate, including *Untitled* (1973) (Figure 7) and *Untitled* (1980) (Figure 8).39 Kapoor would have also encountered the mirrored cubes of Morris’s *Untitled* (1965/71) (Figure 9) in the Tate’s collections, since the institution purchased this work in 1972, one year after the Morris’s solo exhibition at its galleries.40

Hence, these two disparate and deeply divided major minimalist approaches were well represented in England, providing conflicting understandings of minimalism, which Kapoor’s


early work integrates. Such early pigmented works by Kapoor as *1000 Names, Part of the Red* (1981) (Figure 10), *To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red* (1981) (Figure 11), and *Mother as a Mountain* (1985) (Figure 12) unquestionably inhabit an ambiguous space between sculpture and painting, much like Judd’s “specific” objects. Yet, the quality of their pigment’s application—how it delicately and gracefully fans out from the object’s base onto the floor, gently encroaching upon the viewer’s space—subtly heightens his or her awareness of both the art object and the very real and not just virtual space around it. Although this approach differs from Morris’s interrogation of differences between traditional sculpture and simple inert styles, it does participate in a similar Merleau-Pontian perception of the work as engaging the viewer’s space, creating a heightened bond between them. Because of the forms’ frailty, when viewers are in front of *1000 Names* and its descendants, they are forced to check their bodily movements so as not to disturb the pristine powdery surfaces. However, Kapoor’s decision to install these works on gallery floors and walls cannot be specifically attributed to either Judd or Morris, or any singular minimalist artist for that matter, even though some subsequent works such as *Untitled* (1990) and others from the void series, are installed at a specific, bodily height so as to provoke direct viewer confrontation, much like the way Morris’s cubic sculptures of 1965/71 were built to be large (but not too large) in order to enhance the viewers’ awareness of the relationship between themselves and the object.

In addition, Kapoor’s work may suggest another connection with Judd’s sculpture, in particular the latter’s preoccupation with perfect delicate surfaces. As curator Ann Temkin notes in her essay “Wear and Care,” the surfaces of Judd’s work, which ostensibly appear to be sturdy because of being constructed of industrial materials, are actually extremely fragile and have caused much controversy in terms of conservation. Their Harley Davidson paint surfaces,
gleaming brass finishes, and pristine galvanized steel skins, which Judd was particular about maintaining, have proved difficult to maintain over the years. Even though they have often been exhibited with the physical barriers between the works and viewers, their delicate surfaces have frequently and easily been damaged by the oils and salts on human hands. Kapoor’s pigmented pieces certainly embrace a similar fragility; however, as will be investigated in the next chapter, their surfaces share greater infinites with Judd’s older contemporary, Rothko.

Among the color-field abstract expressionists, a group that included Clyfford Still, in addition to Newman and Rothko, Newman’s work is often used by such scholars as Anfam in comparison with Kapoor’s monochromes.41 Despite this emphasis on Newman’s work, the art of his close contemporary, Rothko, for both specific thematic and formal reasons—which shall be elaborated on in the following chapter—will be put forth in this thesis as decisive for Kapoor’s art. Rothko was best known for his series of larger-than-life canvases swathed with saturated rectangular fields of color, hovering over backgrounds of equally striking pigment; the presence of Rothko’s work during Kapoor’s early years in London is relevant for several reasons. Even before Kapoor arrived in London and enrolled in the Hornsey College of Art in 1973, Rothko, who had passed away three years earlier, had been firmly established in English institutions as a premier modern artist. In the late 1950s and 1960s, many of his paintings had been acquired by the Tate Gallery in London, where Kapoor acknowledges he had encountered them as an art student.42 Included in the Tate’s Rothko acquisitions was *Light Red Over Black* (1957, purchased

41 For such comparisons, please see David Anfam, “To Fathom the Abyss,” *Anish Kapoor*, (London and New York: Phaidon 2009) or Tae Hyunsun, “Engaging Objects: The Art of Anish Kapoor,” *Anish Kapoor/Objects*, (Seoul: Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, 2012), among others. In this essay, Anfam also makes a comparison between Kapoor and Rothko, but chooses to focus on how both artists searched for “spiritual loci.” (Anfam 98)

1959) (Figure 13), as well as his “Seagram murals” (1958-60), a series originally intended for the Four Seasons restaurant in the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Phillip Johnson-designed Seagram Building in Manhattan (Figure 14); after deciding he did not want his paintings to be backdrops for people’s meals, the artist presented them to the Tate in 1969. Each of the Tate’s nine murals and sketches from this group are individualized, and as Anfam notes in the Rothko catalogue raisonné, they differ from the artist’s previous works since they are oriented horizontally, rather than vertically. Almost all of the murals, however, are characterized by deep, dark, foreboding tones, but often Rothko juxtaposed these hues with vibrant colors, like orange and red, thereby playing each colored field off another and distorting the painting’s figure/ground relationship. Rothko intended for viewers to be totally surrounded by the imposing canvases, creating a claustrophobic setting and an aestheticized sense of terror correlating with the “danger-at-a-distance” themes of Irish philosopher Edmund Burke’s (c. 1729-1797) sublime. According to art historian Irving Sandler, Rothko read before 1948 this Irish philosopher’s treatise entitled *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), in which he regards the sublime as a kind of delightful terror humans can experience when confronted by artistic renditions of awesome and wondrous phenomena, such as expansive darkness and natural disasters. Certainly, Rothko sought to generate similar experiences with the Seagram Murals.


Decisively at odds with Greenberg’s advocacy of painting to purge itself of content as were Newman and their fellow abstract expressionists, Rothko viewed his paintings as vehicles for exploring and evoking tragic themes, epic mythologies, and the sublime. He thought of his art as “an adventure into an unknown world” where the only “valid subject matter is tragic and timeless.”\(^{45}\) In his 1988 essay, “Mark Rothko: Heritage, Environment, and Tradition,” art historian Stephen Polcari notes “through symbols, first in an architectural frame and then of inheritances of nature, psyche, and tradition, [Rothko] posited an archaism that endures.”\(^{46}\) An avid student of ancient cultures, Rothko believed in underlying subconscious commonalities intrinsic to all humans, and wrote how the myths of antiquity were “eternal” symbols that expressed fundamental psychological states, no matter the culture.\(^{47}\) Among all the ancient myths and cultures available to him, Rothko had a vested interest in Greek literature and tragedy, and in particular Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* trilogy and its violent themes, such as political disaster, murder, and war. Rothko would have become familiar with this series both through the texts themselves and also through German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, which analyzes the art of tragedy through the (rational, logical, empirical) Apollonian and (irrational, emotional, abstract) Dionysian dichotomy, a productive theatrical system of opposing worldviews, with an emphasis on the latter’s “suspension of all the ordinary barriers of existence” and its ability to


distance itself from “quotidian reality.” The Nietzschian-inflected language of Rothko’s writings and their frequent references to Greek myth and tragedy implies the artist would have envisioned his work as Dionysiac, immersing it and its viewers—including himself—thereby coming to terms, through art, with the struggles and drama of existence. Such a philosophy comprises Rothko’s aesthetic worldview. Even as he purged recognizable subject matter and figures from his paintings, gradually reducing them to his signature floating planes, Rothko sought to transpose an intuitive understanding of his tragic inner life, his subconscious, “into an immediate emotional experience.”

In his 1996 essay on Mark Rothko, Sandler suggests that this artist eliminated demarcated lines in his massive fields, in order to allude to “an extension into infinity” and the Burkian sublime. The gravity of Rothko’s philosophical and tragic painterly pursuit, which Polcari discusses, is reinforced and expounded by his works’ sublime qualities: their ethereal dissonance, near monumental scale, all suggestive of otherworldly void space. Rothko ultimately wanted to utilize these formal aspects in order to create a dramatic and spiritual experience for viewers by striving, in his words, “toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer.”

---


52 Ibid.

The Death of Painting

If Kapoor indeed dialectically connects aspects of two approaches to minimalism with Rothko’s painting, then, his work can be seen as inventively re-presenting painting under the guise of sculpture at a time when there was serious speculation about the death of abstract painting. Crimp’s “The End of Painting” accurately characterizes the differing sentiments about painting in the 1970s when he cites Reinhardt’s 1966 statement that he was “merely making the last paintings anyone could make,” thereby signaling a widespread belief in painting’s demise, and the artist’s consequent abandonment of the medium.⁵⁴ According to Crimp, artists began turning to photography, film, and performance to capture time—the “dimension that had always resisted even painting’s most dazzling feats of illusionism.”⁵⁵ The Museum of Modern Art’s 1974 exhibition Eight Contemporary Artists appeared, to many, to be an institutional recognition of conceptual and minimalist art’s ascendancy over painting.⁵⁶ The same year as this exhibition, William Rubin, the director of the Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Painting and Printmaking, conjectured in an Artforum interview that the age of modernist tradition may be at an end, and “perhaps the dividing line will be seen as those works which essentially continue an easel painting concept…and, let us say, Earthworks, Conceptual works and related endeavors.”⁵⁷ Because of its historicism and essentialism, Bois asserts that, at this time in its history, abstract


⁵⁶ Eight Contemporary Artists included the work of Vito Acconci, Alighiero Boetti, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Robert Hunter, Brice Marden, and Dorothea Rockburne.

painting could be understood as “longing for its death.” Irrespective of these accusations, in New York artists and curators were resistant to any complicity in painting’s relegation. For instance, in 1979 art historian Barbara Rose organized a reactionary exhibition *American Painting: The Eighties* with the goal of demonstrating to the world that painting was still active and relevant in America. Her exhibition debuted at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery before touring internationally. Contemporaneously, painter Richard Hennessy (whose work was included in Rose’s exhibition), published the essay in *Artforum* entitled “What’s All This About Photography?” where he champions painting and criticizes photography for being unable to capture exquisite details as painting and drawing are able to do and for its greater reliance on chemical processes and technology which alienate it from the human condition.

