

ANISH KAPOOR

UNTRUE UNREAL

FIRENZE
PALAZZO STROZZI

7.10.2023
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UFFICIO STAMPA/PRESS OFFICE
FONDAZIONE
PALAZZO STROZZI
Lavinia Rinaldi
C. +39 338 5277132
l.rinaldi@palazzostrozzi.org

SUTTON
Emily Saunders
C. +41(0)799239223
emilys@suttoncomms.com

PROMOZIONE/PROMOTION
CSC SIGMA
Susanna Holm
T. +39 055 2478436
susannaholm@cscsigma.it



PREE RELEASE

Anish Kapoor. Untrue Unreal

Celebrated artist Anish Kapoor creates an original dialogue with Palazzo Strozzi in Florence through a major exhibition including an immersive new work for its Renaissance Courtyard

Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence is pleased to announce ***Anish Kapoor. Untrue Unreal***, a major new exhibition devised and produced with the celebrated artist who has revolutionised the notion of sculpture in contemporary art. Curated by Arturo Galansino, Director General of Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, the show will feature monumental installations, intimate environments and thought-provoking forms that will forge an original and captivating dialogue between the art of Anish Kapoor and the architecture and audience of Palazzo Strozzi.

With a wide range of early, mid-career and recent works, including a new architecturally scaled work especially conceived for the Renaissance courtyard of Palazzo Strozzi, the exhibition offers an opportunity to engage directly with the artist's oeuvre in all its versatility, discord, entropy and ephemerality. Palazzo Strozzi becomes a venue at once concave and convex, whole and yet fragmented, in which visitors are called on to question their senses.

In Anish Kapoor's art, the unreal merges with the untrue, transforming or negating the common perception of reality. He invites us to explore a world where the boundaries between what is true and false dissolve, opening the doors to the realm of the impossible. One of the distinguishing features is the way Kapoor's works transcend their materiality. Pigment, stone, steel, wax and silicone, to name only a few of the materials he works with, are manipulated – carved, polished, saturated and formed – to the point of a dissolution of boundaries between the plastic and the immaterial. Colour in Kapoor's hands is not simply matter and hue, but becomes an immersive phenomenon, containing its own spatial and illusive volume.

Kapoor's works merge empty and full space, absorbing and reflecting surface, geometrical and biomorphic form. Shunning categorisation and distinguishing himself by a unique visual language that embraces painting, sculpture and architectural forms, Kapoor explores space and time, the interior and the exterior, urging us to probe in the first person the limits and potential of our relationship with the world around us and to reflect on perceived dualities such as body and mind, nature and artifice. His work sparks amazement and uneasiness, encouraging us to question certainties and embrace complexity. In a world where reality seems increasingly elusive and manipulable, Anish Kapoor challenges us to seek truth beyond appearances, inviting us to explore the territory of the untrue and the unreal.

Arturo Galansino, General Director of the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation and curator of the exhibition states: *"In the wake of our series of exhibitions dedicated to the leading figures of contemporary art, Kapoor has engaged in a direct dialogue with the Renaissance architecture. The result is entirely original, almost a kind of dialectical juxtaposition, where symmetry, harmony, and rigor are called into question, and the boundaries between material and immaterial dissolve. Amidst the rational geometries of Palazzo Strozzi, Kapoor invites us in this exhibition to lose and rediscover ourselves, prompting us to question what is untrue or unreal."*

THE EXHIBITION

Anish Kapoor. Untrue Unreal unfolds in the spaces of Palazzo Strozzi in between the galleries at the Piano Nobile and the Renaissance courtyard, in a journey through Kapoor's diverse artistic practice that challenges the very notion of form and formlessness, fiction and reality.

At the centre of the courtyard stands **Void Pavilion VII** (2023), a large pavilion that serves as both a point of departure and arrival in the dialogue between Kapoor's art and Palazzo Strozzi. Upon entering the sculpture, visitors are confronted by a triad of rectangular voids that invite the gaze to descend within, offering a meditative experience of space, perspective and time that unsettles the rational geometric structure of the Renaissance building in which it sits and the orderliness it so emblematically represents.

At the Piano Nobile, the exhibition takes off with the iconic work **Svayambhu** (2007), a title that derives from the Sanskrit term denoting self-originated entities, akin to the Christian concept of *acheropoieta*, images not made by human hands. As this vast block of blood-red wax moves slowly along its track between two rooms of Palazzo Strozzi, it creates a dialectic between void and matter as its formless substance is shaped by the architecture it pushes through.

This work is presented in dialogue with **Endless Column** (1992), a work that references Constantin Brâncuși's iconic modernist sculpture of the same title from 1937. Kapoor's red pigment sculpture penetrates floor and ceiling to create an ethereal architectural physicality that stands as a link between earth and cosmos. On a different scale but equally architectural is **To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red** (1981), a seminal work from Kapoor's early career that marked his breakthrough on the international art scene as a profoundly original voice in contemporary art. A suggestive combination of yellow and red pigment forms, appear to emerge from the floor—fragile, otherworldly, yet powerfully present.

In **Non-Object Black** (2015) – characterised by the use of the highly innovative material Vantablack, capable of absorbing over 99.9% of visible light – Kapoor challenges the very idea of a physical and tangible object, presenting us with a form that dissipates as the gaze moves around it. In these groundbreaking works Kapoor provokes us to question the very notion of being, offering a reflection not only on the fictional object but on the immateriality that permeates our world. The fullness of the experience of the no-thing is continued in **Gathering Clouds** (2014), concave monochromes that absorb the space around them in their brooding darkness. Kapoor's work offers a new way of seeing and thinking about how we experience 'reality', with his unique use of form and saturation these works are permeated with psychic resonance.

Flesh, organic matter, body and blood are recurring and fundamental themes in Kapoor's artistic creation. An entire room is dedicated to works in which Kapoor examines a flayed and ravaged interiority that renders the body as entropic and abjected. The large sculpture in steel and resin **A Blackish Fluid Excavation** (2018) evokes a gnarled vaginal void, that crosses the space and the senses of the spectator. On the wall, Kapoor's paintings created with silicone are shaped with fluid forms that appear to us as visceral masses, pulsating with their own life. These structures twist, expand, and contract, evoking a sense of continuous movement and transformation. At the same time, a strong tactile sensuality arises from the interplay between softness and solidity, organicity and linearity. These qualities underlie works with evocative titles such as **First Milk** (2015), **Tongue Memory** (2016), **Today You Will Be in Paradise** (2016), **Three Days of Mourning** (2016).

