

## Jimmie Durham “Various Items and Complaints” at Serpentine Gallery

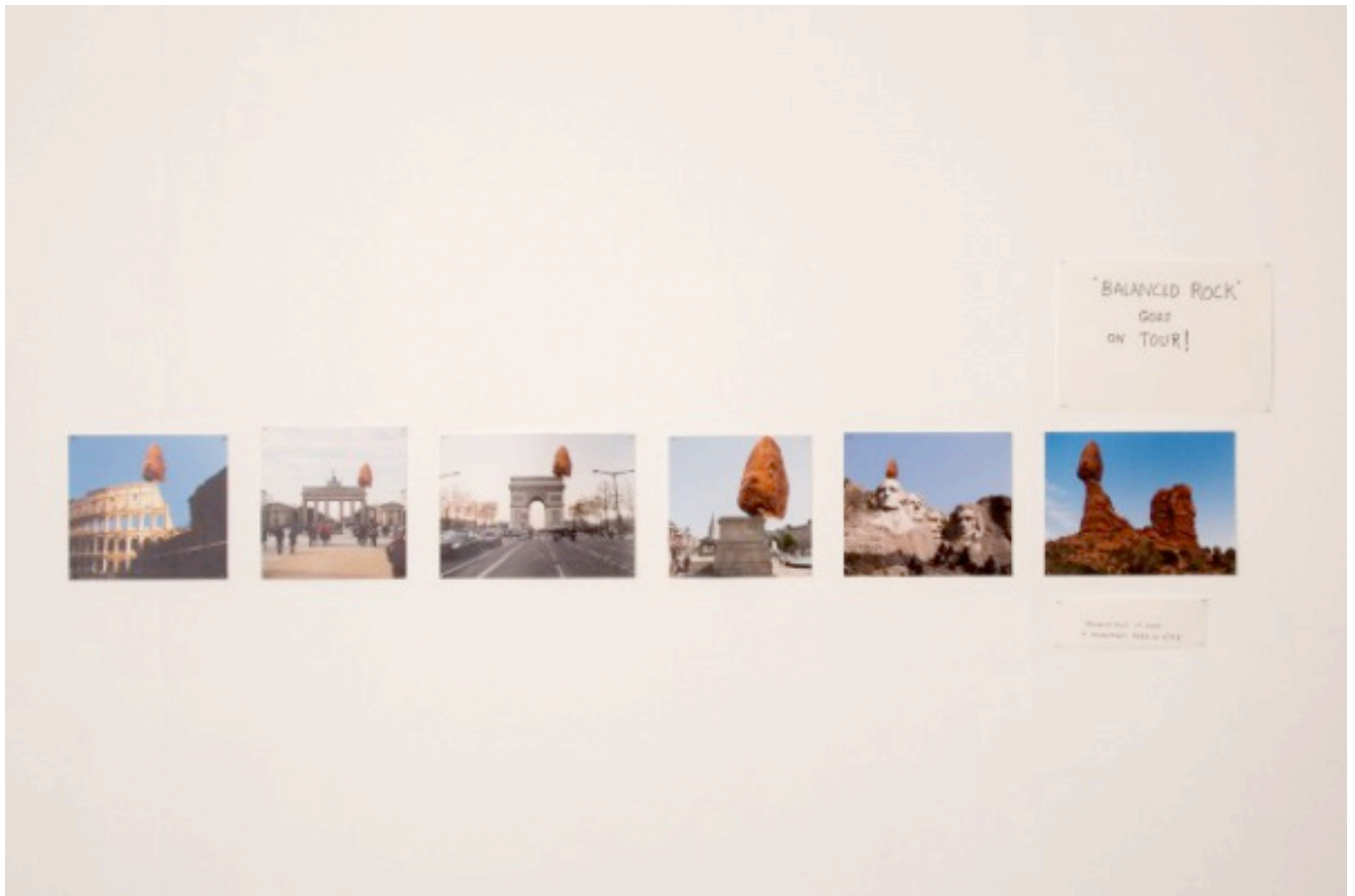


This autumn, the Serpentine presents an exhibition by Jimmie Durham (b. 1940, USA), an artist, poet, essayist and political activist, whose career spans five decades. This major survey show at the Serpentine Gallery highlights his multi-dimensional practice, including sculpture, drawing and film. Alongside new sculptures and key installations, the exhibition shows a group of early works that have never been exhibited in the UK.

Durham’s work explores the relationship between forms and concepts. He combines words within his sculptures and drawings to conjure images and uses images to convey ideas. His sculptural constructions are often combined with disparate elements, such as written messages, photographs, words, drawings and objects. The core of Durham’s work is his ability to explore the intrinsic qualities of the materials he uses, at times fused with the agility of wordplay and, above all, irony.

The Serpentine exhibition begins with two new sculptures that are suggestive of airport security control scanning machines: The Arc de Triomphe For Personal Use (London Version) and Three Forbidden Things

(London version) coerce the visitor to walk through wooden gateways. The sculptures consider historical monuments as symbols of a nation's triumph but also the supposed free borders in Europe, which resonate with the present migrant crisis in Calais. Europe's past, a guiding thread in the conception of the exhibition, is evidenced with works such as *The History of Europe* (2012), comprising two vitrines: one contains a sheet of paper presenting facts about Europe; the other juxtaposes two found objects—a prehistoric stone tool and an obsolete bullet from the Second World War—to evoke a timeline for civilisation.



In the 1950s, Durham worked extensively with wood, in the 1960s he started combining it with other materials, investigating the inherent qualities of the mediums he selected. In the 1980s, his experimentations evolved from object-based artworks to sculptural assemblages. Durham started using everyday objects including a range of materials from wood to PVC piping, metal screws and TV screens, which would become central to his practice in the following decades. Though Durham is wary of iconic representation in his work, in the late 1980s and early 1990s he began experiments on the relationship between culture and man-made objects through his extensive use of installations.

At the heart of Durham's practice is a continuous exploration and production of hybrid and seemingly fragmented installations that invite the viewer to reconstitute or reconstruct the underlying signs embedded in his works. His work addresses the political and cultural forces, e.g. the forces of colonialism that constructs our contemporary discourses and challenges our understanding of authenticity in art. Since Durham moved to Europe in the early 1990s, his works often, but not exclusively, challenge the idea of architecture, monumental works and narration of national identities by deconstructing those stereotypes and prejudices on which the Western culture is based.