Even though Kapoor has not publicly stated his position in this debate, the relevance of the great modernist tradition was a matter of considerable discussion in the art world during his formative years in school. Comparable to the way globalization functions, Kapoor’s art invites and impels the differing positions occupied by minimalism and color-field abstract expressionism into a new aesthetic. Like Hardt and Negri’s understanding of globalization, as a system that does not result in blanket homogenization, Kapoor’s approach does not place minimalist sculpture and abstract-expressionist painting on equal footing in his oeuvre. In a 1990 interview, he noted “I’m a painter working as a sculptor.” The next chapter will explore this idea, as well as the specific aspects of modernist painting he does perpetuate in his art—thus showing that the western discourse of his work is ultimately open to reframing when it enters a global context.

---


Chapter 2

Anish Kapoor as Painter

*Marcus Rothkowitz made art that would last.*

*Mark Rothko did not.*

- Dana Cranmer

*I first came across Rothko as an art student, and I felt immediately as if I knew what he was trying to do.*

- Anish Kapoor

Due to Rothko’s prominence and visibility in institutions like the Tate Gallery, as well as Kapoor’s avowed connection to his paintings, as supported by the second quote in this chapter’s epigraph, it is important to investigate affiliations between the two artist’s oeuvres. Doing so will reveal how Kapoor thematically and formally perpetuates historical modes of modern painting. Although some scholars, like Anfam, have drawn parallels between Kapoor’s use of color and Newman’s, none have fully interrogated the possibilities opened up by his art when it is placed in dialogue with Rothko’s. This chapter will set out to do so, despite those who question inserting Kapoor into the history of painting altogether—such as Hayden, who has argued that Kapoor’s use of “raw pigment as a tactile material in its own right immediately places this

---


categorization in doubt.”

Granted, Kapoor’s work exhibits the strong links to minimalism Hayden proposes, but, as this chapter will demonstrate, analyzing him as a painter will establish how his art suggests meaning through implicit—and often ironic—allusions to themes Rothko explored, such as Nietzsche’s view of tragedy and this philosopher’s invocation of the Dionysian immersion. However, Kapoor accomplishes this re-presentation of painting via the decisively globalizing tactics of blending other localities and traditional practices with modern painting, including such rituals and customs of India as Holi, in addition to such aspects of his Jewish heritage as Kabbalistic doctrine. Yet, just as Hayden is dismissive of Kapoor’s painterly categorization, Bhabha would be dismissive of the aforementioned correlations of Kapoor’s work to metaphysics, arguing “too often we are summoned by critics to stand before Kapoor’s voids, bearing witness to those modernist virtues of verticality.” While Bhabha’s qualms with purely vertical readings of Kapoor’s art are apposite, this paper will demonstrate how the artist uses metaphysical allusions, similar to those connoted by Rothko, but does so to orchestrate a tension between sign and symbol, thereby catalyzing an important theoretical conversation about art and language that would otherwise not be possible. One can understand this tension between title (or lack thereof) and object as a heterotopic situation much like that occurring in René Magritte’s This is Not a Pipe, where the words and work are at odds. Furthermore, rather than merely continuing painting’s grand narrative, Kapoor employs a series of material and conceptual contradictions in 1000 Names and Untitled to de-familiarize viewers’ ready assimilation of vanguard art by presenting them with these enigmatic and powerful objects.

---

62 Hayden, Out of Minimalism: The Referential Cube, 40.

Kapoor and Mark Rothko’s Use of Pigment

The objects of 1000 Names are generally constructed out of traditional painter’s materials: wood, gesso, and pigment. But before 1000 Names is installed, the gallery space is cleaned and prepared in a scrupulous—almost ritualistic—manner. Once the sculpted foundations are placed, they are delicately and evenly blanketed with pure granulated color by an air compressor, allowing the red, yellow, and white powder to fan effortlessly out from the edges of the object and dissolve into the space of the surrounding wall or floor, giving them their signature finish.64 The finished works of art manifest themselves in a variety of abstract and geometric shapes. As New York-based art historian Johanna Burton appropriately observes, the works consequently become “continually segueing associative objects: egg yolk, breast, eyeball, vulva, phallus, volcano.”65 As a result, each individual object has a playful tendency to both attract and resist language. His use of the pigment as a “tactile material” to adorn these associative objects initiates a painterly dialogue with Rothko. Kapoor’s pigment has a saturated, fine, arenaceous quality that is also achieved in the most striking classic Rothko paintings; if one disturbs the pristine coating of 1000 Names by attempting to touch the pigment by hand, it would undoubtedly smear and stain the skin. Without touching it, one can imagine the powder’s softness and delicacy as it momentarily rests in suspension upon the object’s surface. In the same way, Rothko’s tangible use of powdery pigment in combination with egg tempera defined the surfaces of his classic work.

64 For the photographs of the installation process of 1000 Names, please see Anish Kapoor, Gautier Deblonde, and Homi K. Bhabha, 1000 Names, (London: Lisson Gallery, 1998). However, recently, the pigment series To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red (1981), was installed at the Leeum Museum by one of Kapoor’s assistants, who used a brush to delicately dust the pigment out of his hand onto the sculptural form. This different process was conveyed to me by Leeum Museum Curator Tae Hyunsun, and can be seen in a documentary about the installation process on view at the museum.

Prior to solidifying this now iconic style, Rothko explored various techniques and materials early in his artistic career. After two years of undergraduate study at Yale University, Rothko irregularly took classes with Max Weber at the Art Students League in New York. During these early years of his career (c. 1925-40), according to Dana Cranmer, former conservator at the Mark Rothko Foundation, Rothko relied on oil-based tube paint, giving his works a dense quality and decisive permanence. Eventually, Rothko began moving away from commercial paints, seeking to evoke a different materiality in his paintings. In the 1950s, he experimented with unbound powder pigments, also adding whole eggs to his mixture and diluting the paint with solvent. As a result of these processes and ingredients, Cranmer notes “the binding element in the paint mixture was compromised” and the “pigment particles were almost dissociated from the paint film, barely clinging to the surface.”

It is this floating powdered pigment that gives Rothko’s color-field paintings their ethereal and immersive hues. Whereas Rothko’s early oil paintings have physical endurance, the later, powered pigment fields are almost like pastels. They are “extremely delicate,” and “brittle and crack or powder easily.” Such fragility, temporality, and luminosity is also shared and embodied by 1000 Names and its offspring. Moreover, not only does Kapoor employ similar materials to Rothko, but his way of doing so underpins his art’s connection to painting’s historical trajectory, and a connection is made apparent through allusions to the subjects his predecessor addressed, such as tragedy.

---


67 For another account of Rothko’s different stylistic periods, please consult Anfam’s catalogue raisonné of the artist.
Tragedy in Kapoor’s Art

In his manuscript, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche theorizes the origins of the ancient Greek form of drama. Accordingly, tragedy developed from a dialectic of the opposing Apollonian and Dionysian worldviews. Nietzsche suggests the plasticity of the Apollonian together with the non-visual Dionysian “developed alongside one another, usually in fierce opposition, each by its taunts forcing the other to more energetic production.”  

Nietzsche frequently describes the Apollonian portion of this constructive rivalry as an illusory “dream world” where everything appears “simple, transparent, [and] beautiful.”  

To overcome the traumas of reality, the Apollonian uses beauty to “vanquish the suffering that inheres in all existence, and pain is, in a certain sense, glossed away from nature’s countenance.”

Nietzsche notes the surprise a Greek must have experienced after realizing the “Apollonian consciousness was but a thin veil hiding…the whole Dionysiac realm.”

Quite differently, the Dionysian was equated with intoxication, and its followers reveled in music’s “shattering of the individual.”

The irrational Dionysian encroached on the Apollonian order of things by advocating for a “fusion with the original Oneness” which entailed eventual annihilation. Until its eventual death at the hands of Socratic rationality, the ancient Greeks employed tragedy’s dialectical system to attribute meaning to a meaningless reality, as Nietzsche envisioned it. In this way, tragedy’s theatrics dramatized human existence’s struggles.

---


72 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, 56.

73 Ibid.
Given Rothko’s embrace of this Nietzschean view of life, one might then wonder how Kapoor’s art might be considered tragic. One can begin to fathom *1000 Names* and its descendants as tragic, if as this thesis recommends, by substituting “minimalism” for “Apollonian,” as the rational, literal, art form that purges itself of metaphor, and “abstract expressionist color-field painting” for “Dionysian” irrational, emotional, abstract art. Thus, enveloping minimalist three-dimensional foundations with a powdered pigment similar to Rothko’s tactile invocations of the Dionysian immersion overwhelms, in Kapoor’s art, any residual structured rationality hiding beneath it. The process of how *1000 Names* vibrantly immerses a structured base in pigment recalls Rothko’s studio practice as well. The color-field painter began his classic colored planes with clean, linear edges, only to annihilate the distinct boundaries with his brush and pigment. Indeed, Kapoor’s process can also be viewed as a transgressive act, a compulsory interaction between two opposing discourses, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which heralded by the new orientation *1000 Names* inaugurates when it crosses the discursive lines established between Judd’s, Morris’s, Newman’s, and Rothko’s work.

