

JIMMIE DURHAM

Galleri Opdahl is honored to present an exhibition at FRIEZE No.9 Cork Street with works by Jimmie Durham (1944 – 2021) The works in the exhibition span over a time period from the late 1990s until 2018.

A head rests on the floor. A painted stone. Eyes wide open, nose, small mouth. Dark hair, painted, covering the top of the head. All features seem slightly off, distorted. Proportions not quite right, yet no doubt of recognition. A human head. Its right eye twice the size of the left one. A forehead bulging out over the thin brow. The mouth delicately portrayed, almost feminine. Outlined, soft. A chin deformed as if half of it had been torn away. The creases and crevasses of the stone dictating its expression, its positioning of features. Unapologetic. Lines of age runs along the nose down towards the chin, another crease. Sideways and upwards. It lays there, decapitated. On the floor. Stares at you as you walk by. The angles of the stone allow the back of the head to rest on the ground, as the enhanced expressions face upwards. A man laying on his back. No body. Nobody I or you know. Only an exchange of looks allow us to communicate. No sound, yet a voice.

For a decade witnessed every person, every occasion - everything happening in the space in which he lays. Memories we share. Yet, these memories, the ones we share, are only a fraction. A fraction of the narrative that with time has succumb to the stone's own memory. Surviving time, bearing witness. They surround us. We see them everywhere. Architecture – buildings, streets, monuments. Forced away from their natural form, cut for the purpose we intend to need.

The construction of cities retracting them from nature, enabling us to create our nature. For centuries carrying our history, a silent testimony withholding the strength of time. «Portrait of a stone» 2003 is uncut. Moved and painted but remained in its shape. A face with features visualizing senses of experience. Features we recognize as our own that perhaps grant us with a tool of communication. We recognize each other.

As a poet, activist, visual artist, performer and essayist, Jimmie Durham worked to deconstruct historical narratives imposed by dominant cultures. His artistic practice was grounded in the process of combining disparate materials that, when assembled, generate a rupture within the conventions of language and knowledge. Both wood and stone have often been used by the artist precisely in relation to the power dynamics with which they are organised in architectural or monumental constructions. A devotion to the specific qualities of materials, along with the poetry and humor of his approach to them, serve to underline nature's inherent generosity and open up alternative modes of relationship within it.

On receiving the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2019, Ralph Rugoff paid the following tribute to the artist: «For more than 50 years, Durham has continued to find new, ingenious, and cogent ways to address the political and social forces that have shaped the worlds we live in. In everything he makes, we are reminded that «sympathy is part of imagination and imagination is the engine of intelligence», to borrow his own lines. That deeply sympathetic intelligence radiates from his work like invisible rays of light, illumination a way of seeing that touches and changes everyone lucky enough to cross its path.»

Jimmie Durham's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, such as: On the spiritual matter of Art, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome (2019); Soil and Stones, Souls and Songs, Para Site, Hong Kong (2017); Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok, Thailand (2017), Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD), Manila, Philippines (2016); The Absent Museum, WIELS, Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2017); Whither the Winds, Lund Konsthall, Sweden (2017); A Sense of History, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.), Berlin (2016); Surrealism: The Conjured Life, MCA - The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, United States (2015); Rights of Nature, Nottingham Contemporary, United Kingdom (2015); America is Hard to See, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015); Existential Visual Worlds: Reinking Collection, Weserburg, Bremen, Germany (2014); Advance through Retreat, Rockbund Art Museum (RAM), Shanghai (2014); What Models Can Do, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany (2014); Yes, Naturally, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague, The Netherlands (2013); Project XXII, Madre · museo d'arte contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, Italy (2013); In the Holocene, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, United States (2012); Nouvelle présentation des collections contemporaines des années 1960 à nos jours, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2011); On Rage, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin (2010); Faux Jumeaux 15, S.M.A.K.- Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst Gent, Belgium (2009); Transmission Interrupted, Modern Art Oxford, United Kingdom (2009); Experiment Marathon Reykjavik, Reykjavik Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðir, Iceland (2008), and Tiempo al tiempo/ Taking Time, MARCO Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, Spain (2007), among many others.

Durham also participated in the following biennials: 58th Venice Biennale (2019) where he was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement prize; La triennale des 50JPG, Geneva, Switzerland (2016); Sharjah Biennial 12, United Arab Emirates (2015); 7th Moscow International Biennale of Contemporary Art (2015); Whitney Biennial, New York (2014, 2006, and 1993, respectively); 58th, 55th, 51st, 50th, 49th, and 48th Venice Biennial, Italy (2012, 2005, 2003, 2001 and 1999, respectively); 5. and 13. İstanbul Bienali, Turkey (1998 and 2013); dOCUMENTA (13) and XI, Kassel, Germany (2012 and 1992, respectively); 2010 SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul, South Korea; 29a Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2010); 1st Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art, Yekaterinburg, Russia (2010); Manifesta 7, Trento, Italy (2008); Taipei Biennial 2012, Taiwan; 14th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2004); 5th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2004); Yokohama Triennale 2001, Japan.