The notion of boundaries and the duality between subject and object are central to Kapoor's mirror works like *Vertigo* (2006), *Mirror* (2018) and *Newborn* (2019), a work that again pays homage to Constantin Brâncuși's formal experiments. With their inverted reflections, the specular is thrown into the realm of the illusory in works that seem to defy the laws of physics. These large-scale sculptures reflect and distort the surrounding space, enlarging, reducing and multiplying it, creating a sense of unreality and destabilization while drawing the viewer into the indefinite space they emanate.

The exhibition path of the Piano Nobile concludes with *Angel* (1990): large slate stones covered in numerous layers of intense Prussian blue pigment. These weighty masses appear in contradiction with their ethereal appearance; they seem to solidify the air and suggest the transformation of slate slabs into pieces of sky, transfiguring the concept of purity into a material element. Kapoor manipulates the hyper-materiality of this work to evoke a sense of mystery that responds to the esoteric ambition of achieving the fusion of opposites.

The exhibition is promoted and organised by Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi. Main Supporter: Fondazione CR Firenze. Main Partner: Intesa Sanpaolo. Supporters: Comune di Firenze, Regione Toscana, Camera di Commercio di Firenze, Comitato dei Partner di Palazzo Strozzi. With the contribution of Città Metropolitana di Firenze. With the support of Maria Manetti Shrem and Fondazione Hillary Merkus Recordati. Thanks to Galleria Continua

The exhibition is part of the Florence Art Week, an initiative promoted by the City of Florence and scheduled from 28 September to 8 October 2023.

Anish Kapoor

Anish Kapoor is one of the most influential artists of our time. Born in Mumbai, India in 1954, Anish Kapoor has lived and worked in London since studying sculpture at Hornsey College of Art and Chelsea College of Art in the mid-seventies. In recent years dividing his time between studios in London and Venice.

His works are permanently exhibited in the most important collections and museums around the world from the Museum of Modern Art in New York to the Tate in London; the Prada Foundation in Milan and the Guggenheim Museums in Venice, Bilbao and Abu Dhabi. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Galleria dell'Accademia di Venezia & Palazzo Manfrin, Venice, Italy (2022); Modern Art Oxford, UK (2021); Houghton Hall, Norfolk, UK (2020); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany (2020); Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum and Imperial Ancestral Temples, Beijing (2019); Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (2019); Serralves, Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto, Portugal (2018); University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC), Mexico City (2016); Chateau de Versailles, France (2015); Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center, Moscow, (2015); Gropius Bau, Berlin (2013); Sakip Sabanci Muzesi, Istanbul (2013); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2012).

Anish Kapoor represented Great Britain at the 44th Venice Biennale in 1990 where he was awarded the Premio Duemila Prize. In 1991 he won the Turner Prize and has gone on to receive numerous international awards and honours.

Also renowned for his architecturally scaled works, public projects include: *Cloud Gate* (2004), Millennium Park, Chicago, USA; *Leviathan* (2011) exhibited at Monumenta, Paris, France; *Orbit* (2012), Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London; *Ark Nova*, an inflatable concert hall created for Lucerne Festival, Japan (2013); *Descension* (2014) most recently installed in Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York, USA (2017) and the soon to be completed Traiano and Università Monte St Angelo Metro Stations, Naples, Italy (2002–24).




FACT SHEET

Title	<i>Anish Kapoor. Untrue Unreal</i>
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Press Office	Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi: Lavinia Rinaldi, T. +39 338 5277132 l.rinaldi@palazzostrozzi.org <u>Sutton:</u> Emily Saunders, emilys@suttoncomms.com
Promotion	Susanna Holm – Sigma CSC T. +39 055 2478436 susannaholm@cscsigma.it
Catalogue	Marsilio Arte
Info and reservations	T. +39 055 2645155; prenotazioni@palazzostrozzi.org
Hours and admission	www.palazzostrozzi.org

PHOTO SHEET


<p>1.</p>	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>Svayambhu</i> 2007 Wax and oil-based paint Dimensions variable Photo: Wilfried Petzi ©Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	
<p>2.</p>	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red</i> 1981 Mixed media and pigment Dimensions variable Photograph Oliver Santanaue © Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>Endless Column</i> 1992 Mixed media Dimensions variable Photograph: Phillipp Rittermann ©Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	

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4	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>Non-Object Black</i> 2015 mixed media, paint cm 39 × 39 × 12 Courtesy the artist © Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	
5.	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>A Blackish Fluid Excavation, 2018</i> Steel, resin 150x140x740 cm Photograph: Jacek Kucharczyk ©Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	
6.	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>Three Days of Mourning, 2016</i> Silicone, paint 250x120x70 Photograph: Dave Morgan ©Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	

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7.	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>Newborn</i>, 2019 Stainless steel 300x300x300 cm Photograph: Mark Waldhauser ©Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	
8.	<p>Anish Kapoor <i>Angel</i> 1990 Slate and pigment Dimensions variable Photograph: George Rehsteiner ©Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved SIAE, 2023</p>	

UNTRUE UNREAL
by **ARTURO GALANSINO**

Tief ist der Brunnen der Vergangenheit. Sollte man ihn nicht unergründlich nennen?¹

'I am interested in what places do to work,'² Anish Kapoor has declared, and this is evident when we look at his creations, which are able to catalyse the energy of a space, not only by characterising the setting in which they are housed, but also by taking on the context and transforming it.

The exhibition *Anish Kapoor: Untrue Unreal* at Palazzo Strozzi is the first direct encounter between the artist and a building emblematic of Renaissance culture. To underline the convergences and affinities between his art and the Renaissance, six new essays have been included in the catalogue by a group of renowned fifteenth- and sixteenth- century scholars: Diane Bodart, Francesca Borgo, Rachel Boyd, Dario Donetti, Tommaso Mozzati and Morgan Ng.

As is evident from Tommaso Mozzati's essay, the vast range of sculptures and installations on show at Palazzo Strozzi, spanning from the 1980s to the present day, have been filled with new meanings and impressions. The monumental building designed for Filippo Strozzi at the end of the fifteenth century constitutes, in fact, an 'exercise of representation', in which – as Dario Donetti points out in the catalogue his essay – the architectural facing is clearly distinct from the volumes of which it is made up, rendering particularly evocative the dialogue between a building that is a symbol of Humanism and the Renaissance and Kapoor's art, with its confrontation with and testing of the limits of a closed structure, its reflections on relations of scale, on liminality and on the concepts of external membrane and covering.³

The starting point of the exhibition is the courtyard, which the artist has chosen to occupy with a new site-specific work, *Void Pavilion VII* (2023). It is a large white monolith that visitors enter through an opening on the eastern side and find three very dark 'voids' set in the walls: a work that, as the artist stresses in the interview that follows this introduction, is intended to destabilise the certainties and rational vision that underpin the design of Palazzo Strozzi.