**Holi, Carnival, and Transgression**

A sense of the transgressive, intoxicating, Dionysian is heightened if one recalls the pigment’s centrality to one of Kapoor’s competing regionalisms, the Hindu festival of Holi. Powdered pigment is ubiquitous throughout South Asia, where it is employed for smearing images of deities and adorning the faces of the devoted. But, the exhilarating period of color-throwing-fun, where the caste system’s order is upended amid communally sanctioned chaos, opens up Kapoor’s work to certain, special, transgressive meanings. Kapoor would have

---

74 Irving Sandler in particular, has addressed the process behind Rothko’s signature floating planes. However, in his essay “Mark Rothko,” Sandler equates this strategy with the Burkian sublime as a way of depicting the unchecked mind experiencing a delightful terror.
experienced Holi during his childhood, adolescence, and teenage years.\textsuperscript{75} Traditionally observed throughout South Asia, Holi is a spring festival during the full moon day in the lunar month of Phalunga (February-March) celebrating the harvest of winter crops, and culminates in a day of raucous powdered color-and-water throwing in which participants literally immerse themselves in pigment. In north India, where Kapoor spent many of his formative years at the Doon School in Dehradun, Holi is most enthusiastically celebrated as a physical reenactment of a divine story of the Hindu god Krishna and his brother Balarama cavorting, dancing, and playing with the \textit{gopis} (milkmaids). Krishna and Balarama’s narrative establishes the context for how Holi is “played.” It is not a festival of solemn ceremony. Instead, it is a transgressive time of frivolity, fun, and intoxication where social norms are overturned, caste hierarchies become blurry, and behavior otherwise deemed inappropriate is acceptable.\textsuperscript{76}

Holi can be understood as functioning in accordance with Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895-1975) study of carnival. Bakhtin describes carnivals as medieval “comic spectacles and ritual,” sometimes associated with agricultural feasts, offering a “completely different, nonofficial…aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations.”\textsuperscript{77} Comparable to how Holi temporarily overturns the caste system, carnival “marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.”\textsuperscript{78} Those who were normally segregated and divided by social class were brought together under the pretense of frivolity and fun. The


\textsuperscript{77} Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World}, (Bloomington, Indian: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5-6.

\textsuperscript{78} Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World}, 10.
realm of carnival was a “world inside out” where one could renounce their official ranks; the monk could leave his cell, free to “perceive the world in its laughing aspect.” During carnival, the ceremonial donning of the mask permits anonymity for the wearer, abetting the subversion of social conventions and hierarchy among partakers. Likewise, once one is branded by pigment midst one of Holi’s colorful frays, the individual is subsumed into the melee. Caste, background, and identity become afterthoughts. For now, though, the implications of these transcultural references to carnival and Holi evident in 1000 Names will be tabled and picked up later in this chapter.

**Kapoor and the Sahasranama**

Now that Kapoor’s formal and material decisions have been linked to tragedy, it is pertinent to demonstrate how his work dramatizes, or, at least, ironically alludes to the symbolic struggles of human existence with which Rothko was preoccupied. Key texts through which to read such meaning are Kapoor’s titles. For instance, 1000 Names literally translates into Sanskrit as sahasranama—a Hindu hymnal scripture where a deity is referred to by a thousand or more names, each describing a legend or specific trait of that divine entity. Through the utterance of the sahasranama, the abstracted nature of Brahman, which is the infinite, transcendent, supreme universal spirit, is given form so that one can understand how the concrete relates to the intangible. The abstraction of Brahman is called Nirguna, or “without form.” However, with the sahasranama, one is able to understand the intangible through concretization, as Nirguna Brahman becomes Saguna or “with form.”

---


80 An explanation of the sahasranama was generously provided to me by Dr. Dina Bangdel in an interview with the author, April 2012.
never total, form to the formless, i.e., to that which the human mind cannot fully understand. In accordance with this idea, Kapoor once stated in an interview that he does not “believe one can make abstract art, placing it in the world—giving it a name is a vital thing.” Through the act of naming, Kapoor places *1000 Names* in the physical world, while vertically linking the series to the symbolic via allusion to Hindu theology. Thus, alluding to the *sahasranama* is, in the Nietzschean (and Rothkoian) tradition, utterly tragic. Similar to the purpose of the Dionysian—to find meaning in a supposedly meaningless world—it is a dramatization of how Hinduism’s practitioners make sense of existence. The *sahasranama* thus works in accord with the Dionysian immersion; the invocation of each signifies an appeal to a form of abstract, anti-rational transcendence. Yet this symbolic notion of giving form to the unknowable, the infinite, and the formless is a concept not limited to *1000 Names*, for it continues to manifest in *Untitled* and throughout the artist’s oeuvre. However, before understanding *Untitled’s* relationship to the symbolic, how it relates to tragedy, and the contradictions within both of these works, it is necessary to grasp the materiality and physical effects of the objects that constitute it.

**Untitled, the Kabbalah, and the Ineffable Name of God**

Upon entering a gallery space, generally devoted entirely to *Untitled*, viewers are confronted by a trinity of hollow globular shapes more than eight feet in diameter. Jutting out from the wall and into the viewer’s space, one instantly notices the granular blue surface coating the objects’ fiberglass bodies. The shells are dusted with seemingly similar pulsating, delicate, pure powdered pigment to *1000 Names*. When one stands directly in front of one of *Untitled’s* voids, and gazes into their abyss, the deep color and shape of the sculpture coalesces with the gallery’s lighting to produce a dizzying, vertiginous effect, where the three-dimensional objects

---

seemingly flatten to circles, and the viewer loses all perception of depth. Caught among
*Untitled’s* enveloping in-betweenness, a viewer can decisively experience the diagonal sense of
thirdness Bhabha sees in these objects and describes as powerfully disruptive of one’s sense of
space and time.

Before considering *Untitled’s* relationship to tragedy, it should be noted the work exhibits
a concern with peripheral vision, a quality that further aligns this work and others like it with the
modes of modern painting. Art historian Robert Hobbs identifies the preoccupation of such
abstract expressionists as William Baziotes, Adam Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko with peripheral
vision in his 1978 essay “Early Abstract Expressionism: A Concern with the Unknown Within.”
During their formative years and continuing throughout their mature careers, the “shifting foci”
of peripheral vision was a crucial component to their paintings.82 Setting themselves apart from
preceding academic and impressionist painting conventions, the abstract expressionists were
inclined to represent the world through the conflated images seen in the corners of their eyes. For
them, the emphasis on the peripheral shapes functioned as an analogy to unconscious mind.
Peripheral vision was emphasized by Rothko, in particular, who encouraged viewers to
experience his paintings from a distance of only a few feet and under dim lighting; thus his
hovering fields filled the viewer’s vision and seemingly float above the outlying paint. Likewise,
Kapoor sets up for viewers a parallel experience in *Untitled*. The trinity-like arrangement
orchestrates the viewer into an ideal in-between position, flanked on the left and right by voids
so that one gazes into the nothingness of the center void from a distance of a few feet. The
peripheral voids occupy the corners of the viewer’s eyes, as the viewer is denied “focused

---

82 Robert Hobbs, “Early Abstract Expressionism: A Concern with the Unknown Within,” *Abstract Expression: The
scrutiny” by Untitled’s utter flatness, just as Rothko’s hovering fields deny close focused scrutiny.  

Because the disorienting voids of Untitled are not named, viewers are free to locate in them symbolic and tragic allusions. Since Kapoor’s mother is an Iraqi Jew and keeps a book about the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) in his studio, his Untitled as a discussion of the Void can be understood as making a powerful metaphysical allusion to the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable name of God, if the three blue spheroids are analyzed in terms of Jewish mysticism.  

In Judaism, the Tetragrammaton is comprised of four letters YHWH that function as a placeholder for the Biblical Hebrew word “Yahweh,” which orthodox Jews have agreed upon to be the proper and true name of God. In Biblical times, the Tetragrammaton was believed to be so sacred it was only uttered once a year on Yom Kippur by the high priest in the Temple of Jerusalem. After the Temple’s destruction in 70 C.E., and the correct pronunciation was supposedly lost, orthodox Jews instituted and have since maintained a prohibition on reciting and writing the ineffable name. The unspeakable nature and inexpressibility of the Tetragrammaton correlates with an important aspect of Kabbalistic belief, Ein Sof, or the concealed and limitless being of God. According to Jewish mysticism, Ein Sof is entirely spiritual and beyond the cognizance of

---


84 Anfam helpfully lists a number of disparate books Kapoor keeps in his studio in his essay “To Fathom the Abyss.” Besides an unspecified book about the Kabbalah, Kapoor also has a volume on the French-Algerian philosopher Franz Fanon, whose work was influential for postcolonial studies, as well as semiotician Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s Wagner’s Androgyne (1997), mathematician Ian Stewart’s Why Beauty is Truth: The History of Symmetry (2007), and a book of poems by Daljit Nagra.
the human mind; it is completely obscure, incorporeal, and unknowable. Consequently, it is also described as ayin or “that which is No-thing.”

To cope with the vastness of Ein Sof, and to transform the infinite into the finite, Jewish mystics developed the doctrine of sefirot, or the ten emanations of God. Often depicted in Kabbalistic texts as concentric circles, the sefirot are divine qualities and instruments of God that are also manifested in humans. Thus, by understanding the ten sefirot in oneself, an individual is able to understand God much like the sahasranama is used by Hindus to comprehend the formlessness and infinitude of Brahman. Just as the title 1000 Names references an endeavored concretization of the infinite, Kapoor’s lack of a title for Untitled functions symbolically, especially when the depth and immensity of the spheroids indiscernibly flattens to circles, alluding to how the human mind attempts to understand the unknowable in Judaic thought, and, alternatively, all that cannot be named in a work of art. Or, as New York University Professor of Judaic studies Elliot Wolfson fittingly describes the function of the Tetragrammaton and sefirot in his essay “Assaulting the Border: Kabbalistic Traces in the Margins of Derrida,” Untitled “signifies what lies beyond signification.”

