

ANISH KAPOOR & JAMES LEE BYARS

In collaboration with Michael Werner Gallery

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The conversation that goes on between artworks unveils silent secrets their creators could have never exposed in oral speech. This exploration is the premise for Anish Kapoor's dialogue with James Lee Byars.

They do not come from the same generation. They do not come from the same geographical location. One of them died nearly twenty years ago, while the other is a driving force in contemporary art. Certainly, they knew each other for eight years. But Anish Kapoor's selection within his own work and James Lee Byars' goes far beyond the limits of personal interaction and attests some powerful and insightful creative intimacy.

The exhibition features a coherent entry into the work of two displaced artists: an American born in Detroit who, late in his life, decided to leave for Egypt, as a sign of his passion for Ancient mythologies; a British sculptor born in Bombay who still remains very attached to his Indian roots.

The eight works Anish Kapoor selected - four of his own, four of Byars' - enable us to sense the deep community that presides over their art: a great amount of care and attention is paid to the materials used in the making of the works; the sculpturality of each object is the fundament for both of them; each art work provides the viewer with a striking experience of immediacy, while being the focus point for implicit dynamics; they feature an outstanding sense of harmony, while appearing very fragile at the same time; they make us feel a longing for the eternal and the possibility for time to be constantly interrupted.

The exhibition provides us with a sense of an essential issue at hand in both of their work: the one of language: the language of speech, which is made evident in the process, at time playful and metaphysical, of titling the works - a process at time playful and metaphysical. The works they make are enigmas both textual and visual: they remind us of the vitality of painting and sculpture, two media that had for a while been considered long-time gone.

Both Anish Kapoor and James Lee Byars show us the strength of these creative languages, as they subvert, rethink and reshape them at every occasion: Anish Kapoor translates acrylics from painting to sculpture; he paints on a canvas from which exudes smoke, while James Lee Byars turns gold leaf into a palette of sorts. The presence of Byars' marble pieces leads us to think that resin and cement are used by Kapoor to challenge and establish a transcendence that only art - and particularly sculpture - can achieve.

This artistic conversation is not unanimous. Each of the artists expresses his own identity through the work of the other: Byars' predilection for precious materials enables us to sense the importance for Anish Kapoor to bring into sculpture materials that are considered to be part of the tradition; Byars' fascination for Near Eastern mythologies is drawn upon and extended in Kapoor's perspective, as he engages with the aesthetics and ethics of the Middle East and the Far East as well; simple forms constructed by Byars position themselves towards the more complex ones invented by Kapoor; Kapoor confronts Byars' obsession for perfection and harmony and challenges it with its very contradiction - circles and lines coincide with cavities, rifts, and objects are not sacralised in a fixed model, but vary all the time.

These differences enable us to eventually feel the great conservation between these two artists, both passionate about creating objects that would contain within themselves a form of sacredness; and yet would expand far beyond those borders, to isolate the substance of metaphysics and filter it into works of art.

The exhibition « Anish Kapoor & James Lee Byars » is on show from Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 7pm at galerie kamel mennour: 47 rue Saint-André des arts and 6 rue du Pont de Lodi, 75006 Paris.

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