

Exhibition:

ANISH KAPOOR, *Islamic Mirror*, Convent of Santa Clara, Murcia, 2008

From 25th November 2008 to 10th January 2009 the Sharq al-Andalus Exhibition Hall at the Convent of Santa Clara (Murcia) hosted the installation by the artist Anish Kapoor *Islamic Mirror*, a circular and concave mirror of 2.40 metres in diameter and weighing approximately 80 kilos. The work is made of small octagonal and square fragments; its perfect articulation alludes to the formal, mathematical and geometrical transfer between the square and the sphere, a historically significant intellectual concern of mystics, scientists and artists.

Anish Kapoor, born in Mumbai (India) in 1954, has lived in England since the early 1970s. From there he has established himself not only as one of the most outstanding creators of new British sculpture but as one of the most important figures in the international contemporary panorama. The artist has set up his mirrors in diverse open places, as in the case of the installation *Islamic Mirror* in the monastery of Santa Clara. The mirror looks straight at the reservoir in the patio and at the monastic area where the enclosed nuns of the Order of Saint Clare live. The building was donated to them in 1365 by the Castilian King Pedro I. The “look” of the mirror fits in the central axis of the architectural setting and integrates into a geometrical perspective thereby redounding to the symbolic meaning that the arrangement of space had in Islamic architecture: the patio with garden borders represented the image of cosmos while the waters of the reservoir became a mirror that brought the sky to the earth, depositing the nocturnal stars on its surface and creating

glints which were projected on the architecture. Moreover, it acted as a mirror of its own architecture which was then the “bride” of the cosmic spectacle.

This phenomenology that lays down the link between the past and the present, the sky and the earth, also enhances the transversal connections between Christian mysticism, the Sufi visions of the poet Ibn Arabi (Murcia, 1165-Damascus, 1240) and the contemporary aesthetic search, revealing, as the artist himself points out, that “the scale has to do with meaning rather than with size.”

The concave shape of the mirror creates an inverted and opaque shadow of what is in front, while the octagonal fragments that make it up reflect a positive image of what is very close. The viewers, when approaching, will see themselves in multiple images, along with the shifting colours and tones of light in the exterior spaces of the cloister. As Rosa Martínez, responsible for the project and a reputed international curator, states: “The work *Islamic Mirror* and the space where it is exhibited unite the richness of diverse cultural traditions, showing the transversal connection between Christian mysticism, the Sufi poetics of Ibn Arabi (a specially significant mystic as he was born in Murcia) and the current artistic search. He uses a wide range of references and links diverse conceptions of beauty and spirituality always looking for their shared common substrate, beyond the formal and ritual references which distance them. In this way, the piece offers viewers a conceptual and aesthetic



Islamic Mirror (José Luis Montero).

experience in which each visitor interacts visually with the work.”

In the exhibition catalogue, Rosa Martínez explains that, throughout the more than 30 years of his creative career, the art of Anish Kapoor has mirrored the power of the mixing of cultures, the spirituality that emerges from sensuality, the capacity for making the invisible visible, and the cognitive richness resulting from the subtle play of opposites; light/darkness, full/empty, earth/sky, body/soul. Thus it forms part of a trend that seeks the mysticism of beauty and takes pleasure in the metaphysical subtlety that arises from the material.

His work is characterised by pigmented and shiny forms, by stones with holes of impenetrable depth, by reflecting mirrors that include the viewer, by masses of material which define its form when passing through architectural doorways and voids. The human figure, so absent from minimalist abstraction, is a permanent reference in Kapoor. The abstraction implicit in his works is that which asks itself how the self is transferred to the other, how the discourse of the divine eros is articulated, how relations of individuals with universal wisdom are revealed. This is why in his work there is a serene call to the viewer whose body and look must complete it.