Coleridge’s Symbol

Such a notion of giving form to the formless or comprehending the infinite is not limited to the philosophical and theological concepts found in Hinduism or Judaism. Another means of understanding 1000 Names and Untitled can be found in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s (1772-1834)

85 For more information about the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, the Tetragrammaton, and other similar topics, please see Byron L. Sherwin, Kabbalah: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

theory of the symbol which conceptually aligns with the idea of the sahasranama or the sefirot. According to philosopher Patricia Ward, in her essay “Coleridge’s Theory of the Symbol,” it was the romantics “for whom the symbol presented the infinite in the finite.” The symbol could fuse the universal in the particular, and become a part of the infinite reality, and not just a representation of an idea. Further, for Coleridge, the symbol, by its very nature, functioned as a synecdoche—or, in other words, a part which stands for and personifies the whole. Not by accident, each sculptural form in 1000 Names functions as a synecdoche. Thus, a singular bulbous red form sprouting from a gallery wall represents 1000 Names in its totality, just as the individual utterances of the sahasranama are symbolic embodiments of Brahman. As a consequence, 1000 Names becomes difficult to define, since the series is comprised of many different objects and has been exhibited in multiple, varying ways over the course of Kapoor’s career, simultaneously existing as discrete sculptures, temporal gallery-filling installations and an ongoing series. Regardless, both 1000 Names and Untitled can be symbolically understood through both western and non-western theological and philosophical lenses.

---

87 Patricia A. Ward, “Coleridge’s Theory of the Symbol” in Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Vol. 8, No.1 (Spring 1966), 15. In this essay, Ward argues Coleridge’s theory of the symbol was symptomatic of the changes in thought initiated by German romantics. The symbol, which presented the infinite in the finite, dominated romantic poetry according to Ward, including Coleridge's, and was formative to his theory of the symbol.


90 In Aparajita Mazumder, “Coleridge, Vishnu, and the Infinite, in Comparative Literature Studies, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1993), Mazumder points out that Coleridge’s writing, and other Romantics’ writing, demonstrates a fascination with India, indicative of the cross-cultural relationship between Britain and India during colonization. Specifically, Mazumder argues Coleridge was inspired by the stories of Vishnu from the Bhagavadgita, where the deity floats on the sea of Infinity. Thus, it is fitting that Kapoor’s art explores the symbolic cross-culturally, just as Coleridge did centuries before.
1000 Names and Untitled as Models of Transcendence

For Nietzsche and Rothko, art was “not an imitation of nature, but its metaphysical supplement.” Kapoor decisively breaks from their worldview when his allusions to tragedy are read as ironic. Allusion is often read as a modern trope. While Kapoor makes such allusions, he simultaneously ironizes them, a frequent postmodern tactic. In her book, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, postmodern critic Linda Hutcheon posits irony emerges as a problematic method of expression during the 1980s and ‘90s, even though it has existed in various circumstances throughout history. At its most fundamental level, irony is a mode of discourse where people can articulate something they do not mean with the expectation someone will know what is being connoted. In other words, the ironic moment occurs in the space between the said and unsaid. Hutcheon expands on this definition by asserting irony is a “discursive strategy operating at the level of language (verbal)” or in the “form” of music, art, and text. In addition, she argues “unlike metaphor or allegory…irony has an evaluative edge,” that elicits an emotional response from those who “get it” and those who do not. Irony does not necessarily exist in a text or work of art, but rather it must be comprehended as an “interpretive and intentional move.” When irony transpires, it sets up the situation Hutcheon describes as “scene of irony,” which is a political issue concerning “relations of power based in relations of


communication," a process revealing the complexities of social dynamics and interpretation of meaning.  

The irony of Kapoor’s art is made apparent by seeing how his works of art interact with their tragic titles in terms of a heterotopic situation. A heterotopic situation or “heterotopia”—a term coined by French literary theorist Michel Foucault in his text *The Order of Things*—is a “disturbing” phenomena that “secretly undermine[s] language” when incongruous words and things “hang together.” They rub against one another, resulting in a friction between the word and thing, thereby “mak[ing] it impossible to name this and that” by “contest[ing] the very possibility of language at its source” and “dissolve[ing] our myths” while “sterilize[ing] the lyricism of our sentences.” Heterotopic situations do away with external referents, and the words and things that constitute them become self-referential. To understand how a heterotopic situation might function in the context of visual art, specifically *1000 Names* and *Untitled*, one should turn to Foucault’s analysis of Magritte’s *This Is Not a Pipe*.

Towards the conclusion of his text, Foucault asks the reader to rethink Magritte’s drawing of a pipe that “bears so strong a resemblance to a real pipe” and the written statement that “bears so strong a resemblance to the drawing of a written text.” When investigating the possibilities created by Magritte’s juxtaposition between word and image, Foucault states the words “this is not a pipe” is a “negative” discourse, because it “denies along with resemblance,


97 Ibid.

the assertion of reality resemblance conveys.”99 Yet, the statement is also “affirmative” because it validates the existence of simulacrum, concealing the fact “this is not a pipe” since there is no pipe, only models of it. Therefore, Magritte presents viewers with a defamiliarization of the pipe through artistic language, challenging viewers’ assumptions of what a common object—the pipe—is and can be.

If, as Foucault demonstrated, a heterotopic situation can result in a defamiliarization of the pipe (and subsequently, perceptions of reality), then by titling his series 1000 Names, or titling it Untitled—which is both a title and the denial of one—Kapoor presents the viewer with the unfamiliarity or denial of known paths to transcendence and tragedy. Whereas in a sahasranama, there are exactly one thousand specific utterances, each invoking a specific divine quality, in 1000 Names there is an unknown and fluctuating (but definitively less than one thousand) number of pieces, shifting with every reinstallation and photographic documentation. In a somewhat opposing fashion, Untitled, which is supposed to be—or, at least allude to—the unknowable and limitless, has concrete definition as three larger-than-life blue voids of potentially discernible depth. Hence, 1000 Names and Untitled are not transcendent themselves, nor do they create transcendent experiences for viewers. Rather, they provide viewers with models of transcendence that attest to the limits of rational discourse, returning vertical interpretations to the horizontal and creating impossible situations that stress the human mind’s inability to comprehend ultimate transcendence. Perhaps, as well, 1000 Names and Untitled not only allude to the various means through which individuals comprehend existence or God, but also the inability of a single viewer to comprehend absolutely the work of art in front of her or him and the many, even infinite significations of the materials which constitute it.

99 Foucault, This is Not a Pipe, 47.
It should be noted that Foucault’s notion of the heterotopia compares to and correlates with the Sanskrit literary expression *slesha*, therefore underscoring the transcultural readings permitted and encouraged by Kapoor’s work and its ongoing East/West tensions. A double entendre or pun, *slesha*, traditionally, is a practice in poetry (and the visual arts) similar to irony, where the writer deploys a single word or phrase, to connote several diverse meanings.¹⁰⁰ Simultaneously playful and intellectually serious, *slesha* endows language with flexibility and demonstrates the writer’s or artist’s cunning and wit. Bearing this allusion or *slesha* in mind, there is a certain spirited irony to *1000 Names*. Kapoor gives powder, an inherently delicate material, a temporal form, and chooses to give the work, in his own words, “a generic title…implying infinity.”¹⁰¹ Hence, through this visual play, Kapoor is able to layer multiple contradictory meanings that are concurrently generic/specific, modern/postmodern, and East/West throughout his oeuvre. ¹⁰²

As this chapter has indicated, under the guise of sculpture, Kapoor implements not only such traditional painter’s materials as wood, gesso, and, most crucially, pure pigment, but also the traditional motifs of modern painting to perpetuate this discourse at a time when critics, scholars, and artists were concerned with the painting’s end. While blanketing the foundations of *1000 Names* and *Untitled* with pigment can signal an invocation of the Dionysian and blurs the demarcations of artistic discourses, there are other implications. Explored in greater depth in the following chapter, each object of *1000 Names* or *Untitled* functions as a globalizing epicenter, a


liminal space capable of subsuming for viewers with different perspectives several localisms of
dissimilar cultural origins under a new network of aesthetic production that obscures readily
identifiable origins and meanings. The following chapter builds on this permeable framework by
exploring Bhabha’s theories of hybridity, the liminal, and fixity will prove useful in
demonstrating how Kapoor’s work operates in post-colonial terms. Furthermore, crucial to
comprehending Kapoor’s oeuvre, and is supported by the way the signifiers comprising his art
connote transcultural signifieds, is the underlying agenda of demonstrating how subjects of
seemingly diverse identity and social position are not so fundamentally different. There may be
multiple ways of perceiving the world, and in Kapoor’s art, each can be a potentially valid means
of assessing and comprehending the work, changing it in the process and contributing to its
complexity in doing so. This accrual of positions for looking at his art is where his work can be
understood as participating in a post-colonial discourse. Like Bhabha’s theories, Kapoor’s art, in
its implicit openness, advocates a dismantling of the self/other binary in favor of a multiplicity of
perspectives—a political position globalization’s processes encourage.
Chapter 3

Anish Kapoor’s Art and Homi Bhabha’s Writings

As indicated in the previous chapter, *1000 Names* can be decisively characterized in terms of ongoing differences. For example, the work can be understood in post-colonial terms as loci of hybridity, liminal spaces of discursive mixing capable of dismantling—not just aesthetic or theoretical dichotomies, but predicated on transgressing the fixity of cultural (and national) boundaries. This chapter will analyze how Kapoor’s art relates to the discourse of post-colonialism, and in particular Bhabha’s theories. While Bhabha’s relationship with Kapoor and their mutual diasporic backgrounds have already attracted the attention of such scholars as English literary professor Andrew Teverson, who states that Kapoor’s art creates a “liminal space” that “illustrate[s] an aspect of Bhabha’s thought,” the connection between the Bhabha’s words and the Kapoor’s work merits further analyses since it will provide greater understanding about each individual’s practice.\(^{103}\) Revisiting Bhabha’s and Kapoor’s symbiotic and complimentary post-colonial dialogue is a crucial step toward comprehending such works as *1000 Names* and *Untitled*, as well as the more recent stainless steel series as subjects operating under the apparatus of globalization. This chapter will move away from Teverson’s view of Kapoor’s art as “giv[ing] us…the facility to recognize…[how] an object, like a nation, may be

ours...whilst simultaneously being other.”¹⁰⁴ Instead, this chapter will propose that Kapoor’s objects do not function at all like discrete and separate nations per se, but move beyond them into the global sphere of cultural production.

