Jimmie Durham
Artforum / May 2009

PARIS

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MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE LA VILLE DE PARIS / ARC

"*Pierres rejetées* . . ." (Rejected Stones . . .) surveyed the work made in the fourteen years since Jimmie Durham relocated to Europe—away, it would seem, from the immediate milieu of his American Indian identity. But like the character Nobody in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*, 1995, the more Durham habituates himself to Europe, the more potent come to seem the tropes of this identity, a development probably owing to his increased renown. Any number of platitudes about the American Indian correspond with clichés about the artist: his reciprocal, mystical relationship to materials, his shamanistic purchase on interpretation, and his access to the echelons of myth. Durham's stance, a balance between irony and ingenuousness, was occasionally outweighed by this correspondence, where a meeting of tropes seemed to leave little space for their subversion.

"Rejected Stones" touched on Durham's central preoccupations, such as the construction of history, the struggle of art and poetry against analytic language, and the ghettoization of indigenous culture. The suite of stone-throwing/dropping/sinking that opened the exhibition—including a stoned refrigerator (*St. Frigo*, 1996), a "vandalized" vitrine (*A Stone from François Villon's House in Paris*, 1996/2009), and a small aircraft crushed by a boulder (*Encore tranquillité* [Calm Again], 2008)—is both cathartic and unsettling, as though Durham had restored to the stones some primeval agency. For the six wood slab works in the series "Labyrinth," 2007, Durham had planned to use an oak tree that tragically fell on eleven people during an outdoor concert in Strasbourg. Facing objections from the victims' families, he settled on another tree, only to find several World War II bullets ensconced in its trunk—effectively transferring his attentions from a murderous tree to an executed one. The coincidence seems like improbable divination, another moment of man-material communion. In one of the "Labyrinth" works, *Shot with a .22 automatic and a .38 revolver*, Durham answered the vintage bullets by firing on the wood himself, like the cedar-slaying Gilgamesh and his sidekick, Enkidu—a team part god, part savage.

Jimmie Durham, *St. Frigo*, 1996, used refrigerator, 52 x 23⅝ x 23⅝".

Riffing on the myth of the American Indian as the savage-but-holy interpreter, *Snake Eyes!*, 2006, is an annotated wooden board covered with a miscellany including stones, pliers, fish-shaped pens, and gears; beneath a bike reflector are the words GREAT CAUTION WAS NEEDED; below fragments of animal bones lies the disconcerting aphorism THE WOLF AT THE DOOR, BONES ON THE FLOOR. Durham's lines on this and many other assemblages here keep them from becoming indecipherable rebuses by beating the viewer to the chase. Analysis is preempted by cryptic prognostications befitting a Hollywood medicine man. Another stereotypical Hollywood Indian, the solitary rambler drawn into the white man's world, appears in the loosely autobiographical film *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 2002. Durham, played by Anri Sala, portrays his pre-Europe days with such absurd and cheeky elementariness that one almost forgets similar preambles are at the heart of many an expat-artist myth. Is Durham becoming that myth, despite the sardonic portrayal? Like Gilgamesh, who bound rocks to his feet to reach the plant of eternal life at the bottom of the sea, Durham has allowed his stones to accompany him to the site of artistic longevity, i.e., the large institutional survey. Is it one irony too many that the very tropes Durham has been mockingly milking should be so evident here?

—*Joanna Fiduccia*