The visitors who enter Kapoor's sculpture can – by 'sinking' into the voids in the walls – experience a moment of meditation on the idea of space, perspective and time. A physical and mental experience, impossible to penetrate with the eyesight and which seems to make room, in a world of shadows, for the unconscious. It is darkness in which to find ourselves again, the Jungian Ouroboros, the serpent that eats its tail, the abyss that devours or feeds on itself, forming an endless circle.⁴ The well, of which Morgan Ng speaks in his essay, the physical vertigo of the unknown, the fear of falling, of being sucked into the inscrutability of the past and the future: these are themes that take us back to what Kapoor has said about his works devoted to the void, with references to both the maternal womb and the tomb: dark and gloomy places in which you can find, or lose, yourself, even if – as always – the artist does not provide interpretations, but leaves viewers to raise their own questions with regard to their inner life and spirituality.

I have always been drawn to a notion of fear, towards a sensation of vertigo, of falling, of being pulled inwards [...]. This is a vision of darkness. Fear is a darkness of which the eye is uncertain,

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towards which the hand turns in hope of contact, and in which only the imagination has the possibility of escape.⁵
Void is really a state within. It has a lot to do with fear, in Oedipal terms, but more so, with darkness. There is nothing so black as the black within. No blackness is as black as that. I am aware of the phenomenological presence of the Void works, but I am also aware that phenomenological experience on its own is insufficient. I find myself coming back to the idea of narrative without storytelling, to that which allows one to bring in psychology, fear, death and love in as direct a way as possible. This void is not something which is of no utterance. It is a potential space, not a non-space.⁶

In the passage to the rooms on the Piano Nobile, characterised by a marked regularity and severe chromatic duality, Kapoor's works take possession of the space. And the artist has chosen to intervene precisely on the symmetry of those rooms, as he explains in the interview. This intent is evident from the first room, where the space comes under attack by *Svayambhu* (2007), with its dimensions, its movement and the intense and dramatic colour of its malleable material.

This Sanskrit term signifies something that is generated autonomously, that is 'self-born'. It is the equivalent of the Christian *acheiropoieta*, images made without the intervention of a human hand but impressed miraculously on a support.⁷ According to Kapoor, 'the form [...] made Itself and in this work the artist's intervention is in fact absent, replaced here by the – invisible – motor that drives the large and pliable block through a doorway. *Svayambhu* proposes a reflection on the dialectics between void and material: the massive block of red wax, reminiscent of a train, moves on tracks along a distance of almost twenty metres between two of Palazzo Strozzi's rooms, moulding the material of which it is composed through its contact with the architecture it traverses. Since the block is larger than the doorway, it leaves traces of its passage – moving at a barely perceptible speed – that are deep red in colour, looking almost like spurts of coagulated blood: metaphors for birth and allusions to the uterus, but which also give rise to perceptions of death and violence.

Wax has a long tradition in Florentine history. In her essay, Francesca Borgo relates how it has been used both as a material for a variety of technical purposes and as an artistic medium in its own right, with reference to the old tradition of ex-votos representing parts of the body or life-size figures, like the ones made by the *ceraiuolo* called Orsino for Lorenzo de' Medici to celebrate his survival of the Pazzi conspiracy.⁹ In one of them Lorenzo the Magnificent appeared with a bandaged wound at his throat, just as he had presented himself at the window of his house to prove to the citizenry he was alive; an image that, like the wax, evoked the vulnerability and ephemerality of the flesh and the uncertainty of human life and that can also be likened to Kapoor's works in silicone – we will find them farther on – that call to mind the bowels, violated and bleeding bodies.

In the exhibition *Svayambhu* is presented alongside *Endless Column* (1992), which makes explicit reference to Constantin Brâncuși's famous sculpture *La colonne sans fin*, with which the Romanian artist wanted to suggest a reaching for infinity, while Kapoor creates forms and meta-environments in order to interact with the viewer both physically and sensorially.¹⁰

UFFICIO STAMPA/PRESS OFFICE
FONDAZIONE
PALAZZO STROZZI
Lavinia Rinaldi
C. +39 338 5277132
l.rinaldi@palazzostrozzi.org

SUTTON
Emily Saunders
C. +41(0)799239223
emilys@suttoncomms.com

PROMOZIONE/PROMOTION
CSC SIGMA
Susanna Holm
T. +39 055 2478436
susannaholm@cscsigma.it



There's something immanent in my work but the circle is only completed by the viewer. Now that's a very different position from a work with a subject matter, where the work itself has a complete circle of meaning and counterpoint.¹¹

The vivid red pigment of *Endless Column* spreads out at the base and on the ceiling to suggest that the column has penetrated from below and is breaking out of the room in an attempt to reach the sky, going beyond the limits of the space and exploring the relationship between physicality and transcendence. In this way the sensation of an ethereal architectural substance is created, a metaphor for the link between earth and cosmos. It is a concept that Kapoor has underlined through a poetic comparison with the iceberg, whose structure and significance are always only partially revealed, considering that the portion hidden from view is by far the largest part.

[When] you make an object and place pigment on it, the pigment falls to the ground like a halo around the object. And the implication is that it's like an iceberg: that most of the object is hidden, is invisible. And so I became more and more interested in the invisible object. There was part of it that protruded into the world but the rest was really interesting.¹²

If Brâncuși's work, while devoid of direct anthropomorphic references, recalls the female body with its repetition of rhomboidal shapes, Kapoor's column may allude to the male sexual organ. In the setting of Palazzo Strozzi, however, what is fundamental is the way it is mirrored in the stone columns of the courtyard (and in others that were also designed by Giuliano da Sangallo): so many 'sturdy cylinders' – as Donetti describes them – that stand out against the pale walls.