**Bhabha’s Diasporic Heritage**

Before analyzing Kapoor’s art in relationship to Bhabha’s writings, it will help to consider briefly the theorist’s heritage in order to appreciate how his own background has informed his ideas of liminality, hybridity, and fixity, which are central to this chapter. Doing so will provide also a fundamental historical and contextual understanding for why Bhabha would wish to write about Kapoor’s art. Bhabha was born in 1949 into a Parsi family living in Mumbai, India. According to tradition, the Parsis, a relatively small Indian community of Zoroastrians, emigrated in 936 A.D. from Persia to India in order to escape religious persecution. For the next six centuries, the Parsis generally kept to themselves, engaging in agricultural practices, weaving, and occasional local trade. In the sixteenth century, as European nations began to search for fabled wealth in foreign lands, the Indian seaport of Surat—which at the time had a large Parsi population—became a hub of mercantilism. And the Parsis became known for their ingenuity and erudition, as they implemented successful banking, moneylending, and trading operations. During Great Britain’s colonization of India, the Parsis were well positioned to be members of this country’s cultural elite. As an ethnic group, they were economically prosperous and enjoyed the favor of the British crown since they were particularly westernized

and actively sought to differentiate themselves from the Indian majority.\textsuperscript{105} Parsi history can thus be characterized in terms of a narrative of transience, and since have been readily able to adapt to their changing socio-political climate. According to Bhabha, the Parsis are traditionally a “hybridized community” that is “not very doctrinaire,” and he has noted that his own theoretical development has been impacted by how the Parsis have “negotiated and performed in the context of cultural translation” the “question of identity,” therefore enabling his identity to be defined by fluidity, a condition or predilection setting the stage for a critical approach to his writing. Since Bhabha’s own biography is reflective of the historical narrative of Parsi impermanence, one can conclude that he, like Kapoor, is still caught up in the dynamics of an ongoing diaspora.

In addition to his diasporic Parsi heritage, Bhabha has cited the importance of Kapoor’s work to his thought. In an \textit{Artforum} interview with the theorist of media, literature, and visual art, W.J.T. Mitchell, Bhabha noted how Kapoor’s art helped him understand “the folding of time into space and vice versa”—processes central to his theories regarding the construction of subjects.\textsuperscript{106} One can assume, then, that the editor’s decision to place a detailed image of Kapoor’s \textit{Untitled} on the cover of Bhabha’s seminal 1994 volume, \textit{The Location of Culture}, was not arbitrary or fortuitous. When one moves beyond the cover of \textit{The Location of Culture} and


into the theories articulated in its pages, one can identify theories pertaining to “the folding of
time into space” that Bhabha recognizes in Kapoor’s work.\textsuperscript{107}

**Bhabha’s Liminality in Kapoor’s *Untitled***

The first of Bhabha’s theories related to Kapoor’s art in general—and his *Untitled* (1990)
in particular—is the notion of the liminal or third space. In his introduction to *The Location of
Culture*, Bhabha describes this liminality using a word coming from the Latin *limen*, meaning
“threshold” as “the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of
difference and identity” impacted by past and present temporality, as well as external and internal
forces.\textsuperscript{108} Within a liminal space there is a sense of disorientation, which Bhabha characterizes
as a “disturbance of direction…in the ‘beyond.’”\textsuperscript{109} It is an unsettling and restless space of
being. Bhabha poetically describes the experience as a “movement caught…in the…here and
there, on all sides…hither and thither, back and forth.”\textsuperscript{110} This vertiginous liminality can be
viewed as a social and temporal space where identity becomes dynamic and fluid as static
definitions of self are questioned and borders are blurred. The liminal is the space “in between”
nations where cultural differences are negotiated.

Kapoor’s *Untitled* has the ability to catalyze the “liminal space” for viewers as Teverson
suggests, one key to comprehending this liminality empirically is through the phenomenological
effects Kapoor’s sculptural installation generates for viewers, as outlined in the previous chapter.

\textsuperscript{107} In addition to Kapoor, Bhabha has also written about Pakistani born American artist Shahzia Sikander, as well as
London-based Indian painter Raqib Shaw.

\textsuperscript{108} Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
To recapitulate: when one stands before *Untitled*, and gazes directly into one of its three deep blue abstracted shapes, a sense of depth is lost. If one imagines himself standing at the requisite position and perspective—approximately a few feet from the outer rims of these pieces—the larger than life size concave spheroids of *Untitled* suddenly convert to flatness, creating a powerful sense of unease in its beholders. This effect is felt from several angles, as observers are enveloped, using Bhabha’s terms, in a “sense of disorientation,” experiencing a consequent “disturbance in direction” created when viewers literally situate themselves in between the three voids. 111 Standing in the presence of *Untitled*, individuals figuratively become “caught so well in the…here and there, on all sides” that Bhabha describes as liminal space in *The Location of Culture*. 112 As will be seen, this empirical approach to the work is greatly enhanced culturally for viewers arriving with a knowledge of the artist’s diasporic background and the semiotic traces of minimalism and color-field abstract expressionism.

**On Hybridity**

Not only does *Untitled* construct a liminal space for viewers to experience, but it—along with many of Kapoor’s other works—functions as liminal spaces. To conceive his art in terms of these thresholds of production, it helps to look at Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, a consequence of liminal space’s spatial and temporal processes also evident throughout Kapoor’s work. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes hybridity as arising when “the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated.”113 Thus, hybridity, whether

---

111 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

112 Ibid.

113 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 114.
colonial or contemporary, is a cultural condition occurring in the liminal, the place where “space and time cross to produce complex figures of identity,” and one cannot pinpoint distinct identities or particularities. The previous chapters’ analysis of Kapoor’s art has clearly demonstrated how it is predicated upon this idea. Through the interpretation sets of dialectics they encourage and catalyze, works like 1000 Names can be understood as paired on several series of contrasting theoretical, aesthetic, and cultural positions. Yet, these articles that Kapoor’s art can be viewed as enacting “are not simply there to be seen or appropriated.” Although one can locate the references to Holi, carnival, Rothko, minimalism, and the Kabbalah in 1000 Names and Untitled, such meanings are not embodied in the works themselves. Complex chains of signification arise in the acts of looking and interpreting this work in terms of its many legacies, which are biographical, art historical, and cultural—since art objects themselves do not embody singular stabile, and static, readings. The notion of hybridity underscores Bhabha’s argument against attempting to define subjects in terms of such dichotomies as First and Third World, colonizer and colonized, self and other. Bhabha advocates moving past these polarities in order to examine what happens in the spaces between nations where thresholds are crossed. Certainly, if Kapoor’s art can be seen as functioning in a liminal space, it does so in terms of the hybridized manifestations of subject formation that occur when these multifaceted figures of time and space intersect.

**Kapoor’s Mirrored Objects: Dismantling Fixity**

These post-colonial issues of subject formation can also be found in Kapoor’s later work, such as the highly reflective, stainless steel series of sculptures which include Turning the World Inside Out (1995) (Figure 15), Untitled (2009) (Figure 16), and Cloud Gate (2004) (Figure 17). This series, which sets up a dialectic with his early pigmented works’ delicate surfaces by
transitioning from fragility to industrial resilience, appears at first to obviate Bhabha’s concept of “fixity.” In Bhabha’s discourse on colonialism, “fixity” is vital to the ideological construction of otherness and “is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order, as well as disorder, degeneracy, and daemonic repetition.” Bhabha understands fixity to result from stereotyping. Indeed, fixated representation is essentializing, since it creates the polarizations of self and other; consequently Bhabha urges global society to move beyond fixity to liminality and hybridity, a position that assumes a place of primacy in his writings.

Keeping fixity in mind, if one turns toward Kapoor’s mirrored works of art and their gleaming surfaces, one can appreciate how these works of art physically dismantle fixed perceptions and representations. On the most grand and spectacular scale of all his reflective works, Kapoor’s monumental *Cloud Gate* (2006), the popular public sculpture and icon of Chicago’s Millennium Park, distorts and obliterates such static views of the world. From a slight distance, the polished, leguminous curves of the massive object reflect Chicago’s skyline from its central locale, albeit in a bent and warped manner. As viewers move closer toward *Cloud Gate*’s metallic, seductive, and almost liquid surface, their own reflections enter the mirror plane, shifting and swerving with the shape of the sculpture. *Cloud Gate*’s dynamic exterior reveals the external world and its inhabitants as fluid and dynamic entities that blend and flow. Viewers’ experiences of *Cloud Gate* are entirely dependent upon their own position in relationship to the object and are unique to them. When viewers stand directly underneath *Cloud Gate*, gazing up at the sculpture’s *omphalos* (Figure 18)—Greek for “navel”—this liquefying effect is at its zenith. Any recognizable or whole image is utterly obfuscated. Kapoor presents the identity of the world as his sculpture sees it; a boundless representational multiplicity of changing and ricocheting

---

114 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 66.
images, devoid of any consistent stability so that no two individuals experience the same work of art, which is always an active reflective entity, even though the sculpture itself remains static.

