

JIMMIE DURHAM

SOUND AND SILLINESS

INTRODUZIONE

“Vorrei che non ci prendessimo troppo sul serio ma che considerassimo più seriamente l’umanità, non la nostra importanza all’interno di essa. Alla lunga preferirei essere più inutile che utile”, così Jimmie Durham, poeta, artista e attivista politico, descrive la scelta di intitolare la sua mostra monografica al MAXXI, *Sound and Silliness*.

Il titolo, apparentemente desueto e anticonvenzionale, è un invito a cambiare punto di vista, a guardare la realtà in modo diverso, perché, come afferma lo stesso Durham, soltanto la leggerezza e l’ironia consentono di cogliere il senso più profondo della vita.

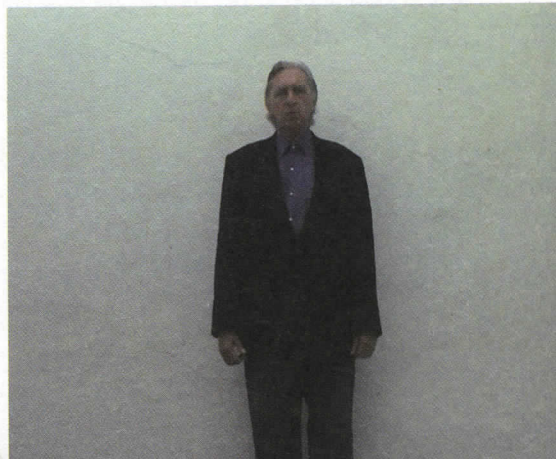
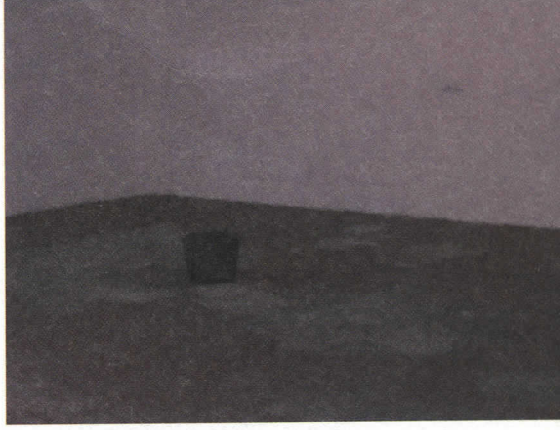
Curata da Hou Hanru e Giulia Ferracci, la mostra presenta due opere video e due lavori audio realizzati in Italia e profondamente legati al nostro Paese: *I rondoni di Porta Capuana* (2013), che riproduce il cinguettio degli uccelli nei pressi di Porta Capuana a Napoli; un lavoro audio che registra il fragore di trecento bicchieri infranti da una pietra; *A proposal for a New International Genuflexion in Promotion of World Peace* (2007), un’opera che celebra la riconciliazione e la pace; *Fleur de Pas Mal*

INTRODUCTION

“I wish we didn’t take ourselves so seriously but rather took humanity more seriously, not our own importance in it. In the long run, I’d rather be useless than useful,” says poet, artist and political activist Jimmie Durham, explaining how he chose the title *Sound and Silliness* for his solo exhibition at MAXXI.

This unconventional, apparently outmoded title is an invitation to change our point of view and to look at reality with different eyes, because, as Durham himself says, only frivolity and humor allow us to grasp the deeper meaning of life.

Curated by Hou Hanru and Giulia Ferracci, the exhibition includes two video works and two audio works made in Italy and with profound ties to our country: *I rondoni di Porta Capuana* (2013), which reproduces the chirping of birds near the Porta Capuana in Naples, an audio work with the sound of three hundred glasses being shattered by a stone, *A Proposal for a New International Genuflexion in Promotion of World Peace* (2007), which celebrates reconciliation and peace, and *Fleur de Pas Mal* (2005), a video that shows a stone falling into a can of paint.



(2005), un video che ritrae la caduta di una pietra in un barattolo di vernice.

