

A CLOSER LOOK

Anish Kapoor



Anish Kapoor (Indian, b. 1954, active UK)

Turning the World Inside Out, 1995

Cast stainless steel, ed. 3/3

SBMA, Museum purchase, 1998.48*

About the Artist

Born in Mumbai, India, the son of an Indian Punjabi Hindu father and Baghdadi Jewish mother, Anish Kapoor relocated to England as a young adult to pursue art. He is best known for his large-scale public art installations and sculptures created with reflective surfaces that challenge perception and physical space—most famously, *The Bean (Cloud Gate)* located in downtown Chicago.

Themes

- Contemporary Art
- Perception
- Sculpture
- Cross-cultural Narratives

Overview

In the 1980s, Anish Kapoor became part of a group of young artists in London interested in reinvigorating British sculpture. Concerned with the issue of cultural origins and spiritual expression, Kapoor has said, “I don’t want to make sculpture about form...I wish to make sculpture about belief, or about passion, about experience that is outside of material concern.”

Yet in *Turning the World Inside Out*, material is fundamental. The piece is one of the artist’s first works produced in a series of large (and eventually enormous) sculptures made of highly reflective cast metal. Its amorphous form suggests the organic, abstract, and universal, while its mirror-like surface offers illusions of absence, presence, and distortion—calling the viewer’s attention to the way we perceive ourselves and our surroundings.

The sculpture, which turns the world into a navel, also relates to the artist’s background. In the Hindu creation story, a lotus flower grows from Lord Vishnu’s navel. A seated Brahma emerges from the flower and transforms it into the Heavens, Earth, and Sky. In ancient Greece, the navel was called “omphalos,” which also meant the source of the world or center of the earth.

Reflect: Object + The Viewer

“The work doesn’t exist without the viewer, without somebody looking at it. To a large extent, all work is incomplete. It’s completed by the person who is looking at it. That relationship is what makes it whole.” –Anish Kapoor

In *Turning the World Inside Out*, the relationship between the object and the viewer is important. As Kapoor’s quote suggests, the sculpture requires people looking at it to be truly activated.

We can’t avoid seeing ourselves reflected in the work, and it returns our gaze. If this is the world we are looking at, we are the center of what we see. How much does that sense of ego reflect our true world view? What secrets, sorrows, or fears might be in that part of the piece we don’t see—the recess or cavity? Is this world empty or full? Imagine the sphere as a breath. We take it in and give it out. We are here and not here.

Anish Kapoor has said he does not want to tell us what the work means. He wants us to arrive at it on our own. When we confront this piece, he says, “We are arriving at something that isn’t telling a story, but is allowing you to experience your own story.”

What story do you see?



Defining Reflection:

- The act of reflecting, as in casting back a light or heat, mirroring, or giving back or showing an image; the state of being reflected in this way.
- An image; representation; counterpart.
- A fixing of the thoughts on something; careful consideration.
- A thought occurring in consideration or meditation.

Watch:

In this twelve-minute video from Art21, listen to Anish Kapoor discuss his artwork, while taking a look into his studio and artistic process:

<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s10/anish-kapoor-in-london-segment/>

Activity: Making it Personal

Kapoor titled this artwork *Turning the World Inside Out*. What does that phrase mean to you? When have you felt that your world was turned inside out? How would you depict that feeling? Would it be realistic or abstract like Kapoor? Would you choose to be literal or metaphorical?

Create a drawing or collage illustrating a time when you felt that the world was turned inside out. You could also create a photography or video project that captures how you felt.



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