**Moving Beyond the Nation**

Thus far, this chapter has expanded upon Teverson’s useful connections between Bhabha’s concept of liminal space and Kapoor’s art. However, determining how Kapoor’s art can move beyond the concept of nation requires further investigation into Bhabha’s theories and the ideas formative to them, such as those found in historian Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). In the introduction to the edited volume *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha explicitly cites the importance of Anderson, “whose *Imagined Communities* significantly paved the way” for this book.\(^\text{115}\) Anderson’s arguments are primarily concerned with the idea of nation as a cultural artifact, an artificial construct with historical origins traceable to the end of the eighteenth century. For Anderson, the term “nation” represents an “imagined political community,” produced by the crossing of distinct historical forces. Once these artificial communities are naturalized, they become “modular” and are capable of being transplanted.\(^\text{116}\) Included among these historical forces and vital to the construction and spread of the nation with its concomitant nationality (identity) and nationalism (state of belonging to an established confederation) are the processes and phenomena associated with literate and visual culture. Though art is inextricably linked with the historical construction of unified national identities, print culture commands Anderson’s attention, because it established the foundations of national consciousness by allowing readers in a specific language-

---


field to identify and connect with similar speakers, simultaneously establishing linguistically-based nationalistic hierarchies. In other words, print (and other visual culture) contributed to the image of the unified, whole nation while simultaneously demonizing or “othering” cultures, languages, and styles separate from one’s own.

Like Anderson, Bhabha characterizes nations as imagined: they are “like narratives, los[ing] their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.” He presents national culture as an image of social life, where margins are, and have almost always been, ambivalent. Underscoring Bhabha’s view of nation as solely a type of “narration” is a challenge to assertions of cultural supremacy by revealing national boundaries as thresholds—liminal spaces—that can and have been transgressed, permeated, and translated in the past. Bhabha’s conceptualization of nationhood underscores both the theoretical and pragmatic basis of his work. Through his explorations of liminality, hybridity, and fixity, Bhabha can advocate an understanding of the world beyond the prohibitive positions encouraged by nationality’s and nationalism’s strict geographic and ideological boundaries. A particularly more

---


118 Contradictorily, Kapoor breaks down the ideological fallacies of otherness, using tactics which historically have helped to create it. For further reading on how visual (and literary) culture as a whole created the possibility of the “other,” please see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Among other theories, Eisenstein’s now iconic work posits early printing was defined in part by a standardization of images. The same stock images were repeatedly used in printed materials to portray different towns, plants, and people. Widespread implementation of the same images made the idiosyncratic features and differences of towns, plants, and people much more apparent. Anderson’s and Eisenstein’s research support the notion that constructing the other was made much easier with the introduction of the printing press and the media it produced.

119 Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 1.

120 Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 2.

121 Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 4
productive way of doing this is Bhabha’s conceptualization of the world in terms of ongoing process and cultural negotiation.

While Kapoor has never openly articulated his views of nation or nationality, he does share Bhabha’s rethinking of identity. In a 2011 interview, Kapoor summarizes their affinities, including their similar diasporic backgrounds, and the relevancy of Bhabha’s post-colonial view. As Kapoor notes, “the longer we look at it, the more we see that your personal perspective is not that different from mine. It doesn’t matter where you come from in the end.” Thus Bhabha’s and Kapoor’s common understanding of identity is not limited by nationality. Subjects can move beyond nationality, a culturally constructed representation. If one extends this perspective to Kapoor’s art by describing its functionality in terms of geopolitics, one’s enlarged understanding of it can collapse the discernible cultural particularities that historically demarcate signifiers of a specific nation. Kapoor’s art, then, beginning with 1000 Names, can be viewed as concretized models capable of enacting for viewers the transgressive spaces of translation and alteration Bhabha identifies with negotiated cultural differences.

Bhabha’s writings and Kapoor’s art can thus be considered as validating each other as they engage in mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationships. A post-colonial reading of Kapoor’s work, using Bhabha’s theories, allows it to be seen as moving beyond the confines of cultural particularities and being open to the permeable global frameworks established by Hardt and Negri for the production of culture and identity—even though Hardt and Negri criticize Bhabha, and his post-colonial mission for being too concerned with the past to address the immanent specter of Empire and globalization. In the next chapter, this thesis will propose not only that

---

Bhabha’s theories can be translated to contemporary processes of global cultural production, but Kapoor’s art, which shares theoretical ties to post-colonialism, is also well-equipped to address globalization’s actuating effects.
Chapter 4

Anish Kapoor’s Art and Globalization

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri propose that power, in the age of globalization, is now implemented through apparatuses that directly organize human brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and systems (in government organizations, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of “autonomous alienation” from “creativity.” Suggesting globalizing technologies and political bodies, such as the internet and the United Nations, are entirely liberating entities is definitely contentious, supportive of unbridled creative freedom, globalization can generate new and exciting prospects in the sphere of cultural production. Kapoor’s art is demonstrative of such creative possibilities in an era when national separateness is identifiable as imagined and permeable. As the previous chapters have specified, his art is grounded in transgression, and as this chapter will contend, these transgressive qualities are indicative of globalization’s effects, which are outlined in *Empire*. Though certain local ideas are alluded to in Kapoor’s work, similar to the reactionary phenomena in countries subject to globalization, his art can be viewed as intrinsically global, with concomitant localities, thus dismantling the local/global dichotomy Hardt/Negri and Bhabha challenge. This chapter will contend that Kapoor’s oeuvre represents an ongoing process of cultural translation, presenting viewers with a reframing of certain culturally normative styles as minimalism and color-field abstraction. In the case of Kapoor’s art, cultural translation defamiliarizes informed viewers’

---

experiences of a given culture by never actually embodying the localisms that characterize it, and only entertaining them as possible frames and views. As will be demonstrated, this aspect of Kapoor’s work resists Empire’s and globalization’s frictionless society of control. Moreover, the art’s resistance to globalization is underscored, if the work is considered in Althusser’s terms as being *about* the ideology of globalization rather than a mere product of its procedures. Hence, Kapoor’s work can be inscribed in art history as thoughtful and self-aware, and its potential global associations can be understood in relation to the contemporary production of cultural identity and difference theorized by not only Hardt and Negri, but also Bhabha.

**Revisiting Empire, Globalization, and Kapoor’s Art**

As noted in chapter one, Hardt and Negri argue that globalization, a phenomena engendered in part by Empire’s nexus, acts as a regime for the production of identity and difference. In response to a global encroachment on the perceived stability of national borders and identity, these thinkers view the development of local political projects as necessarily “defended or protected against the intrusion of globalization.”¹²⁴ These perceived local differences require preservation because their origins, according to nationalism’s ideology, are unquestionable. Hardt and Negri take note of the dangers of clinging to such traditional perspectives, which “can easily devolve into a kind of primordialism that fixes and romanticizes social relations and identities.”¹²⁵ Alternatively, these two theorists propose a framework where they differentiate the global from local, with the latter referring to the networks of flows and impediments that attempt to reterritorialize barriers, borders, and boundaries. In contrast to the

---

¹²⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 45.

¹²⁵ Ibid.
local, global movements privilege “the mobility of deterritorializing flows.” Resisting globalization by attempting to “(re)establish local identities that are in some sense outside and protected against the global flows of capital” is, an understandable endeavor for Hardt and Negri, but they opine these actions are in reality impractical, unproductive, and in the contemporary era, near futile.

The various sets of polarities, stemming from the global and local discourses explored in chapter one and two, on which Kapoor’s art is predicated, such as painting/sculpture, East/West, modern/post-modern, demonstrate how his work functions in opposition to the Hardt/Negri view of the potentially dangerous localist activism. Kapoor’s art is dynamic and shifts both globally and locally; it consequently does not uphold a single discursive sanctity or establish concrete and definable regionalisms. As early as the 1970s, Kapoor’s work can be understood as actively dismantling ordered hierarchies and playing off sets of established binaries, often blurring them in the process, ranging from the aesthetic to the political, an example being 1000 Names and its overlapping of the formal margins between painting and sculpture, color field painting and minimalism. But a more concentrated look into this work shows that it shares close thematic ties with the painting traditions championed by Rothko, even though it makes, unlike this abstract expressionist art, ironic existential allusions to tragedy. This heterogeneity correlates with Hardt and Negri (and, as will be discussed, Bhabha’s) theories about contemporary subject formation, since globalization does not produce blanket homogenization but instead constructs identity and difference. An example of this type of differentiation between the local and the global is the use of pigment in 1000 Names and its multiple signifieds, referencing Holi, carnival, and the

---

126 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 45.
Dionysian, which heighten the transgressiveness of the work, setting a conceptual precedent for the rest of Kapoor’s oeuvre.

When one relates 1000 Names and its signifiers to Kapoor’s later sculptural objects, such as the three blue voids of Untitled and others, it is possible to discern where the work diverts from the Hardt/Negri framework to imply a political agenda of its own more akin to Bhabha’s. Evidenced by the complex religious metaphors used by critics and art historians to reference Kapoor’s diasporic and hybrid heritage, as well as those traditions far removed from his own upbringing, his work has been used to bolster the post-colonial notion that subjects of diverse identity and social position are not so fundamentally different—an example being this thesis’s references to the sahasranama in 1000 Names and Ein Sof in Untitled, which address similar issues. These religious perspectives—through which the devout and spiritually inclined can come to terms with their existence in the universe by relying on systems of belief—can be used by humanity to comprehend the infinite and the boundless. Yet Kapoor’s art does not limit these works to Hindu and Jewish references; in his work, artistic allusions to Christianity can also be found. Such works as The Healing of St. Thomas (1989-90) demonstrate a preoccupation with Christian belief similar to the Hindu and Jewish existential allusions in 1000 Names and Untitled.

