

Press release

Jimmie Durham - Evidence

Winner of the City of Goslar Kaiserring 2016

This year the City of Goslar's Kaiserring, one of the most highly acclaimed prizes for contemporary art, is being awarded to Jimmie Durham.

Kaiserring Award Ceremony on 8 October 2016 at 11 am

Kaiserpfalz, Goslar

Presentation speech: Fabrice Hergott,

Director of the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

Opening of the accompanying exhibition 'Evidence'

in the Mönchehaus Museum at 12:30 pm

Exhibition duration from 8 October 2016 – 29 January 2017

Life and work

The artist, poet and activist Jimmie Durham (b. 1940 in the US, living in Berlin) began to work as a sculptor in 1964, when at the same time, since the early 1960s, he was politically active in the American civil rights movement. In 1973, he graduated in Fine Arts in Geneva and returned to the United States. In the 1970s, he was a co-founder and chairman of the International Indian Treaty Council at the United Nations, where his work, among others, led to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Durham became internationally known in the 1980s with sculptures and installations. In 1987, Durham left the United States, first settled in Mexico and since 1994 in Europe. Among others he lived in Dublin, Marseille, Rome and Berlin and ever since observed the political developments of the European Union. The relationship between history and environment, architecture and monumentality, and a critical attitude towards political structures of power and narratives of national identity are often at the center of his artistic and literary work.

Videos

Two videos are displayed in the Kaiserring exhibition. In *Smashing* (2004), presented in the second floor, the artist can be seen sitting on an empty everyday desk, dressed in a black suit. One after another people bring in diverse objects, place them on the desk and Durham picks up a prehistoric stone tool to smash these objects. He then opens a drawer, takes out a form, stamps and signs it and hands it to the person.

Stones play an important role throughout Durham's work. He uses them to smash paint tubes on canvas, to place big rocks on beds, cars and airplanes. It is however never intended as a gesture of destruction, but as an artistic mode of transformation. For Durham stone is not only a monument, but rather a moveable substance. "Michelangelo used iron to transform marble and stone, I choose stone to transform other materials!", Durham says.

In the second two-channel video installation, *Songs of My Childhood* (2014), the artists sings unaccompanied songs he heard and learned during his childhood through Radio and TV. The songs are divided in two sections, *Songs to Get Rid Of* and *Songs to Keep*. The first include "the most horrible and nasty racist, nationalistic and misogynistic songs", Durham says, "but they are stuck in my brain as music." Performing these songs is a way to get rid of them for the artist. The contrary is true for the second part, songs that revolve around humankind with its desires, fears and needs, its love and relationship to one another, songs that speak to humanity as a whole and are therefore to keep.

The Famous Box

At the beginning of the exhibition just by the reception desk the work *The Famous Box* (1996) is placed. It is an old schooldesk with a handmade wooden box that looks as though it is for the purpose of collecting money. Durham has placed this sculpture at the beginning of many shows for the past 20 years. He says he hopes the box might therefore live up to its title and become famous one day.

Works for Goslar

The core of the Kaiserring exhibiton is a sculpture and an installation made specifically for the region of Goslar.

"I wanted to make work relating to the place, as I always do.", says Durham about the work for Goslar. One of his first exhibitions after moving to Europe, *História concisa de Portugal* 1995, uses quotes from the Nobel Price winning author José Saramago, and "he was pleased that I would use excerpts from his book *The year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* as sources I would engage my work with."

The sculpture *The Center of the World in Goslar* is a tree assembled from different materials and objects such as steel and plastic pipes, glass, bones, wooden branches and boards, steering wheel and many more, with cables, ropes and flexible tubes as roots. The idea of this tree started when a guide took Durham in February to the Kaiserpfalz where he saw a mural of the history of Germany including a painting where the soldiers of Karl der Große are destroying a tree that was considered the center of world of the people of the area. "I am interested that every place that I have seen has the idea of being the center of the world, so there is no real center, despite all ideologies, just multiple centers", says Durham. "My work wants to honour and celebrate that tree as a center, not depict it."

In the second exhibition room Durham places the installation *Evidence*, which engages the notion of "witch" and how it was used to discriminate against and extinct other forms of knowledge and existence through the dominant power. Everyday household objects, such as plates, clothes and books, combined with seemigly scientific objects such as a scale, glass bottles, a mortar and a still are placed on neutral desks, reminding one of the mode of display of objects police uses to produce evidence of guilt. "If someones house or apartment, or where someone lives is broken in by the authorities anything that is found or not found can be seen as evidence for criminality.", Durham says.

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