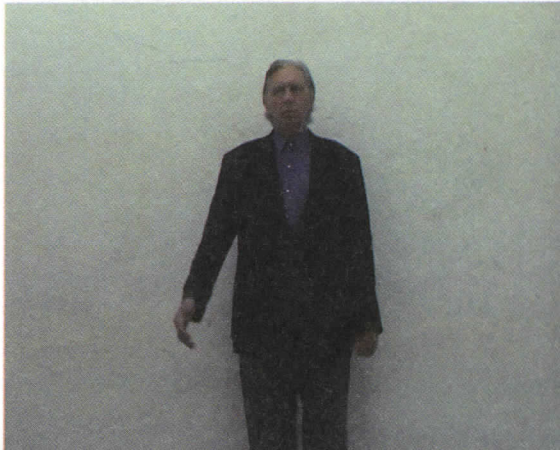
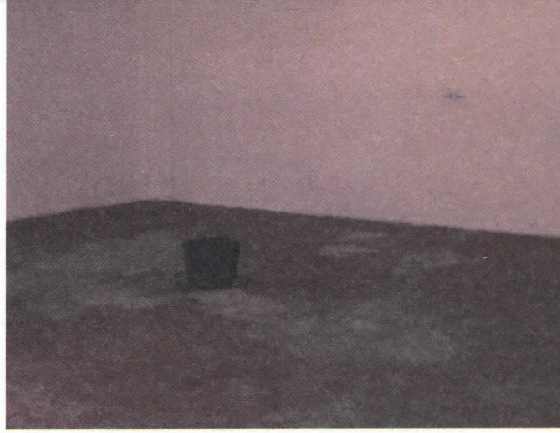
Sound and Silliness è una mostra esile, quasi "immateriale" che nega la monumentalità e l'autocelebrazione privilegiando un allestimento essenziale, in linea con la spazialità fluida disegnata da Zaha Hadid. L'obiettivo è produrre un'esperienza, un percorso sensoriale basato sul suono e sul video che incoraggia i visitatori a rovesciare i propri pregiudizi nei confronti della realtà per esperire lo spazio del MAXXI in modo nuovo.

In questa prospettiva tutto è possibile; personalmente sono rimasta incantata dal video di una pietra che cade nella vernice e si trasforma in una "pittura aerea, un incrocio tra una bomba e un fiore", un fiore che esplode nell'aria dipingendola; mentre il gesto dell'artista che si inginocchia di fronte al pubblico diventa un invito umano e dolcissimo alla riconciliazione e alla pace. La mostra conferma inoltre l'interesse del museo per la valorizzazione dei grandi protagonisti della creatività contemporanea, le cui ricerche hanno rappresentato un punto di riferimento per le ultime generazioni. Da Pistoletto a Pesce, Nervi e Boetti, in questi anni la programmazione del MAXXI ha affiancato

Sound and Silliness is a tenuous, almost immaterial exhibition, and one that goes against monumentality and self-celebration, calling for an essential display installation in harmony with the fluid spatiality created by Zaha Hadid. The idea is to create an experience, a sensory journey based on sound and sight that will encourage visitors to cast aside their prejudices with regard to reality and to experience MAXXI in a new, revolutionary way.

Like this, everything is possible, and I personally was enchanted by the video of a stone falling into paint and turning it into an "air painting – a cross between a bomb and a flower": a flower that explodes in the air, painting it. At the same time, the gesture of the artist kneeling in front of his audience is an adorable, very human invitation to reconciliation and peace.

The exhibition once again shows how the museum aims to promote the great masters of contemporary creativity, whose artistic research has become a benchmark for the younger generations. In recent years, the MAXXI exhibition program has accompanied events devoted to established artists, ranging from Pistoletto to Pesce, Nervi and Boetti, with projects that focus on the young, such



esposizioni di artisti già affermati a progetti dedicati ai giovani, come il Premio MAXXI o YAP, Young Architects Program, rivolto agli architetti under 35. Il nostro intento è creare un museo "laboratorio", un cantiere aperto a più linguaggi che promuova la ricerca e la formazione, perché, come ci ricorda Jimmie Durham, "se (...) fare arte significa produrre conoscenza, allora lavorare insieme può essere un buon laboratorio. Non si è mai intelligenti da soli, ma nel dialogo"¹.

Scendiamo dall'ipertrofia egoica che avvolge l'uomo contemporaneo e ascoltiamo piuttosto con leggerezza e ironia le voci degli altri.

