BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Anish Kapoor
Barbara Gladstone

Anish Kapoor has given a new slant to irrationality, made it look like it has just been discovered—not an easy thing to do these days, when it has become a cliché. He creates autonomous objects, sometimes in groupings, that resonate with uncanniness, even though we can easily read them spatially from their often schematically clear shapes to their blatant uniform color. It's this hysterically sublime color that is the first source of uncanniness, especially the Yves Klein blue of infinity and, in one untitled work of 1986, the indescent, internal red that has almost become Kapoor's trademark. There is also an ashen black. All the colors have the startling vivacity of the caste mark on the forehead of an Indian Brahmin. The colors seem as autonomous as the objects, and both belong to and float free of them. Kapoor's sculptures are generally low-lying, even when, as in Dark, 1986, one of the four elements is geometrical, a kind of architectural sign—a clue to the sacredness of the space—this ground-orientation enhances one's sense of them as growth. They infantilize sensibility by forcing us to bend to them, to flowers; yet we sense they have the potentiality of dwarfing us emotionally. A Flower, a Drama like Death, 1986, brings out their insidiously allusive character, and their elegant reconciliation of the organic and the abstract, even in Wilhelm Woringer's sense of what these connote:

nature, and our resistance to the terror of infinite, empty space. These sculptures seem to suck up space rather than stand in it. They concentrate it so that it seems implausible, yet whimsical.

The surreal poetic object has customarily been a composite of fragments, a kind of collage of residual signs—blunt in its meaning, if a bit of a puzzle initially. Kapoor extends the genre by creating seamless objects whose symbolic meaning is more latent than manifest, even when, as in his 1985 masterpiece Mother as Mountain, it is indicated by the title. It is as though he wants to lose the meaning in the object rather than to find it there. What Kapoor has really done is to take the Minimalist-type object and make it poetic, almost ornamental, through the use of color and schematized detail, both of which are applied accessibly yet have the impact of gestures.

Simultaneously geometric and organic, restful and dynamic, stable and unstable, Kapoor's sculptures are, literally, sacramental; sacred ornaments waiting to be placed in the temple of a new religion. They belong in the ritual of a religion that, like the objects themselves, can stupefyingly reconcile death and sex, renewing them as natural mysteries. The sculptures' peculiarly pastoral intensity seems beyond any dialectical struggle of opposites: their paradoxicalness is reconciliatory rather than divisive. Emblematically, Kapoor has made the staff of Minimalism blossom like a flower, as in the biblical miracle, transcending the sense of petrified technology that early Minimalist sculptures gave. He has regained the paradise of "surreal" allusion that was lost with Minimalism, creating objects that are meaningful to the unconscious as well as perceptually subtle.

—DONALD KUSPIT