**The Healing of St. Thomas and Cultural Translation**

*The Healing of St. Thomas* (Figure 19) is a red pigmented gash sliced through a wall. Possessing dimensions of 35 x 18 x 2 cm, the work is undeniably subtle, seemingly at odds with Kapoor’s oft-imposing and grand installations, even though it commands a distinct presence of its own. The blood-red cut suggests an act of violence to the white-cube gallery, not only because
of its wound-like formal qualities, but also the shape and title of this work allude to the stigmata and the New Testament story of Thomas, the apostle, who doubted Jesus’s resurrection. Once he saw Jesus in person, Thomas was allowed to touch the wound in Christ’s torso, where a Roman guard had pierced him with a lance to confirm his death before he was removed from the cross. In choosing a biblical allusion, Kapoor perpetuates a common art historical trope depicted countless times, perhaps most famously by Duccio (Figure 20) and Caravaggio (Figure 21). In colloquial English, this story of Thomas—often referenced by the phrase “doubting Thomas,” is used to describe or label individuals who require concrete proof or personal experience of something before they believe it to be true. Thus, Kapoor’s *The Healing of St. Thomas* makes allusions to belief and doubt—the first a modern theme and the second a postmodern one—similar to as those referenced in *1000 Names* and *Untitled*, where they function as a testament to the limits of rational discourse and the unknowability of the divine. Complementing such notions, the installation of *The Healing of St. Thomas* at the Leeum Museum in Seoul, South Korea, in 2012-13, was slightly out of arm’s reach even for the tallest people. The height of this installation functions not only as a protective barrier from curious patrons, but it also prevents the most doubting Thomas from obtaining empirical knowledge of the installation’s physical qualities.

Occurring throughout Kapoor’s oeuvre, the frequent reframing of religious aspects central to traditionally South Asian and Judeo-Christian religions can also be appositely read through Bhabha’s conceptualization of cultural translation, who helpfully characterizes it as a transgressive act. Bhabha describes certain instances of translation in which diasporic subjects re-present cultures not “originally” theirs and notes that they are often viewed as blasphemous. He defines blasphemy as a moment “when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition
is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation.” Thus, cultural translation can “desacralize,” using Bhabha’s term, the conventions supporting established cultural hierarchies. The process is not always a smooth transition, and often highlights certain disjunctions within a nation’s or culture’s ideology. Cultural translation’s blasphemy, however, reveals alternative positions and enunciative possibilities within a given discourse. Considered in Bhabha’s terms, Kapoor’s allusive and ironic recurrent staging of customarily Christian, Hindu, and Jewish themes and motifs does not necessarily challenge the validity of these diverse perspectives, but rather emphasizes the disjunctions that prevent total cultural assimilation and transformation of the diasporic subjects Bhabha characterizes.

Resolving Bhabha’s Theories with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s Empire

One might ask how Kapoor’s art can work in tandem with Bhabha’s theories as well as those of Hardt and Negri, since the latter theorist criticize post-colonial (and postmodern) approaches and the former critic does not identify with their post-Marxist look at the forces of Empire. Hardt and Negri view the perspective of post-colonialism as “limited” since its adherents continually critique and pursue “liberation from the past forms of rule and their legacies in the present.” These theorists identify Bhabha, in particular, as the primary perpetrator of this old fashioned approach in the belief that he refuses to view the world through binary divisions, leading him to “reject…theories of totality and theories of identity, homogeneity, and essentialism of social subjects.” Hybridity, however, is the situation where

127 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 225.
128 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 137.
129 Ibid.
130 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 144.
Bhabha finds liberation from Hardt/Negri’s totalizing theories, which, in the opinion of Hardt and Negri, is a powerful synthesis of post-colonial and postmodern discourse. Chapter three worked to demonstrate how hybridity and liminality – ambivalences connected to Kapoor’s art and Bhabha’s theoretical approach – are valuable models for dismantling rigid perceptions of social control shaped by fictions of national sovereignty and thus are not in any way inimical to globalization. Working in tandem with Bhabha’s liminal spaces, which can be understood as the locations where Hardt and Negri’s competing regionalisms intersect with globalization, Kapoor’s art resists Empire’s and globalizations mechanisms of social control through the aforementioned transgression Bhabha associates with cultural translation.

**Resisting Empire’s and Globalization’s Processes**

The system of control proliferated by Empire and globalization is not unlike Foucault’s panopticon where subjects discipline themselves. In this type of self-monitored society “the immanent exercise of discipline – that is, the self-disciplining of subjects, the incessant whispering of disciplinary logics within subjectivities themselves – is extended more generally.” Hardt and Negri believe this society of control diverges from traditional modern institutions, which produced “standardized machine parts” in which each person played a “specific role in the assembled machine.” Differing from the modern, present-day subjectivity is formed by the degradation of the barriers that differentiated institutions, thus permitting the melding of multiple social identities. It is not static in nature, but fluid and shifting. Before, in

---

131 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 145.
133 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 331.
a traditional modern disciplinary society, “each individual had many identities…defined by different places and different times of life: one was mother or father at home, worker in the factory, student at school,” now, since these distinct locations and places have lost their designations, subjectivities have “mixed constitutions”: they are the mother or father, worker, and student all at once. 135 This congruent smoothing of subjectivity and social space, Hardt and Negri propose, plays into globalization’s new regime and renders “social inequalities” more severe (though in different form) by collapsing the physical distance between the center/periphery and rich/poor in such global cities as Los Angeles, Singapore, and São Paolo. Meanwhile, the society of control actively works to maintain separation in response to the potential permeability of socio-economic classes.

Kapoor’s art may ostensibly appear to be a smoothing of social space, albeit an intricate one. It would seem the works of his oeuvre flow effortlessly from one identity, often demarcated by religion, to the next. However, during the ongoing process of cultural translation, Kapoor’s work defamiliarizes the hybridity demanded by global capital. The works generate glitches and frictions that rub against the infinitely fluid developments Empire demands. 1000 Names is not a work of infinity, nor is it an entirely “Hindu” art form. Untitled is not boundless, nor is it a decisively “Jewish” sculptural installation. The Healing of St. Thomas is not Christ’s wound, nor is it “Christian” work of art. The multiple perspectives of these works entertain such localities, ironically alluding to religious subject matter and constituting a series of negative discourses which, to reiterate Foucault, deny “along with resemblance, the assertion of reality resemblance conveys.”136 It is fitting that this reading of Kapoor’s art correlates with the artist’s perception of

---

135 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 331.
136 Foucault, This is Not a Pipe, 47.
his own diasporic identity, examined in chapter one, by never totally belonging to a discrete
culture or nationality.

This resistance to the smoothing and flexibility of Hardt/Negri’s globalization is even
more pronounced if one looks to Althusser’s theorization of ideology and art and views Kapoor’s
work as about globalization rather than co-opted by it. In “A Letter on Art in Reply to André
Dasperé,” Althusser summarizes his fundamental ideas on the topic by contending that art should
not be ranked among ideologies because it “makes us perceive…something which alludes to
reality.”\(^{137}\) Particularly remarkable for Althusser is the ability of a work art to allow viewers to
see the ideology that created it and not to be interpellated as its subject, as many critics like Craig
Owens thought in the 1980s.\(^{138}\) By giving viewers the chance to become aware of the media’s
and form’s “absurd” opacity, the work of art does not interpellate ideological subjects because it
lacks, according to Hobbs in “Looking B(l)ack: Reflections on White Racism,” the “direct
persuasiveness necessary for this type of enlistment.”\(^{139}\) The distance fosters a constant
oscillation in a work of art that reinforces it’s “aboutness.” Hence, art has the potential to
represent or be about artificiality, simulation, or fiction, as opposed to manufacturing a discrete
reality, unwaveringly upheld by sincere believers. Hobbs contends art “provides us with requisite
distance for seeing the subject” as the illusion that it is. Ideology then becomes, according to
Hobbs, the “subject but not the object of the art.”\(^{140}\) Following these observations, Kapoor’s

\(^{137}\) Louis Althusser, “A Letter on Art in Reply to André Dasperé” (1966),

2011), 136.


\(^{140}\) Ibid.
work can be dissociated enough from viewers to prevent an encumbering globalization from being the object of his art. His work can be understood as being about globalization’s ideology of flows and networks, systems of power, and the production of identity and difference.

Indeed, this assertion works in accord with art historian Pamela M. Lee’s theory in *Forgetting the Art World* (2012) that art is both an “object of and agent for” globalization. As an object of globalization, the development of Kapoor’s art can be conceptualized, using Hardt and Negri’s rhetoric and logic, as a product of several competing regionalisms. Bhabha’s theories can aid in discerning the liminal spaces where regionalisms converge. In recent years, Kapoor’s art can be seen as becoming an even more authoritative agent of globalization as it has been disseminated internationally, thereby providing even more opportunities for people to engage in its liminality. The work has permeated a number of national borders to assume prominent public positions in several strategic global centers, including *Cloud Gate* in Chicago, London’s *ArcelorMittal Orbit* (2012), commissioned specifically for the 2012 Summer Olympics, Paris’s *Leviathan* (2011) temporarily commandeering the Grand Palais; and Jerusalem’s *Turning the World Upside Down* (2010). This prominence is reinforced by the three major exhibitions of Kapoor’s art *simultaneously* taking place on three different continents in first months of 2013. One can conclude, then, that Kapoor’s art is not just about globalization, its ideology, and its ongoing production of identities, but also about the present-day permeability of national borders as the work moves through the world and is understood through the radically different lenses through which this highly liminal work can be perceived.

