

# Anish Kapoor

## Memory



ANISH KAPOOR.  
*Memory*, 2008, Corten  
steel, 14.5 x 9 x 4.5 m.

Over three decades, Anish Kapoor has earned global renown for a compelling body of sculptural work structured around empty spaces. Recently, he has created monumental works that engage directly with the architecture and landscapes in which they are installed. A classic example is *Taratantara* (1999), a 50-meter-long, trumpet-like tunnel of red PVC stretched through the gutted interior of a former flour mill in Gateshead, England, prior to the building's conversion into the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

*Memory* (2008), displayed at the Guggenheim as part of the museum's 50th-anniversary celebrations, is similarly enigmatic: as a single object it looms large, and yet it only gradually reveals its form. With the work installed in a gallery in the museum's tower, viewers entering from the spiraling ramp of the rotunda were confronted with a forbidding, curved wall of rusted Corten steel looming over them like the hull of a ship. A narrow gap between the steel and the wall beckoned the viewer to crouch down and crawl through to the other side, but museum guards and signs dictated that the rest of the piece was to be seen by walking through an adjacent gallery of Picasso and Cézanne canvases to the second of three viewing points, a discreet alcove. There, all that was visible was a black, seemingly flat square on the white wall—one of Kapoor's signature voids. Once one's eyes adjusted to the darkness, a deep cave of oxidized metal revealed itself.

In contrast with the purist spiritual connotations of much of Kapoor's work, navigating this giant sculpture within the bowels of the Guggenheim was an unusually awkward experience. Contemplation of *Memory*'s interior was subject to interruption, as guards occasionally intervened with polite warnings not to touch the piece. Thereafter, other than by accidental discovery, finding one's way to the third vantage point required following directions

from either the guards or a wall text. Like the obstructive mass of *Memory* itself, these institutionalized interventions and markers drew attention to the conventions and regulations that govern the viewing of art in a museum. Indeed, a couple of months after the exhibition opened, steel-wire cordons were installed at the first viewing point to permanently prevent visitors from crawling under and around the work.

The final room offered a wider view of *Memory*'s 24-ton gourd-like body—made up of dozens of 8mm-thick curved panels—here emanating from one wall, filling half the gallery while resting on a single point on the floor. It was only from this vantage point, having walked almost the entire circumference of the artwork, that one became aware of the work as a single entity. In contrast with the claustrophobia of the initial encounter, seen from this side the sculpture conveyed a sense of buoyancy, nosing into the space like the tip of a zeppelin or submarine. Formal and conceptual associations abounded: *Memory* was at once predatory, organic, artificial and sexual. As the sum of both an ethereal void within and an obtuse physical protrusion without, it was a powerful metaphor for the unfathomable workings of the mind.

There is a risk that if you build anything large enough it will take on meaning independent of the creator's intent, but Kapoor has avoided that trap with an illusion that pits the work's autonomy against that of the fabric of the museum itself. *Memory* was originally made to fit the dimensions of a gallery in the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, where it was shown in November 2008. Though it is too small to fill any of the New York Guggenheim's spaces wall-to-wall, a wall was moved and a brass banister reshaped to enhance the impression that the sculpture had swollen to fill the museum, when in fact the museum had shrunk to fit the sculpture. *Memory* dictated both the dimensions of the space and how viewers navigate the museum; though it was only a temporary exhibit, it became an integral element of the architecture itself—a vital new organ within the body of Frank Lloyd Wright's icon. ●

Ashley Rawlings

A square opening  
revealing the interior  
of *Memory*, 2008.  
Installation view at the  
Guggenheim Museum,  
New York, 2009.