Giovanna Melandri
Presidente Fondazione MAXXI

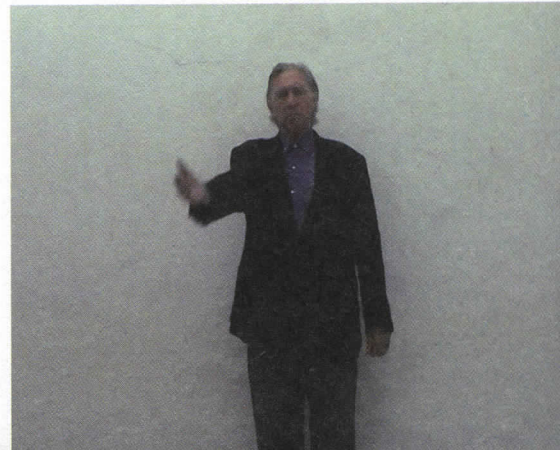
as the MAXXI Prize and the Young Architects Program (YAP), aimed at architects aged under 35. Our aim is to create a laboratory-style museum, a building site open to multiple forms of art that promotes research and education, because, as Jimmie Durham reminds us, "if [...] making art is the production of knowledge, then probably coming together to work can be a good factory. One is not smart on one's own, but in dialogue."¹

Let us therefore come down from the egoic hypertrophy that envelops contemporary humanity and listen instead with lightness and humor to the voices of others.

Giovanna Melandri
President, Fondazione MAXXI

1 Jimmie Durham, "Insegnare arte, Fare arte", in *Jimmie Durham*, a cura di Anna Daneri, Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, Roberto Pinto, Charta, Milano 2004, p. 12.

1 Jimmie Durham, "Teaching Art, Making Art," in *Jimmie Durham*, Anna Daneri, Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, Roberto Pinto, eds., Milan: Charta, 2004, p. 13.



IN THE CITY OF ROME

In the City of Rome are power stations.
These distribute electric currents
(The ultimate source of which I know not),
By means of copper wire,

To every building in Rome,
Every apartment, to every office
Where administrators scheme and plan.

Fresh water from mountains and lakes
Is brought into the city of Rome
Through steel pipes and is pumped into
Each building, each office and apartment,

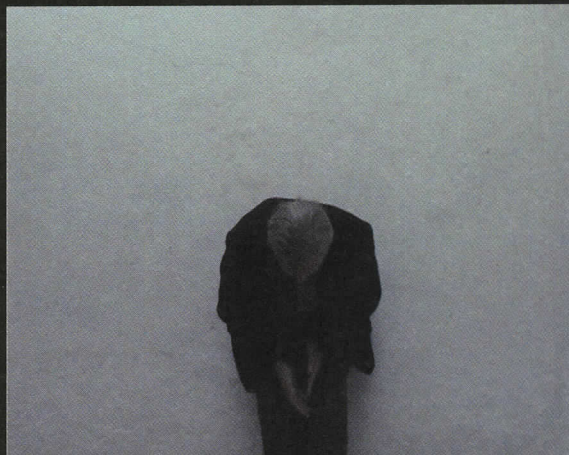
By means of steel pipes. Waste
Water is taken away by other pipes,
And every building holds pipes channeling
Rain water from the roof to below the street.

Fresh food and clothing arrive daily
For the sitting administrators, for the men
Manning the pumps, the workers in the power
Stations, and those maintaining channels and streets,
By trucks, trains and aeroplanes.

Each person, whether administrating or working,
Is allowed units of monetary currency
And may use them to purchase whatever
Fresh food they desire.

Men and women who are assigned no work
Stand on the streets, their hands held out
In supplication and fearful hungry hope.