The pigment of *Endless Column* had an important role in Kapoor's early works, such as *To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red* (1981), fundamental to the sculptor's emergence on the international scene as one of the most original voices in contemporary art: an evocative ensemble of forms, resembling natural elements, made of yellow or red pigments, that protrude from the floor: fragile, almost otherworldly but powerfully present. While the smaller scale differentiates these works from later ones, the spatial and architectural effect sought and achieved is similar. At the Venice Biennale in 1990 Kapoor's pigment-based work was interpreted in relation to his origins and as references to Indian culture, but already on that occasion the artist had energetically opposed this pigeonholing:

That makes me furious. I have a great resistance to trying to look at the work for its Indianness or through my Indianness.¹³

Since that time, his response to such an interpretation of his work has been to put forward the idea of the 'spiritual', of a broader dimension that involves all the varied experiences and diverse references that are at the root of Kapoor's thinking, and not just about art. And then colour, which in Kapoor's poetics is not just substance and shade, but also an immersive phenomenon, with an at once spatial and illusory volume of its own. This creates, as Rachel Boyd points out in her essay, a parallel with the use of pigments in the sculpture not only of the Renaissance, but also of antiquity: a relatively new discovery in the field of art history.

On show from Kapoor's seminal body of black works is *Non-Object Black* (2015). Vantablack, the highly innovative material used in this work, is made from carbon nanotubes, able to absorb more than 99.9 percent of visible light and rendering the contours of the object invisible. The result is the disappearance of the third dimension, allowing Kapoor to bring into question the very idea of the physical and tangible object and to present forms that dissolve in front of your eyes. In these revolutionary works, the artist prompts visitors to wonder about the very notion of being, proposing a reflection not only on the nature of objects but also on the immateriality that permeates our world.

In a recent conversation with Giulio Paolini in which he cited the two biggest innovations of the Renaissance, which in his view were perspective and drapery, Kapoor commented:

*The motif of the fold in Renaissance painting was a mark of being, but if there was a fold in black fabric, you couldn't distinguish it. Through the erasure of the outline and the edge we are offered the possibility of going beyond. Beyond being.*¹⁴

Utilising this revolutionary material, Kapoor has continued his long-standing research into the 'Non-Object', breaking down every boundary between painting and sculpture. By 'taking away' the object from itself, it appears absorbed by the very material of which it is made, asking us to deal with its loss in order to analyse our complex relationship with reality. In Kapoor's art, in fact, as the title of the exhibition reminds us, the unreal is mixed with the untrue, transforming or negating the ordinary perception of reality. Thus we are invited to explore a world in which the boundary between true and false is dissolved, opening the doors to the dimension of the impossible.

This powerful experience of the non-object continues in *Gathering Clouds* (2014), monochrome concave forms that absorb the surrounding space in a meditative darkness. In fact Kapoor's art offers a new way of seeing and thinking about how we experience 'reality' through his unique use of form and saturation, in works pervaded by a profound psychological connotation.

These works of Kapoor's devoted to investigating the perception of forms and spaces, to the sense of distortion, to destabilising but unitary forms, are accompanied in the exhibition by works on other themes that also constitute a fundamental part of his research: the obsessive attention paid to flesh, organic material, the body and blood. Thus we are presented with dramatic eviscerated and devastated intimacies, such as the large sculpture in steel and resin *A Blackish Fluid Excavation* (2018) that calls to mind a contorted vaginal void, a form that traverses the space and senses of the viewer.

Uniting paint with silicone, Kapoor creates works with fluid forms that look like organic, visceral masses, seeming to pulsate with a life of their own. The structures grow contorted, expand and contract, evoking a sense of movement and continual transformation, as well as one of a strong tactile sensuality that emerges from the interaction between the sensations of softness and solidity, between an organic quality and a geometric one. This is what lies at the root of works with evocative titles like *First Milk* (2015), *Tongue Memory* (2016), *Today You Will Be in Paradise* (2016), and *Three Days of Mourning* (2016). As far back as 2000 the artist spoke of a 'phase of blood', dominated by red, a colour that has always characterised his works, being able to express both life and death.¹⁵ As Kapoor has put it:

I use red a lot. [...] It's true that in Indian culture red is a powerful thing; it is the colour a bride wears; it is associated with the matriarchal, which is central to Indian psychology. [...] Red has a very powerful blackness. This overt colour, this open and visually beckoning colour, also associates itself with a dark interior world.¹⁶

Duality is always present in Kapoor's work too, the opposition, or fusion, between contrasting elements: earth/sky, male/female, form/formlessness, presence/absence... As well as the complex relationship between the cultures that have shaped him, those of the East and the West. Monumental works with a mirror surface are connected to the traditional notion of limits and the dichotomy between subject and object. They include *Vertigo* (2006) with its inverted reflections, *Mirror* (2018) and *Newborn* (2019), once again inspired by Brâncuși's formal experimentation: works that, by dematerialising the concept of sculpture into endless reflections, make their own contribution to the long dispute over the *parallel* between the arts, as Diane Bodart explores in her essay. Optical illusion is a central element of these works, which seem to defy the laws of physics: large sculptures that, in fact, reflect and deform the surrounding space and magnify, shrink and multiply it, creating a sensation of unreality and destabilisation while drawing the viewer into the indeterminate space they emanate.

The images are distorted, to the point of being turned upside down, and the visitor experiences a sense of estrangement that is not only gripping on the sensory plane, but can also give rise to reflections on the nature of being.

The mirror works, the painted works, they all had skin. Skin is a consistent quantity in everything I've talked about in my work for twenty years now. Skin is the moment that separates a thing from its environment, it is also the surface on which or through which we read an object, it's the moment in which the two-dimensional world meets the three-dimensional world. Seemingly obvious statements, but I think that looked at in any detail they reveal a whole other process. There's a kind of implied unreality about skin which I think is wonderful.¹⁷

At the end of the route through the exhibition, the work *Angel* (1990) exalts an alchemy of materiality. Large slabs of slate coated with numerous layers of intense blue pigment seem to solidify the air, turning the very idea of purity into a material element. Inviting viewers to immerse themselves in their illusory depth, Kapoor evokes a sense of mystery that responds to the esoteric ambition of an attainment of the fusion of opposites.

