Kapoor Shows Scatological Work, Builds Olympics Orbit

By James Tarmy - May 9, 2012 7:01 PM ET

Assistants raced to construct a 26-foot-high steel orb in time for the opening. Anish Kapoor, creator of the piece, balanced on the edge of a Le Corbusier chair in the gallery's waiting room, looking rather calm.

Dressed in black pants, a black crew neck and Yohji Yamamoto sneakers, he sipped a glass of water and smiled convincingly.

The Mumbai-born Kapoor, 58, has a lot going on.

His Orbit tower promises to be a centerpiece of the Summer Olympics in London. A bright red mass of crisscrossing metal beams, it’s like looking at the Eiffel Tower on acid.

Premiering in Amsterdam next month are his sets for “Parsifal,” Wagner’s solemn opera devoted to the Holy Grail.

And both of Barbara Gladstone’s Galleries are displaying his two new, massive pieces.

We met at the 24th Street gallery, which Kapoor has filled with 22 giant mounds. They’re made from thousands of pieces of concrete, dribbled out of a machine in a process that Kapoor describes as scatological.

Tarmy: Can you help me understand the piece downstairs?

Kapoor: I found all kinds of ways over the years to think of proto objects -- first objects.
And one of them was a machine that made objects that didn’t require me — a high technology machine. You put in cement in one end and you put in a kind of program, and it just sort of does its own thing -- just keeps going and going. And it makes certain kinds of objects that are kind of archaic, primitive. They were, you know, childlike, even though they were high technology.

**Epic Process**

Tarmy: How many people did it take to make it?

Kapoor: I have about 25 people in my studio. We’re working on all sorts of different things at the same time. Sculpture is a long process; it takes months to make anything. This piece downstairs took almost two years to make.

Tarmy: Do you think that there’s an ideal scale for sculpture?

Kapoor: No, it depends so much on the space you’re in. I do believe that every idea has a scale, that you can’t have the same idea small and big. To enlarge a small idea doesn’t work, and a big idea does not mean a great idea. Scale is always a matter of content.

Tarmy: What was the idea behind your Orbit tower?

Kapoor: Look. An Olympic project is kind of like a national project. Think of what the Chinese did. They had Herzog & de Meuron and Ai Weiwei build a stadium for them; politically, they were able to use good design for their own end, to justify the modernity of the Chinese state.
I'm amazed they let me build it, to be honest. I think it says a huge amount about Britain today, that it will take forward such an utterly odd project.

Early Indian

Tarmy: Do you collect art?

Kapoor: I do. I collect early Indian art very avidly. Let's say between 2,000 BC to about 500 AD. And amazingly, it’s still collectible. The areas I collect in are so obtuse I don’t know if anyone is really interested in them.

Tarmy: What about contemporary?

Kapoor: I’m a great fan of Sarah Lucas. Whenever I can afford one, I buy a Dan Graham, because he has worked with both architecture and mirrors for such a long time and in such a sophisticated way. I think he’s hugely underrated as an artist in terms of the market.

Tarmy: Tell me about the piece you’re doing in Amsterdam.

Kapoor: "Parsifal" is one of the great works, so grand and problematic. Especially the last act can be almost sentimental.

Tarmy: How much is art and how much is stage set?

Kapoor: When I did "Pelleas and Melisande" in Brussels, I made it as a kind of sculpture in which everything took place. This time, it will be more like a series of sets.

Tarmy: What is your favorite opera?

Kapoor: "Bluebeard's Castle," but I don't know if I want to do a set for it.