

# REGEN PROJECTS

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## BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeenDecember/January 2025–26  
Anish Kapoor: *Early Works*



Installation view: *Anish Kapoor: Early Works*, The Jewish Museum, New York, 2026. © Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved, DACS, London/ ARS, NY 2025. Photo: Kris Graves.

"If these works are any good, they go beyond composition, like poetry. A good poem is a singular thing...It is this singular presence I am after."

—Anish Kapoor

You round the corner, and there he is, on-screen. The voice on the video is warm, low-key, unassuming, Anish Kapoor responding to off-camera questions about his background and career. Lengthy pauses; a bemused smile. Collar-grazing grey-black hair. Right arm casually draped over the back of a long wooden bench; flowers and leafy

# REGEN PROJECTS

bushes behind him. How refreshing: a spring-like day, the artist not taking himself too seriously, his public-facing *persona* thoughtful, agreeable.

To begin at the beginning of an inner room on the second floor of the Jewish Museum: *1000 Names* (1979–1980), a blood-red, half-concealed oval dish surrounded by a ragged, ruffled mass of red pigment, fifteen feet up, hanging upon, emerging from, or penetrating a white wall. As you approach, the red shadow cascading downward becomes more detailed, then granular, at last degenerating into a dusty, red-speckled explosion. The *1000 Names* title recurs in many early Kapoor works, a reference to the thousand names of the Indian god Vishnu. Likewise, the artist has remarked that, “red is a powerful thing in Indian culture...and this overt color, this open and visually beckoning color, also associates itself with a dark interior world.” The mystique of fabricating such so-called sculptures sprang from Kapoor’s imagination in his mid-twenties, having returned to London following a trip to India, where he was born in 1954.



Installation view: *Anish Kapoor: Early Works*, The Jewish Museum, New York, 2026. © Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved, DACS, London/ ARS, NY 2025. Photo: Kris Graves.

Nearby lurks the perfect segue, *Part of the Red* (1981), a community of three low-lying “Yves Klein blue” structures (as per John Russell in *The New York Times*): the trio could have been a Mayan temple, a nubby globe, and a volcano encroached upon by two neighbors, possibly a red burial mound and a yellow layered dwelling. Each member of the ensemble is snugly cocooned by a wave-edged aura of color, as if declaring to the spectator, *Here I am*. The group’s stillness is palpable; you would not dare walk between the works, even had you been permitted. In this sacred space, the antique, ribbed radiators aligned beneath the windows breathed among comrades.

Among the lucid and unpretentious wall labels in the exhibition, the artist explains a multitude of drawings as “a register for my state of being, or rather the state of play in relation to what I think I’m after, whether I’m making paintings, sculpture, or whatever else.” Two 1987 examples, both called *Untitled*, caught the eye by virtue of their groundedness. The first, brushstrokes visible, is a thickly applied, orange-sienna gouache on board, its outer limits edged with earth; the second, dusty and monochromatic, with a sandy-tinged cornucopia or bugle at the center, floated above its

# REGEN PROJECTS

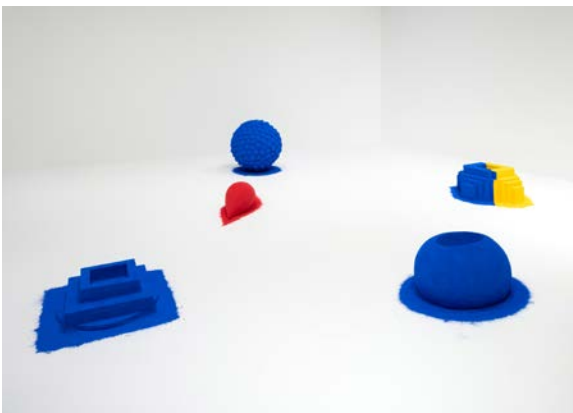
mounting, wanting to escape from the frame.



Installation view: *Anish Kapoor: Early Works*, The Jewish Museum, New York, 2026. © Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved, DACS, London/ ARS, NY 2025. Photo: Kris Graves.

And then, a bold curatorial shift, contrasting with the artist's vibrant pigment panoply. In 2014, "Kapoor began using a material called Vantablack, composed of microscopic carbon tubes—'VANTA' is an acronym for 'vertically-aligned nanotube arrays'—in his work." The high-tech substance "traps nearly all visible light; objects coated with it do not possess any shadow to define their interior features." These depthless conundrums premiered for American audiences at the Lisson Gallery in the fall of 2023. Here, *Non-Object Black* (2019), a gloomy fiberglass protuberance, presents as utterly flat, only to thrust forth from the wall when one peers around its dispassionate boundaries.

In her introduction to the stylish (and, notably, *gratis* to visitors) exhibition catalogue, Shira Backer, the Leon Levy Associate Curator, points out "ritual as a mode of [Kapoor's] work." "Ritual actions," she continues, with reference to the artist's ethic of incessant practice, "are repetitive, structured, and prescribed, yet they move participants toward a state of enlightenment or inspiration."



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# REGEN PROJECTS

Thus does the conclusion of this essay circle ouroboros-like, to its beginning. Kapoor reveals that by making art he is “looking for a language...that felt real to me and in which I could be free.” He has mused, as well, about the ideal of a drawing “free of the need to display a descriptive language.” One reads this quest into the allusive/elusive title of another important sculptural pigment work on view, *As if to Celebrate, I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* (1981).

Anish Kapoor continues to situate a corpus of “singular presences” among all manner of spaces in our quotidian world. They range restlessly from early pigmented miniatures, genre-defying drawings, and impromptu hand-held sketchbooks of the 1970s and 80s on display in this fascinating exhibition, across a vast spectrum to monumentality: One recalls *Marsyas*, the red PVC and steel “entity” commissioned in 2002 to fill the entire Tate Modern Turbine Hall in London, a sculpture so huge in “scale and shape that it was impossible to see the whole [work] at one time.”