If art is about anything, then it's about transformation. It is about changing one state of matter into another. And that happens not by willing it to change, but by some strange process of manipulation which I wouldn't know how to talk about. I am sure if I were to insist that these forms were quarried blocks of Prussian blue, you'd believe me.¹⁸

The fact is the silicone are manipulated, sculpted, polished, saturated and treated, bringing into question the boundary between plasticity and immateriality. But, as Kapoor explained to Maurizio Cattelan, who had asked him from where his work started and how it took shape, he replied: 'Alchemy, work and materials' because in the work the material 'has been subjected to an alchemical transformation. The mix of mind and matter is that marvel which we humans can make and have forgotten that we can make.'¹⁹

1. Mann, Thomas. *Joseph und seine Brüder*, I (Berlin: E. Fisher, 1933), p. 1.
2. Pacquement, Alfred (ed.). *Anish Kapoor*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Château de Versailles (Versailles, 9 June – 1 November 2015) (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2015), p. 19.
3. '[...] the Renaissance convention of painting as illusionistic window or space beyond, while never deviating from his commitment to work that is wholly sculptural and very much physically present.' Forsha, Lynda. 'Introduction', in *Anish Kapoor*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (San Diego, 1st February – 5 July 1992 (La Jolla: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), pp. 10–13: 10–11. One of the most illuminating of Kapoor's references to Renaissance art is the statement he made during the artist's recent meeting with Giulio Paolini in Brescia: 'Do you know what were the two most important discoveries in the Renaissance? One was perspective, we know. The other was the folds in the clothing': www.exibart.com/arte-contemporanea/dialogo-tra-assoluti-anish-kapoor-e-giulio-paolini-in-mostra-alla-galleria-minini-di-brescia/, last accessed 26 August 2023.
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ANISH KAPOOR IN CONVERSATION WITH ARTURO GALANSINO

Your relationship with Italy has a long and intense history, which has seen the realisation of important projects in various cities such as Naples, Rome, Milan and Venice. Today, Florence hosts this significant exhibition of yours. Could you describe your connection with our country?

I have had as you say a long and intense relationship with Italy. I feel that here in Italy there is an intense relationship between daily life and culture, just like that with which I grew up with in India.

The other day I was walking in Venice and I noticed an image of the Madonna on the side of a church – it occurred to me that the protestant countries that I have spent so much of my life in had banished the feminine and turned society into a male hierarchy. Italian Catholicism holds on to the feminine as a psychic presence... This speaks forcefully to me.

In the past, you have worked in highly characterised historical contexts, such as the Gardens of Versailles, Houghton Hall, or Palazzo Manfrin, which you chose for your Venetian foundation. However, it is the first time you are facing Florence and dealing with a building from the early Renaissance like Palazzo Strozzi, known for its rigour, symmetry, and essentiality. Given your profound relationship with architecture, how has this building, symbolising humanistic culture, inspired you in choosing the artworks to exhibit? Moreover, how does *Void Pavilion VII*, the new installation created for the Courtyard – whose exterior recalls the structure of the palace's facades – interact with Palazzo Strozzi and its history?

Palazzo Strozzi is as you say symmetrical. The enfilade of rooms is structured and rigorous. Making an exhibition in these rooms is not easy. Too much order kills the way in which the work can interact with the viewer. It has therefore been necessary to interrupt the order of the rooms by placing works in such a way as to make alternative routes through the building. *Void Pavilion VII* as you say is a formal structure that rhymes with the palazzo. It is a small building made to hold emptiness or darkness – to give place to the unformed or the hidden. Somewhere for the 'unheimlich', maybe in this sense the opposite to what is intended by the makers of Strozzi.

You often explore the themes of dualism and opposition such as *Inside and Outside*, *Concave and Convex*, *Order and Chaos*, *Natural and Artificial*. Do you think there could be an idea of synthesis of these contrasts in your work or their overcoming?

We live in a universe of opposites – day and night, male and female, positive and negative, life and death. Our psychic universe is also as we know made of opposites. My adventure in the object has led me to the conviction that all objects reside in a material/immaterial dichotomy.

Your artistic practice often tends toward a search for formal perfection, aiming for the disappearance of the 'artist's hand' and the sublimation of the material component of your works, turning them into eternal objects, almost timeless, belonging to a pre-cultural and pre-anthropological era. At the same time, some techniques and materials you have used in your work are part of the artistic tradition as the essays of this catalogue suggest. What has been the challenge of bringing their characteristics and peculiarities into new expressive horizons? And how do they interact with newer materials, some of which are absolutely cutting-edge, that characterise your more recent production?

ANISH KAPOOR

UNTRUE UNREAL

FIRENZE
PALAZZO STROZZI

7.10.2023
4.02.2024

Marcel Duchamp proposed the found object. I propose that there is a prior condition – the unmade object, the self-made object – the self-manifest object. Before thought, before culture.... A complex fiction of the object ... the unmade made. You are referring to the blackest material in the universe – as technological material that is blacker than a black hole – it absorbs 99.8 percent of all light.

Malevich's black square is as he said a four-dimensional object – three dimensions we know and one we don't. The two great inventions of the Renaissance are perspective as we know, and the fold, which is the folded fabric in early Renaissance painting – the body and being. This black material put on a fold makes it invisible – takes it beyond being. Like Malevich, it takes the object into the fourth dimension. A trick – An illusion – A fiction – YES, but all art is fiction. As we know, artists make mythological propositions, not simply objects. To take an object beyond being is a high ambition – that is my aim.

***Untrue Unreal* is the title you chose for the exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi, inviting us to explore a world where the boundaries between true and false, reality and fiction, dissolve, and opening the doors to the dimension of the impossible. These have been foundational and recurring themes in your work for a long time. On this occasion and in this specific historical moment, do they take on new and different meanings and dimensions than in the past?**

Yes, at this time of ultra-nationalism taking the world over, political fiction poses as the real and is blind to history. The real/unreal – true/ untrue game is a trope of our times. Here in Italy and the world over. I dare say that we have lost touch with human reality and that of our fellow comrades, a hundred million of whom wander the world as refugees. All this in blind ultra-nationalists' indoctrination. Untrue – Unreal today. The artists role according to me is to look to the unknown or half known. I have nothing to say. My truth is to trust in what I don't know or half know, in this the Untrue/Unreal is a guide.

UFFICIO STAMPA/PRESS OFFICE
FONDAZIONE
PALAZZO STROZZI
Lavinia Rinaldi
C. +39 338 5277132
l.rinaldi@palazzostrozzi.org

SUTTON
Emily Saunders
C. +41(0)799239223
emilys@suttoncomms.com

PROMOZIONE/PROMOTION
CSC SIGMA
Susanna Holm
T. +39 055 2478436
susannaholm@cscsigma.it



ANISH KAPOOR AND THE RENAISSANCE

The exhibition represents the first direct comparison between Anish Kapoor and a building symbol of Florentine Renaissance. To reconsider convergences and affinities between his art and an era that marked Western civilisation, the catalogue includes six new essays by international scholars: Dario Donetti, Tommaso Mozzati, Francesca Borgo, Rachel Boyd, Morgan Ng, Diane H. Bodart.