Rome 2009



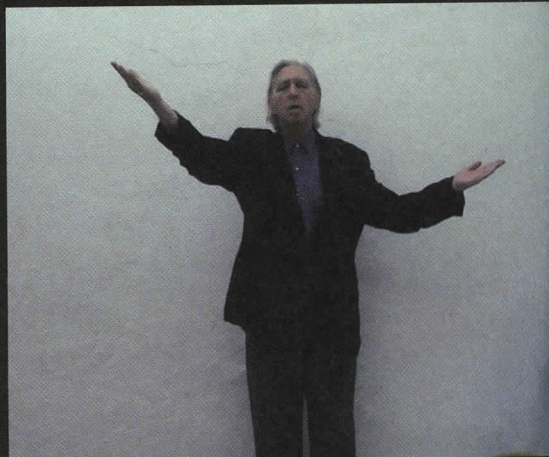




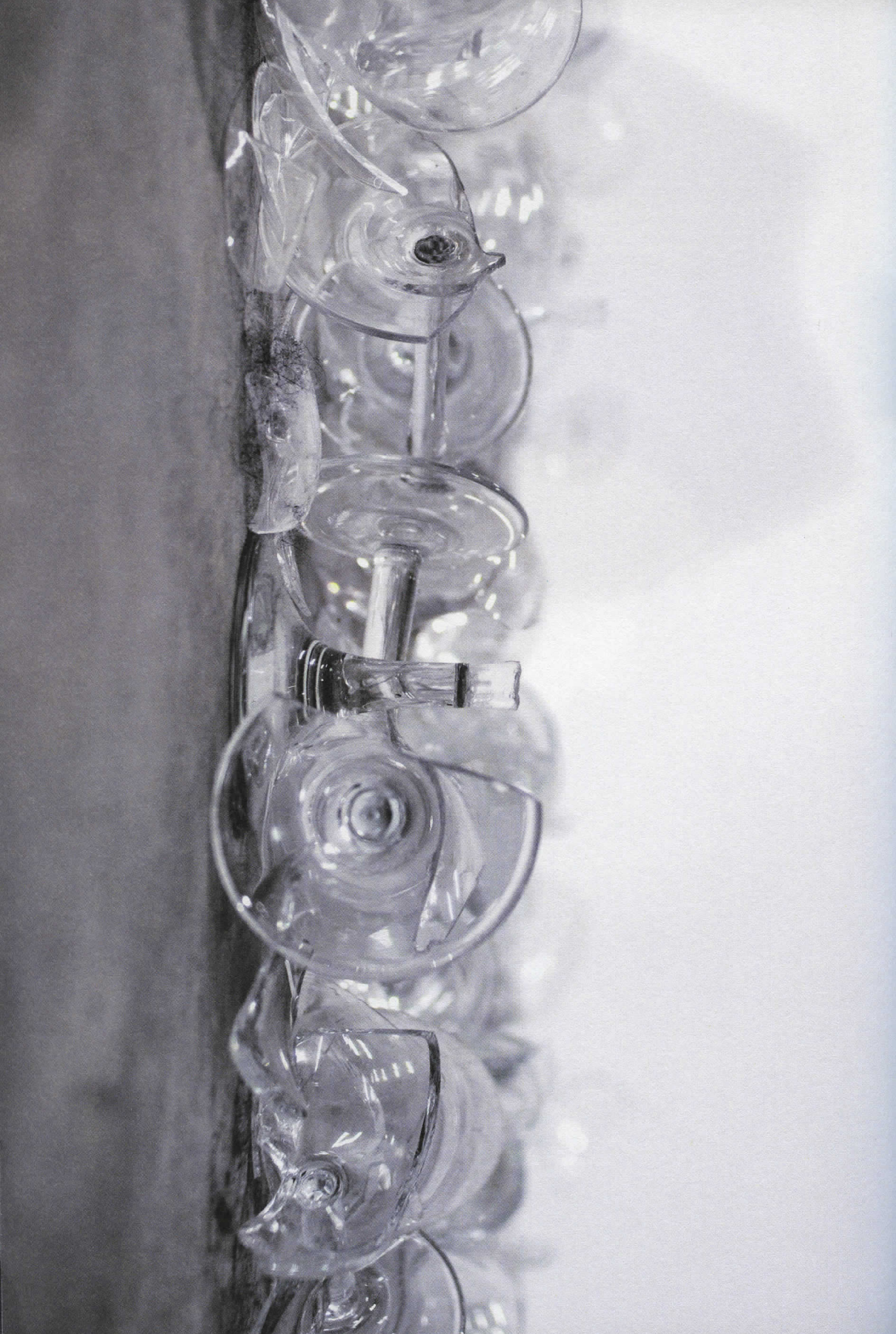
SPRING FORWARD FALL BACK

After some vin rosé I lay on a bench in a park
I was lying,
The sun shining,
Sparrows sparring,
The crocus was croaking,
Dents de lion glaring bright holes in the shiny day.

April 12, 2015, Berlin







It seems a little silly to call an exhibit silly – as if the work is not taken seriously by the artist. But then as soon as i attempt to explain it i notice how silly the phrase ‘a little silly’ sounds. A little like a bird chirping. A little bird, perhaps a silly little bird from little italy in the big apple new york city. Oh, sorry, i lost my train of thought, or the thread of my thought, as some people say. Thread-bare. Beware the dreaded tred bear. Teddy bear. Bear with me a moment if you can bear it; i will bare my soul. My sole reason for writing this is to



Ok, (do you know that ‘ok’ is a choctaw word? The choctaws are from tennessee and mississippi, but have been forced into oklahoma, which is choctaw for ‘red-earth place’) i’m going to get serious now, and stay on the point. No more ridiculous interruptions. There should have been a colon after that sentence, to show that more follows:

