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Anish Kapoor: Monadic Singularity

Liverpool Cathedral
10 August – 15 September 2024

This striking exhibition, predominantly of reds and blacks, is one of dichotomies. Firstly, the title, ‘Monadic Singularity’, hints at this: monadic, meaning ‘the totality of all things’, juxtaposed with singularity – the specific and individual. Secondly, the impression of the exhibition is one that is corporeal and yet immaterial: the viewer is reminded by the glowing red forms of veins, arteries, and orifices, and yet contemplation is induced by the awareness that what makes human experience universal are our shared body elements which are nevertheless experienced as unique.

‘Monadic Singularity’ is an exhibition of six works by Anish Kapoor, the artist’s first solo show in a UK cathedral. It commemorates the 100th anniversary of the consecration of Liverpool Cathedral, a dramatic vast Gothic Revival space

designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, creator of the iconic British red telephone box, when he was just 22. The exhibited works by Kapoor date from the period 2000 to 2018 and use a diverse range of materials, including onyx, PVC and wax. The siting of these startling and sometimes monumental forms inside the venerable religious location adds a frisson, and there is perhaps another dichotomy, for some of the sculptures convey even sexual overtones, or certainly visceral ones.

The different spaces in the cathedral are used effectively, with the works forming a journey from the West end to the Lady Chapel at the East. Upon arrival, in the Well of the building, the first artwork to be encountered is *Sectional Body Preparing for Monadic Singularity*, 2015. This is the most dramatic and even unsettling work of the exhibition: a PVC-covered cube pierced with cavities, the dim interior of which one can enter, only to be confronted by glowing crimson tubes. Here, one could be inside a giant womb or trapped within a mass of gargantuan intestines.

In the centre of the building is *Untitled*, 2010, a kinetic bell-shaped

sculpture made of burgundy wax that is continuously moulded by a slowly moving steel blade. The work is proving popular with audiences, particularly children, who enjoy watching as the wax is peeled off into glutinous piles. Placing the sculpture underneath the cathedral’s 331-foot high Vestey tower – which holds the highest and heaviest peal of bells in the world, the central 15-tonne ‘Great George’ which is surrounded by 13 smaller bells – emphasises these outstanding features of the place of worship and their role in marking time and events.

The Chancel of the cathedral hosts the stainless steel *Spire*, 2014, a highly-mirrored spiked trumpet form which inspires veneration due to its gleaming exterior that seems at first to be made of precious metal. This attracts crowds who wish to catch sight of themselves in the disorientating surface, proving to be quite a task for the Visitor Assistants who need to monitor the safety of the artwork. Once more, the sculpture is in dialogue with the building: as the curator, Elisa Nocente, states in the accompanying exhibition catalogue, ‘The physicality of the object, soaring up towards the sky and infinity ...



amplifies its spiritual dimension pointing to something beyond ourselves’.

On either side of the Chancel, in the North and South Aisles, are *Red Haze*, 2018 and *Covered*, 2018, respectively. These are imposing paintings, both made of silicone, paint, and gauze on canvas, hung on large, unadorned walls which normally receive little attention. Both works blur the boundary between sculpture and painting, as the surfaces are highly tactile due to the coloured silicone, which seems to throb and bulge from the surface of the canvases. *Red Haze* has the appearance of scarified meat. In combination with its title, which implies anger, or at the least, confusion, this might induce contemplation of the frenzy of Christ’s condemnation at the hands of the Romans.

Directly opposite, *Covered* is largely black, with just a few areas of vermilion, and has the threatening character of the pulsing lava and ash which emanates from an erupting volcano. These connotations evoke ideas of an underworld, possibly Hell, in contrast with the Nave Altar nearby, where the Eucharist is celebrated.

The final work in the exhibition is *Imminence*, 2000. This is situated in the Lady Chapel, the oldest part of the cathedral, here also dedicated to important local and national female figures, such as Elizabeth Fry and Kitty Wilkinson. This location is apt for *Imminence*, which from its title and appearance, seems to refer to pregnancy. The cream striated onyx material has a flesh-like quality, which underlines the concept of creation that is inescapable when viewing the convex form which protrudes from the otherwise flat marble.

To end in the Lady Chapel, and with a sculpture that so overtly evokes new life, potential, and hope, is an uplifting conclusion to the viewer’s journey through the artworks and through the cathedral. This journey has encouraged contemplation about the body, mind, and spirituality, and has illuminated Liverpool Cathedral’s thrilling spaces in new ways.

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below: Anish Kapoor *Sectional Body Preparing for Monadic Singularity*, 2015
opposite page: Anish Kapoor *Untitled*, 2010. Photos by Rob Battersby