Dario Donetti (professor of History of Architecture at the University of Verona), in his essay *Architecture and Illusion at Palazzo Strozzi*, addresses the theme of the relationship between the building that hosts the exhibition and Kapoor's art: "Since its heroic beginnings in fifteenth-century Florence, the architecture of the Renaissance has commonly been seen as the expression of a spatial sensibility rooted in measure, harmony and a sense of organic unity [...] But if there is a work of architecture that can buttress this view, that can legitimately be recognised as a product of that idealism of forms and space, it is the building designed by Giuliano da Sangallo for Filippo Strozzi, towards the end of the Quattrocento. At the same time, this monumental residence, the fruit of social ambitions that disrupted the Florentine cityscape, provided the opportunity for a subtle exercise of representation, conducted principally on an architectural skin effectively disconnected from the volumes that it covers. So, given the spatial significance it can assume, the dialogue between a building so firmly lodged in the imagery of Renaissance architecture and the art of Anish Kapoor becomes particularly evocative. Especially in view of the way he has more than once put the geometric limits of the box of masonry to the test, insisting on the ambiguity of relationships of scale, exploring thresholds and boundaries, penetrating the illusory potential of its membrane and facing."

Donetti insists on the relationship between the external coverings of the building and Kapoor's attention to the skin of objects, understood as a 'veil' between the internal and external world: "The detached wooden ashlar [...] show that it was already its architect's intention for the façade to act as the support for a form of pure representation: a surface to be drawn on like paper; an ambiguous skin that masks the structure and leaves the way open to the illusory, or at least to the imitation of something other than itself. In this case, the natural appearance of stone architecture. [...] Anish Kapoor's sense of architecture shows us, with particular eloquence, how the skin used to cover objects on a large scale – whether made of plastic membranes, as in *Leviathan* (2011), or of more or less polished metal, thinking of *Cloud Gate* (2004) or *Memory* (2008) – can conceal its actual consistency in terms of mass, altering substantially the body's perception of the architectural space or the scale of the urban surroundings. But is this not also true of much of the architecture of the Renaissance and, more in general, the age of classicism?"

Donetti also highlights how: "In the courtyard of Palazzo Strozzi – as well as in other works by Sangallo, from the façade of Lorenzo's villa of Poggio a Caiano to the powerful courtyard of Santa Maria Maddalena di Cestello – sturdy cylinders of stone stand out against empty space to support the solid one of the plastered walls and, precisely because they are isolated, exalt the origins of a language that has now become allusion. They provide, too, the measure of the building: they become the yardstick with which to gauge its scale, to guide (or constrain?) the interpretation of space by the senses. Thus, like the *Endless Column* (1992) that runs the full height of one of the corner rooms of Palazzo Strozzi, the orders in the Renaissance maintained their ability to shape, for what concerns of perception, the dimensional relations between the observer and the building; to recognise in the body the means with which to experience the mysteries of scale, as well as the meaningful illusion of early modern architecture."

As highlighted by **Tommaso Mozzati (professor of History of Modern Art at the University of Perugia)** in the essay *Object/Non-Object*, the wide selection of sculptures and installations by Kapoor exhibited at Palazzo Strozzi, dating back to the early 1980s to this day, it acquires new meanings and suggestions in relation to the city's centuries-old vocation for sculpture. In fact, as witnessed from “Charles de Brosses to Joshua Reynolds, from Stendhal to John Ruskin and right up to the ever more common visits paid to it toward the end of the century, the Tuscan city was mirrored in its gallery of sculptures, coming to be identified with those images, an expressive model of absolute pre-eminence, solid evidence of a contrived and archetypal function.”

Even the Marquis de Sade, “Lost in the enfilade of rooms, the French nobleman – in Tuscany in the summer and autumn of 1775 – would in fact associate, in the notebooks of his *Voyage d’Italie*, his memory of the antiquities restored by Michelangelo with that of the anatomical Venuses collected by the Grand Duke, marble against wax, dividing the account between the chapter devoted to the Galleria and the one on the *moeurs* of the city’s inhabitants, without neglecting Gaetano Zumbo’s *Effects of the Plague*: ‘[...] you will see a sepulchre filled with an infinitude of cadavers, where each one demonstrates the different gradations of decay, from recently deceased to one completely devoured by worms.’ This overturning of the image of Florence, reinterpreted at the dawn of modernity by operating on the very material of its illustrious vestiges of the past, resonates with the invitation to an artist like Anish Kapoor to stage his first major solo exhibition in the city. A project intended to reflect the complete course of his development through a series of more or less recent works, from the immaterial surfaces of *Newborn* (2019) to the deep red, thinning perpetually, of the work *Svayambhu* (2007) from the illusory solids of *To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red* (1981) to the organic *Tongue Memory* (2016). In fact Kapoor has always stressed his ambition to seek, through his manipulation of the material, ‘more than a physical presence’ (in accordance with the category of the ‘truly made’, described by Homi K. Bhabha in 1998 ‘as the meeting of material and non-material’), and his desire to express in ‘every concrete object [...] an equal non- object, a mysterious one’.”

With **Vivissimi. Bodies in Flesh, Wax, and Silicone, Francesca Borgo (Professor at the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews)** investigates the Renaissance research for the creation of a statue that has a life of its own, and the wide use of wax both in Florentine artistic tradition and in Kapoor, starting from *Svayambhu* and the slow movement that characterises it: “The story of the statue that is brought to life is an impossible and recurring tale. From Pygmalion onwards, creating life where life is lacking, suggesting it through movement, is a challenge that has long been taken up by Western art. Art ‘is not in itself alive but expressive of living things without life’, wrote Leonardo (1452–1519); a work that is unable to create an illusion of movement in its inert matter is ‘twice dead’, in reality and in make-believe: ‘[...] if it does not add the vivacity of action, it becomes twice dead’ (*Book on Painting*, 376). This is the reason why the artist has to erase every trace of their making, the evidence of the hand and in particular the visibility of the mark, so that the work might appear miraculously arisen, ‘self-born’. The capacity for self-motion is – according to Aristotle – the unmistakable sign of a living being. But it is not just movement that makes *Svayambhu* a descendant of the Renaissance dream of animating the inanimate. More than any other sculptural medium, wax is in fact linked to the processes of life: birth, metamorphosis, disintegration and regeneration. At once hot and cold, malleable and solid, amorphous and polymorphous, wax undermines the expectation of immutability generally associated with sculpture. It responds to our touch, warms up and takes shape: it reacts, and therefore lives. In Ovid’s story of Pygmalion, the sculptor feels the statue coming to life under his fingers like beeswax that softens in the sun (*Metamorphoses*, X, 284). This innate predisposition to change, its malleability, pliancy and metamorphic qualities, have long placed wax in a special position in

Western artistic production, in particular as a whole or partial simulacrum of the human body. States of sickness, death, and wounded flesh are among the medium's preferred subjects.

