

Jimmie Durham's "Works of Science and Yellowness"

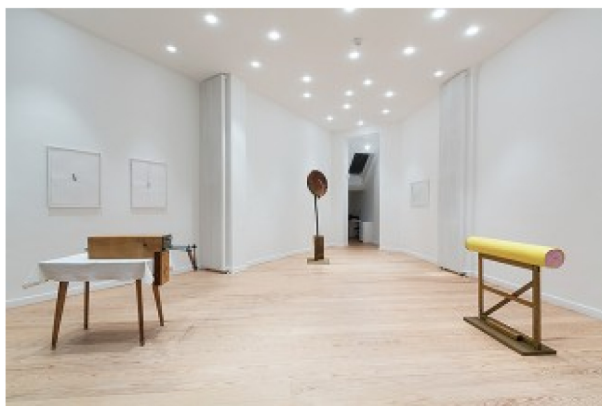
GALERIE MICHEL REIN, Brussels

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Jimmie Durham has had a significant presence in the Low Countries of late with a major survey (co-curated by Bart De Baere and Anders Kreuger) in 2012 at the Museum of Contemporary Art (M HKA) in Antwerp, as well as a solo exhibition at De Vleeshal in Middelburg earlier this year. For this reason, a third monographic presentation of his work within such a short timeframe might not seem particularly urgent. However, given the curiously distorted sense of scale that people have in this part of the world, many art lovers rarely take it upon themselves to travel the relatively short distances between Belgian cities. Durham's exhibition also marks the inauguration of Galerie Michel Rein's new space in Brussels, who like numerous dealers, has been attracted by the recent developments of the European capital's art scene. In reality, the artistic potential of the city remains largely open and unresolved, leaving a number of expectations as yet to be fulfilled.

The gallery space, and thus the exhibition, is relatively modest in size, but this is not too much of an issue, as it brings together three sculptural works and five drawings rather neatly into a formal unity. With an opportunity for more focused looking, we still gain insight into Durham's relationship to a range of objects, particularly those he found or appropriated. All the works bear witness to how he bonded with them—and interrogated their material quality—over time, before he eventually released them back into the world as artworks. As has been the case throughout his career, Durham's "homespun" aesthetic still remains provocative within the context of the professional art world. In particular, his sculptures work against the logic of the lifecycles typically attributed to manufactured objects by providing them with new characteristics, personalities, and values.



1 View of Jimmie Durham's "Works of Science and Yellowness," Galerie Michel Rein, Brussels, 2013.



2 (Background) Jimmie Durham, *Untitled 3* from "Charts" series, 2005. Pencil on paper, 51 x 72 cm. (Foreground) Jimmie Durham, *Yellow Higgs Transmitting Apparatus*, 2013. PVC pipe, metal, wood, acrylic paint, and glue, 87 x 94 x 29 cm.

A new sculpture, *Yellow Higgs Transmitting Apparatus* (2013), is made from a segment of yellow pipe Durham found in Brussels in 1994, which was incidentally the year he also returned to live in Europe. His use of the item exemplifies the way Durham introduces his own perspective to the elemental nature of things, redefining their status and the reason for their existence in personal, idiosyncratic terms. Sitting on a wooden stand, the pipe is sealed on one end, with the top of an oil canister glued precariously to the other. Presumably being the pivotal work that inspired the title of the exhibition, the sculpture's own title seems to comment on the rhetoric of scientific discovery and the very questions the world of physics currently explores about the nature of existence. While Durham's opinions on these "big" questions seem ambiguous at first, you eventually get the sense that he wishes to draw us towards the relatively "small" issue of how our subjectivity assists in the understanding of complex things.

Two additional sculptures stand not too far away: *Untitled* (1994), a table combined with separate chunks of wood and metal parts that together form a sort of hybrid machine or animal, and *Hertz Receiving Apparatus* (2013), a television satellite receiver coated with chameleon car paint that changes color depending on your view (a simple twig, painted yellow, acts as the receiver). Anthropomorphic in scale, these works engage with the viewer, but they seem much more attuned to themes of industrialism and redundant technologies than anything else, looking back to the era of mechanics and radio waves. Durham's interest in the technological progress that harnesses the universe's energy—understanding that electricity and radio waves are part of nature—propels these works into the realms of the cosmic.

Surrounding the sculptures are a group of selected drawings from two different series Durham produced over the past decade—three untitled works from the "Atelier Calder" series (2007), which were part of an exhibition at the gallery's Parisian space earlier this year, and two untitled works from his "Charts" series (2005), which were presented in his M HKA retrospective. In this sense, these drawings might even be considered to be "re-presentations." *Untitled 3* and *4* (2013) from "Charts" are graphs of sorts, responding to the way in which progress is measured through the analysis of minutiae. One graph is labeled as "Parentheses" and the other as "Different uses of diffusion if using fusion/fision – mission scissions" (*sic*). The absurdity of both headers illustrates the impossibility of making sense of their rather loopy results—results of what exactly, we have no clue, but it ultimately doesn't matter, because the main point is that data can be merely anecdotal. Durham is an artist having a renaissance moment, and would most likely be unappreciative of a chart like this—one that



3 Jimmie Durham, *Yellow Higgs Transmitting Apparatus* (detail), 2013.



4 View of Jimmie Durham's "Works of Science and Yellowness," Galerie Michel Rein, Brussels, 2013.

analyzes all the highs, lows, hits, and misses of his life and work. It wouldn't do it justice, floundering uncomfortably in its own inadequacy to summarize such a broad career and practice.

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5 Jimmie Durham, *Hertz Receiving Apparatus*, 2013.



6 View of Jimmie Durham's "Works of Science and Yellowness,"
Galerie Michel Rein, Brussels, 2013.