

Jimmie Durham's *Pirogenetico, pirogenetico*

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I'm not so sure that art is so ambiguous.
I just think it's not linguistic.
It's more full and complex than language—
we can experience it but not explain it.

—Jimmie Durham¹

Jimmie Durham is an American artist of Cherokee descent. He's a visual artist and a political activist for the American Indian Movement. *Pirogenetico pirogenetico* (2009) was recently installed at the Centre Pompidou as part of their "New Presentation of the Contemporary Collections." His work is replete with wild ideas shaped by a sage, unpretentious impulse and an automatic responsibility to history, particularly his own Cherokee history. Confident from instability, and free from pedagogical language, he strings form and words together that sharply pierce the atmosphere of ideology. Durham doesn't follow a line and he doesn't depend on the scaffold of language, but the work makes a remarkable point.

Pirogenetico, pirogenetico is a collection of three obsidian rocks, cut and then cast as a double in German silver. Each threesome sits on its own low metal table, forming a diptych. The cut of the original follows the shattering nature of obsidian, which Durham undercuts and monumentalizes in the double. The derivative double and its mannered original: they are nearly too beautiful but still can't deny the violence. If Durham's irony, his edge, is obscured by the volume of his forms, it's reactivated in a video on the adjacent wall where the obsidian cuts through a heart organ.

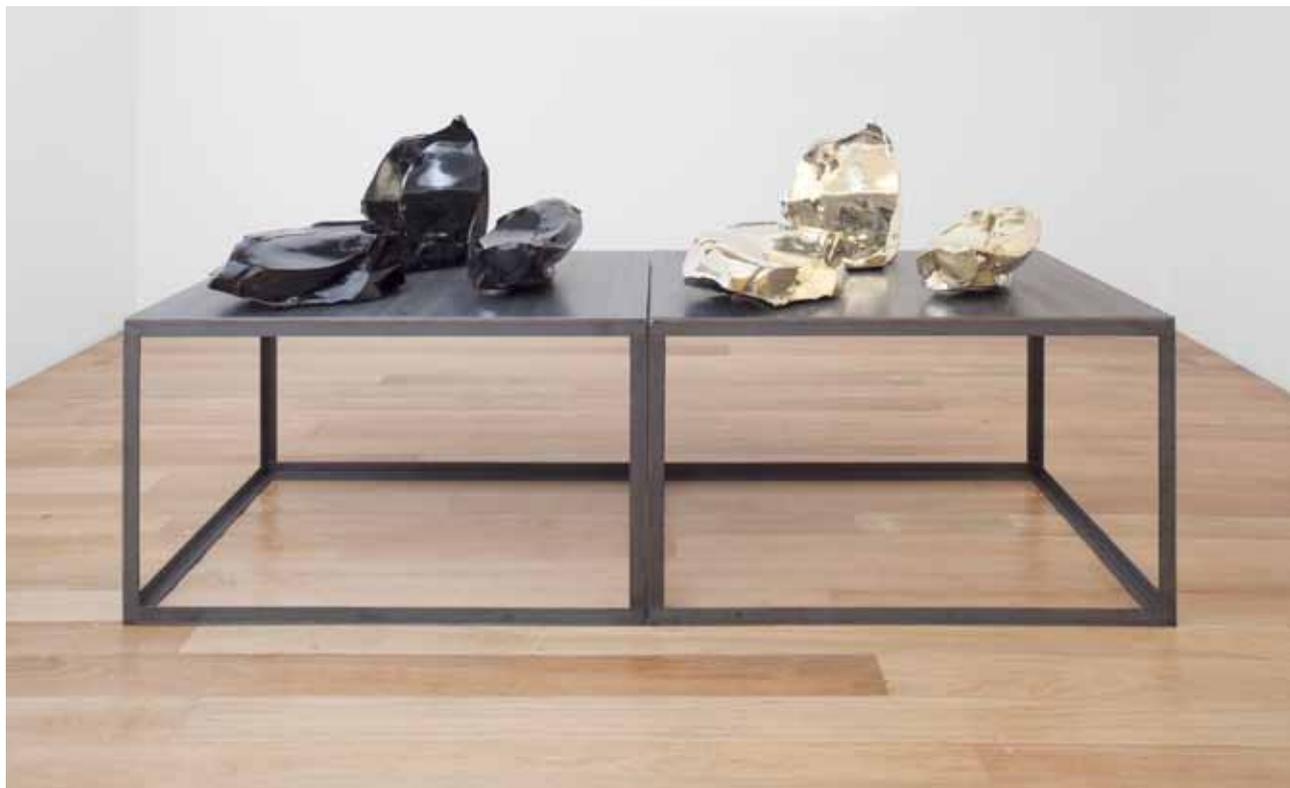
Durham's syntax is spare. He knows that language isn't big enough to tell the story, reminding us, as Lacan stated, "I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth... because saying it all is impossible: words fail."² In place of language Durham uses an alternative accuracy that compounds history with the present, a mashup of material things, a collision of aesthetics that shakes down conventional wisdom, replacing it with searing poetry.

Notes

1 Heyokamagazine. "Jimmie Durham: The Pursuit of Happiness."

<http://heyokamagazine.com/HEYOKA.2.JIMMI%20DURHAM.htm>

2 Lacan, Jacques. *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*. Ed. Joan Copjec. Trans. Dennis Hollier, Rosalind Kraus, and Annette Michelson. (New York: Norton, 1990). p. 18



Jimmie Durham, *Pirogenetico, Pirogenetico*, 2009
Installation composée de deux tables en métal et trois blocs d'obsidienne et leur moulages.
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