In the Renaissance, death masks and ex-votos reproducing single body parts, both functioning and malfunctioning, were modelled or moulded in wax. Votive effigies were also made of wax, especially in Florence, where they once filled the sanctuary of the Santissima Annunziata, piled up in the thousands. In Florence, wax was also the material used for anatomic models – those opened-up, eviscerated Venuses, the secrets of their bowels uncovered – that in the eighteenth century would make La Specola, later the Museum of Zoology and Natural History, the centre of scientific waxwork."

Rachel Boyd (curator of the Department of Renaissance Sculpture at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London), investigates *Pigmented sculpture in Renaissance Florence*, considering how today we have a distorted vision of the image that the city offered at the time. "What we see today, [...] only hints at the centrality of colour in the artistic culture of Renaissance Florence, as many of the painted surfaces of sculptures and buildings have worn away with time and use, or have been intentionally stripped of their original hues. Anish Kapoor's vibrant pigment sculptures, a selection of which are included in the present exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi, invite a reflection on this local history and a consideration of the uses and connotations of pigments in Renaissance sculpture in particular. This is a history that is only just beginning to be mined, and in some cases celebrated, by scholars of the period, although prejudices against colourful sculpture – often dismissed as unsophisticated, unnatural, overly religious, sentimental, gaudy, or kitsch – remain entrenched in the discipline of art history. Strongly coloured pigments are still considered properly the province of early modern painters, not of those who fashioned form in three dimensions."

Boyd turns his attention above all, to two artists for whom – as for Kapoor – color and materials played a fundamental role: «Donatello used a range of coloured materials – everything from red and green pigmented wax to glazed pottery fragments – to create vibrantly coloured, reflective grounds for his relief sculptures in terracotta and marble. While Donatello's constant experimentation with materials created an astounding range of visual effects, it was his contemporary Luca della Robbia who achieved near-complete fusion of the painter's and sculptor's art."

Morgan Ng (Assistant Professor at the Department of Art History at Yale University) in *Renaissance Voids* – imagining entering the panel depicting the *Ideal City* preserved in Urbino – explores the underground world as imagined in the Renaissance, "a subterranean landscape of the kind depicted by contemporary Quattrocento artists and architects. Such figures as Mariano Taccola of Siena or his follower Francesco di Giorgio Martini, the latter a possible colleague of the *ideal city* painter at the Montefeltro court. (Some have even suspected Francesco himself to be the author of the panel). In their drawings and sketchbooks, vision transcends material and bodily limits. The bowels of the earth disclose their contents as if in an X-ray. Impenetrable mountain faces appear like transparent volumes that reveal the presence of hydraulic tunnels and underground mills."

«Such subterranean visions find a startling counterpart in the broader literary and theological as well as artistic imaginary of the Quattrocento. Consider the 1472 commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* by the architect and polymath Antonio di Tuccio Manetti. Here, Manetti undertook a stupefying endeavour: the systematic topographical description of the 'site, form, and size of hell.' Displaying an obsessive numerical precision, worthy of Francesco di Giorgio and his subterranean geometric exploits, he specified both the width of the opening and the depth of this 'enormous cave': exactly $3245^{5/11}$ miles. The Renaissance impulse to rationally measure the earth assumes an absurd and grotesque form: the project to map an infernal geography that Manetti had never seen. With hyperbolic confidence, Manetti proclaimed hell, no less than

any other city, to be an inhabitable place with concrete physical attributes, locatable coordinates, and measurable dimensions.”

Diane H. Bodart (Maître de conférences of Modern Art History at the University of Poitiers), rereads Kapoor's mirrored works with *A Pictorial Medium for Sculpture – Anish Kapoor's Reflective Surfaces*, works that are part of the long dispute on the comparison between the arts, which so much literature produced in the Renaissance era: “Positioning his practice at the intersection of sculpture and painting, and merging the physical dimension of the first with the illusory quality of the second, Kapoor revives the terms of the old comparative debate between the two arts, commonly known as the *paragone*, that heated the discourse of arts during the Italian Renaissance. In the context of this dispute, the supremacy of sculpture was claimed on the basis of the truth of its physical substance, which could be attested not only by the vision of the eye but also by the touch of the hand, while the pre-eminence of painting was based on its capacity to represent the whole visible world – including immaterial light and atmospheric effects, such as clouds, thunderbolts and reflections. Reflective surfaces would indeed become the definitive weapon of painting, both in the writings of the *literati* and in the demonstration pieces of the painters.”

In relation to Kapoor's works Bodart mentions the Brunelleschi's famous 'panel' «It depicted the elevation of the baptistery of Florence seen from the cathedral, and the upper part above the skyline was left unpainted and covered with polished silver leaf. When the panel was seen in the right position, reflected in a mirror in front of the baptistery, the image was perfectly superimposed onto the real building, while the actual sky was reflected in the silver leaf. By demonstrating the potential of the new tool in projecting three-dimensional architectural space on a plane surface, Brunelleschi was simultaneously acknowledging its limits: the movement of nature, such as the variation of light and passage of clouds, could not be reduced to the geometrical rationale of the perspective grid. In the mirrored objects that Kapoor places in urban spaces, the tension between permanent and mutable is similarly activated but at the same time overcome, as the appearance of the skyline changes according to the weather and the time of the day. Moreover, the reflective sculptures include in their frame the continuous daily movement of people that animate the city.”

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAM

Palazzo Strozzi devotes special attention to its visitors and offers a broad selection of activities designed to turn their encounter with art into an even more fascinating experience for all age groups.

TEENAGERS AND ADULTS

Guided tours

Visits to the exhibition through a selection of work by Anish Kapoor.

