

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The Telegraph

Anish Kapoor: Boris 'foisted' new slide on my sculpture

Hannah Furness



Anish Kapoor and Carsten Holler visit their Slide at the ArcelorMittal Orbit Credit: Rob Stothard

Sir Anish Kapoor, the Turner Prize-winning artist, has warned his Olympic Park sculpture must not become an “amusement park”, claiming plans to install a slide around it were “foisted” on him by the Mayor of London.

Kapoor’s Orbit sculpture is currently being transformed in collaboration with artist Carsten Holler, in a project which will see the addition of the world’s longest and tallest tunnel slide.

It is hoped the revamped ArcelorMittal Orbit will rejuvenate visitor interest in the sculpture, with £17 tickets for adults recouping its multi-million-pound installation costs.

But while the project has been trumpeted as an innovative collaboration between two leading artists, Kapoor has disclosed their project was not quite all it seemed.

Speaking at a press conference to update the public about the slide’s progress, he said he had only been told of plans to install one a year ago.

The original concept, he said, would have been “problematic” for him, leaving his Olympic statue closer to an “amusement park” than a work of art.

“The Mayor foisted this on the project, and kind of insisted,” the artist said. “So there was a moment where we, or rather I, had to make a decision: do I go to battle with the Mayor, or is there a more elegant, more astute way to do this?”

He disclosed he had immediately turned to Holler, who is celebrated for his slide installations at the Hayward Gallery and Tate Modern.

Kapoor said it would have been “very problematic” to build a slide without him adding essential balance of “public participation and art”, admitting: “It felt to me as if it was turning the whole thing in the wrong direction.”

When asked how the collaboration came about, he added: “This [the ArcelorMittal Orbit] is a project that has been here for a while. It was always the Mayor’s ambition to put a slide in it, but he didn’t tell me.

“When he said [around a year ago] that he really wanted it to happen now, I put it to him that the only way to do that with honour was for me to invite Carsten.

“Rather than have it be an amusement park slide, to have this very impressive thing that Carsten does, which is in between public participation and art. One is left asking, is it an artwork?

“I thought it was the right thing to do. It’s one art work becoming part of another work.”



The artists in front of their creation credit: Eddie Mulholland

Kapoor’s sculpture, once mischievously dubbed ‘Boris’ folly’, cost £19m to build, with £16m paid by the sponsor and the remaining £3m by public funding.

Last year, the Independent reported it was losing £10,000 a week, with visitor numbers 200,000 from ambitious predictions.

When the slide opens next year, tickets to climb the Orbit – the UK’s tallest public artwork – will be lowered slightly to a maximum of £12 per adult, with an extra £5 charge to ride the slide down again.

With 12 “twists and turns”, speeds up to 15mph and an estimated 40 seconds from top to bottom, the cost of a ride will work out as up to 42p per second.

Access will be restricted to those over 1.3m tall for safety reasons, with visitors sliding down on mats to protect their clothing.

Saying he wished the price was cheaper, Kapoor said: “Losing money is a matter of how you view things. Projections are done on God knows what, and I didn’t do them - they did.

“They may be theoretically losing money, but the fact it has a huge number of people coming to see it is a considerable gain.

“In the financial consideration, artists always come last. I can assure you no artist ever made a fortune from a public project of any kind.”

Holler said he hoped the slide would appear to those of all ages. adding: “A child might be here purely for the slide, while the serious art lover might see this in purely formalistic terms.

“I personally like the confusion, that you don’t know what it is but it still creates a very unique experience.”



The Orbit in situ at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson MP, said: “The ArcelorMittal Orbit is a breathtaking piece of art offering fantastic views across the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

“Now we are set to add a new dimension - the world’s highest and longest slide - which will we hope rouse thrill seekers and art lovers alike.

“It will be a wonderful addition to London’s Olympic and Paralympic legacy.

“It is fantastic that two such extraordinary artists should have collaborated on this project - like Bernini adorning the work of Michelangelo.”

Kapoor joked: ““We’re hoping Boris will be the first one down, and that this is Europe when he gets to the bottom. This is a European collaboration here.