---


142 These three exhibitions were at the Leeum Museum in Seoul, South Korea, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, Australia, and the De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg, Netherlands.
Conclusion

Kapoor’s art can thus be comprehended in terms of globalization, as it occupies a unique liminal position between several, often contradictory polarities, fostering a transgressive aesthetic mode capable of producing multiple identities and ongoing difference. While the work sets up such art historical ties to minimalism as seen in Judd’s reliance on seriality and ambiguity of genre, as well as Morris’s concern for an object’s relationship to viewers’ bodies, it also reveals more explicit connections to the themes and traditions of modern painting Rothko championed, ranging from its peculiar use of pigment to its implicit tragic allusions. Complicating his position within the discourse of painting even further is the way Kapoor’s title choices and use of materials redeploy the metaphysical suggestions color-field abstract expressionists believed their work embodied. Because Kapoor never fully commits to transcendence or the symbolic, and the references to Ein Sof, sahasranama and the Dionysian found in his art can be read as ironic, thereby enabling his work to be seen as occupying a liminal space between the modern and postmodern. Bhabha’s theories on hybridity, liminality, and fixity provide helpful models for conceptualizing how Kapoor’s work functions. Though Hardt and Negri take issue with Bhabha’s post-colonial worldview, it can be adapted to address how identity is formed under the globalizing power structures that the post-Marxist authors theorize in Empire. Kapoor’s work, however, should not be understood as only an object of the global system Hardt and Negri identify, but rather it can be conceived as being about globalization, its processes, and its possibilities.
The above enumerated conclusions of this thesis suggest an expansion of the art historical knowledge regarding Kapoor’s art, which works in tandem with the deductions reached by other scholars. For instance, understanding the art’s location between painting and sculpture as a dialectic resolves the differing theoretical positions of those who emphasize Kapoor’s relationship to American minimalism, such as Cooke and Hayden, and others who analyze his work in terms of painting, such as Anfam. Chapter two’s emphasis on Kapoor’s metaphysical references, although they ostensibly appear to be at odds with Bhabha’s criticism of transcendent interpretations, actually support his argument by viewing them as ironic, as indicated by the disconnect between the titles of the works and the materials that comprise them. Indeed, Teverson’s useful engagement of Bhabha’s and Kapoor’s respective works opens up fruitful discussion about the relationship between these two individuals. This thesis has aimed to build on Teverson’s initiative by reconsidering how Kapoor’s works function as liminal spaces, in addition to considering how this art relates to Bhabha’s other theories prioritizing hybridity and condemning fixity. Moreover, Bhabha’s post-colonial and phenomenological understanding of his work as disruptive of space and time buttresses this thesis’s viewing of Kapoor’s art through the lens of globalization, which is an inherently disruptive process of transgressing national and ensconced cultural borders.

Identifying the flexible, shifting, and liminal position of Kapoor’s work sets it apart from his contemporaries who also address issues related to globalization. Whereas other such important artists such as Takashi Murakami (b. 1962, Japanese), Shahzia Sikander (b. 1969, American, born Pakistani-American), and Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977, American) adopt localisms and make them global through their work, Kapoor’s art can be understood as explicitly global in its abstract permeability while it only entertains certain regionalisms and traditions.
Murakami’s typical paintings depict subject matter related to *otaku* culture, that is, the obsessed followers of Japanese styles of animation and comics, known as anime and manga respectively (Figure 22). Murakami proliferates on a global scale these signifiers frequently associated with a Japanese sensibility using, as Pamela Lee suggests, a deep understanding of the contemporary world economy, as indicated by the artist’s embrace of “post-Fordist aesthetics,” evidenced by his use of computer software to create his paintings’ designs, and their flexibility and near infinite scalability. Murakami describes his globalism as “Superflat” to suggest a collapsing of past/present and high art/mass-media entertainment. The congruent flattening of history and culture within Murakami’s picture plane displays a “deliberately nonspherical perspective” that does away with such impediments to a “seamless” world of global capital as the “concrete particularities of time and space.”

In regards to the topic of globalization, Wiley’s series of paintings, *The World Stage* (Figure 23), can be understood in a somewhat similar manner to Murakami’s, however mass-media and world-wide manipulations of hip-hop culture rather than *otaku* is the subject of his art’s focus. However, *The World Stage* paintings do differ significantly from Murakami’s by reporting how hip-hop culture has spread throughout the planet and been localized in such countries as Brazil, India, Sri Lanka, China, Israel, Nigeria, Senegal, and France. In his essay, “Kehinde Wiley’s Conceptual Realism,” Hobbs notes these paintings are simply homogenous “melting pots,” even though they uphold a certain degree of difference through their subjects’

---

143 Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, 42-43.

144 Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, 68.
representation of local customs in conjunction with hip-hop.  

Political posters, background patterns, and dress, all unique to a specific region or country of the world, imbue the paintings with an overtly artificial local flair. Wiley moves beyond music in his paintings to depict hip-hop as a cultural commodity, “liberally mixed with local styles, to convey this popular culture phenomenon’s global expansion.” Fully in line with how globalization has been characterized in this thesis, *The World Stage* illustrates the permeability of national boundaries in a global economy, and demonstrates how globalization produces identity and difference, even though it does so in terms of a world-wide phenomenon, which has been enunciated locally.

In Sikander’s early works, the artist employs artistic traditions deeply rooted in traditional Persian and Mughal miniature painting, and uses them to address issues pertaining to contemporary geopolitics, hybridized identities, and sexuality. Though the subject matter of her works can be seen as occupying a similar liminal position to Kapoor’s, since her sources come from a selection of diverse cultural and religious references, Sikander’s paintings continue to rely on the localism of miniature painting that she learned while studying at the National College of Arts in Lahore. Exquisite detail and handmade paper, as well as watercolors, tea, and vibrant inks (hallmarks of the several hundred year old the miniature legacy) are deployed to create such works as *Pleasure Pillars* (2001) (Figure 24). While remaining faithful to techniques and materials of miniature painting, Sikander flattens the figure/ground relationship when juxtaposing Classical Greek statuesque nudes with representations of the Indian dancers found throughout miniature painting’s history. *Pleasure Pillars*’s East/West tension is heightened by the

---

145 Robert Hobbs, “Kehinde Wiley’s Conceptual Realism,” *Kehinde Wiley*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2011) 63. Hobbs also notes Wiley originally selected subjects from the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with Russia being the exception) to include in *The World Stage*. He selected these countries after discovering Goldman Sachs’s global economic paper “Building Better Economic BRICs” (2001) where the firm made predictions about profound economic developments in these countries during the next fifty years.

addition of what appear to be F/A-18 fighter jets (a multi-role plane favored by the United States military), adorning the surface in a circular decorative motif. These contrapuntal themes suggest the climate of post-9/11 politics, as the contemporary/traditional and East/West struggle to command the picture plane. In *Pleasure Pillars*, and many other of Sikander’s paintings, global issues are negotiated by decisively local tactics.

Kapoor’s art and its global politics differ considerably from this later generation of contemporary artists who address specific issues related to globalization. While globalization, its products, and its processes serve as iconography for Murakami, Wiley, and Sikander, this new political configuration that moves beyond nationalism and internationalism, functions as an unresolved dialectic, poised on such polarities as painting/sculpture, East/West, and modern/postmodern, which depend on viewers’ orientation, art historical knowledge, and familiarity with localisms. Whereas Murakami’s, Wiley’s, and Sikander’s works are comprised of specific iconographies stemming from identifiable geographical centers, Kapoor’s art, as this thesis has demonstrated, does not permit an identification with a single center, but rather a multiplicity of them. In doing so, Kapoor’s art has become a highly relevant global artistic force, challenging not only viewers’ static perceptions of themselves, but also narrow views of the world.
Bibliography


Figures

Figure 1, Anish Kapoor, *1000 Names*, 1979-1985
Figure 2, Anish Kapoor, *Untitled*, 1990

Figure 3, Kapoor, *Void*, 1989
Figure 4, Kapoor, *Adam*, 1988-9

Figure 5, Kapoor, *Void Field*, 1989
Figure 6, René Magritte, *This is Not a Pipe*, 1926
Figure 7, Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1973
Figure 8, Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1980
Figure 9, Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1965/71

![Figure 9, Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1965/71](image)

Figure 10, Anish Kapoor, *Part of the Red*, 1981

![Figure 10, Anish Kapoor, *Part of the Red*, 1981](image)
Figure 11, Anish Kapoor, *To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red*, 1981

Figure 12, Anish Kapoor, *Mother as Mountain*, 1985
Figure 13, Mark Rothko, *Light Red Over Black*, 1957

Figure 14, Mark Rothko, *Red on Maroon*, 1959
Figure 15, Kapoor, *Turning the World Inside Out*, 1995
Figure 16, Kapoor, *Untitled*, 2009
Figure 17, Kapoor, *Cloud Gate*, 2004

Figure 18, Kapoor, detail of *Cloud Gate’s omphalos*, 2004
Figure 19, Kapoor, *The Healing of St. Thomas*, 1989-90

Figure 20, Duccio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, c. 1308-11
Figure 21, Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1602
Figure 22, Takashi Murakami, *Mr. DOB All Stars (Oh My The Mr. DOB)*, 1998
Figure 23, Kehinde Wiley, *Marechal Floriano Peixoto*, 2009
Figure 24, Shahzia Sikander, *Pleasure Pillars*, 2001