For groups, in multiple languages: max 20 people.

For individual visitors (only in Italian): free with the ticket entrance on Mondays and Wednesdays at 18.00, on Sundays at 15.00.

Teenager Kit

Interpretative material with in-depth explanations and ideas for discussion designed for teens to explore the show alone or with friends.

The Kit can be downloaded on the website palazzostrozzi.org

No Grown-ups

Thursday 25 January, from 17.00 to 21.00.

The students from two high schools in the Metropolitan City of Florence conduct relay-guided tours, narrating Kapoor's artworks to their fellow peers visiting Palazzo Strozzi.

Free activity with exhibition admission ticket.

With the support of the Fondazione Hillary Merkus Recordati.

Anish Kapoor In-Between Lecture Series

Four appointments dedicated to reflecting on the work of Anish Kapoor through the lens of various fields and disciplines: art history, physics, psychoanalysis, and the psychology of perception.

Tuesday 5 December, 19 December, 16 January, 30 January at 18.00

Strozzina, Palazzo Strozzi

Free admission

Sensitive Matter

Seminar on the poetics and artistic practice of Anish Kapoor in collaboration with the students of the Contemporary Art History Course at the University of Florence.

Thursday 1 February at 17.00

Strozzina, Palazzo Strozzi

Free admission

SCHOOLS

Tours and workshops for classes

Paths for discovering contemporary art through dialogical tours and creative experiences. Available for all school years; the contents of the activity are tailored to suit the various different age groups.

FAMILIES

Workshops for families

Activities for children and adults to discover the exhibition together and experiment with the languages or art. Activity only in Italian and free of charge, included in the price of admission to the exhibition.

Down, down, even lower!

Every Wednesday at 17.00

Families with children aged 3 to 6

Red, yellow, black, and a hint of blue

Every Sunday at 10.30

Families with children aged 7 to 12

Family Kit

A kit for adults and children aged five and over to visit the exhibition together and play with art. A pathway among the exhibits with suggestions for observing and ideas for discussion. The Kit can be downloaded on the website palazzostrozzi.org

ACCESS PROGRAMS

A series of projects designed to make Palazzo Strozzi a venue for coexisting with differences. Activities for autistic young people (*Nuances*), for people with Alzheimer's (*With Many Voices*), disabilities and mental distress (*Connections*), tours in Italian Sign Language (*Signs and Words*) and a dance pathway devoted to the wellbeing of people with Parkinson's (*Free Flowing*).

ACCESSIBILITY AT PALAZZO STROZZI:
THE MARIA MANETTI SHREM EDUCATIONAL CENTER

Inaugurated in 2022, with **over 30,000 participants** and **more than 500 activities**, the Maria Manetti Shrem Educational Center is the heart of all educational projects at Palazzo Strozzi for schools, families, youth, and adults, with a special focus on accessibility. The three rooms of the center, located at the entrance to the exhibition, constitute a space designed to be inclusive and accessible, where it is possible to turn the encounter with art into an opportunity for self-reflection, exploring our connections to others and the world. The environments of the Maria Manetti Shrem Educational Center are specifically designed to allow the greatest number of people to transform their encounter with art into an occasion where every participant is valued, and everyone can feel involved.

The Maria Manetti Shrem Educational Center is a space where new relationships can be forged among individuals and their families, as well as creating an **interdisciplinary field for collaboration and dialogue** among artists, museum educators, social and healthcare professionals, and experts from various disciplines. Among these projects we flag out those dedicated to inclusion, with activities for autistic children (**Nuances**), people with Alzheimer's (**With Many Voices**), disabilities and mental distress (**Connections**), visits in Sign Language (**Signs and Words**), and a dance program dedicated to the well-being of people with Parkinson's (**Free Flowing**). These projects are renewed for each exhibition, expanding their reach within the local community.

“L'arte di vivere è l'arte del donare. Sono davvero lieta di sostenere le arti e la cultura e in particolare renderne possibile l'accesso alle persone più fragili. L'arte può aiutare le persone, mettendole in relazione attraverso una visione olistica”. (Maria Manetti Shrem)

Born in Florence, Maria Manetti Shrem moved to San Francisco in 1972, becoming the quintessential ambassador of the Italian lifestyle and the so-called “Made in Italy” creations, and one of the most important world's philanthropists. She lives between San Francisco and Florence.

For a long time, Maria has been supporting *education, music, fine arts, and medicine*, helping talents and the underprivileged in the USA, Italy, the UK, France, and Mexico.

Currently, she supports more than 45 charitable programs; favorites in the USA include UC Davis University, the San Francisco Opera, the Met Opera in New York City, Festival Napa Valley, San Francisco Symphony, Cal Performances, SFMoMA Museum, SFFilm Festival, UCSF and CPMC hospitals. Maria is also one of the major benefactors of The Royal Drawing School and the Prince's Foundation of His Majesty King Charles III, Friends of the Louvre, Friends of Versailles, the Italian National Trust (FAI), Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, and Andrea Bocelli Foundation. Maria and her husband, Jan Shrem, are co-founders of the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at UC Davis, which opened in 2016 to complete a longtime art legacy that took 60 years in the making. The museum's collection includes works from major California artists such as Wayne Thiebaud, William T. Wiley, Robert Arneson, and Roy De Forest. ARTNEWS has listed it as “One of the World's 25 Best Museum Buildings of the Past 100 Years.”

Maria has received numerous recognitions as an outstanding cultural ambassador between the USA and Italy and an unparalleled arts philanthropist. Amongst them, in 2019, the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, bestowed upon her the *Grand Officer of the Order of the Star of Italy*. In 2022, the Mayor of Florence, Dario Nardella, awarded her with *The Keys of the City* for her inspiring role model of patronage, following in the steps of the Medici's legacy. The City and County of San Francisco proclaimed *June 22 - Manetti Shrem Day for Philanthropy*. During the same ceremony, the Festival Napa Valley bestowed upon the Manetti Shrem couple the inaugural *Angels of The Arts Award*. On the occasion of a celebratory event organized by SF Opera and SF Symphony, “Maria--50 Years in America”, the San Francisco City Hall rotunda exceptionally lit up in the Italian flag colors to honor her unparalleled philanthropic activity. Maria was recognized with the highest community honor, *The Spirit of the Opera Award*. She is the 2023 UC Davis Medal recipient—the highest honoris degree presented by the University of California system to individuals in recognition of extraordinary contributions that embody the university's vision.