

By DON TSE

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Sometimes everything just comes together in a perfect moment.

I was sitting in a local beer bar. I had come to try some new Mikkelser beers that were being tapped. The first to be tapped was Koppi Coffee, a coffee IPA, so I ordered one, even though I wasn't sure coffee would work in an IPA. In fact, I was quite certain that it wouldn't work. On one of the big screen TVs was coverage of the Olympic games in London, England.

That's when everything came together.

I was served my beer and as I first tasted it, the TV showed an aerial shot of Olympic Stadium, together with the piece of art located outside the stadium. And it worked wonderfully with the Mikkelser Koppi Coffee in my glass.

If you watched any of the Olympic coverage, you would have seen similar shots of the Olympic Stadium and may have notice a tall, red structure just outside of the stadium. That structure is the *ArcelorMittal Orbit*, a structural work of art created by artist Anish Kapoor, in conjunction with structural designer Cecil Balmond.

Kapoor ([anishkapoor.com](http://anishkapoor.com)) is a British sculptor originally from India.

Orbit sculpture  
at London's  
Olympic Park



On this continent, he is probably best known for Cloud Gate, a gigantic, polished, stainless steel sculpture in Millennium Park in Chicago. Cloud Gate is affectionately known as The Bean and may be one of the most popular pieces of public art in America.

Kapoor's *Orbit* unanimously won a call for proposals by London Olympic organizers. Standing 377 feet tall, the sculpture is Britain's largest piece of public art. The red looping structure looks as stable as a strip of ribbon, which is to say that it looks impossibly unstable. This is deliberate. In Kapoor's own words, "I think it is awkward.... It is unsettling and I think that is part of this thing of beauty."

The same can be said of Mikkelser's Koppi Coffee IPA. It is awkward and yet it is beautiful. Sometimes when you smell the beer, it is nothing but the aroma of freshly-ground espresso beans. Other times, you get nothing but hops. Similarly, the flavor, which is medium-bodied, has a very strong coffee flavor with the hoppiness of an IPA being secondary. But if you sip it again, the IPA dominates the palate with the espresso flavors playing a back-up function. In all cases, the aroma or flavor of the coffee is not that of brewed coffee, but of espresso grounds.

The combination of IPA and coffee is one that makes no sense... except that it does. Koppi Coffee IPA takes two disparate flavors and creates something out of their disparity. And it enigmatically is able to balance one type of bitterness (from coffee) against another (from hops).

This is not synergy, which creates something greater than the sum of its parts. Rather, by challenging our notions of what should and should not work, the sculpture and the beer make us rethink aesthetics in the case of the sculpture and flavor in the case of the beer.

Even the now official name of the sculpture is a bit awkward. The piece was originally titled *Orbit* by Kapoor, but *ArcelorMittal* was added to the name to reflect the sponsorship of the piece by Lakshmi Mittal, chairman of the ArcelorMittal steel company and one of Britain's most wealthy individuals. The marriage of art and finance is always awkward. But not always this beautiful.

(Footnote: on a walking tour of Olympic Park, our guide provided the anecdote that London Mayor Boris Johnson sealed the deal for *Orbit* during a chance bathroom meeting with Mittal at the Beijing Games — ed.) ♦♦♦♦