

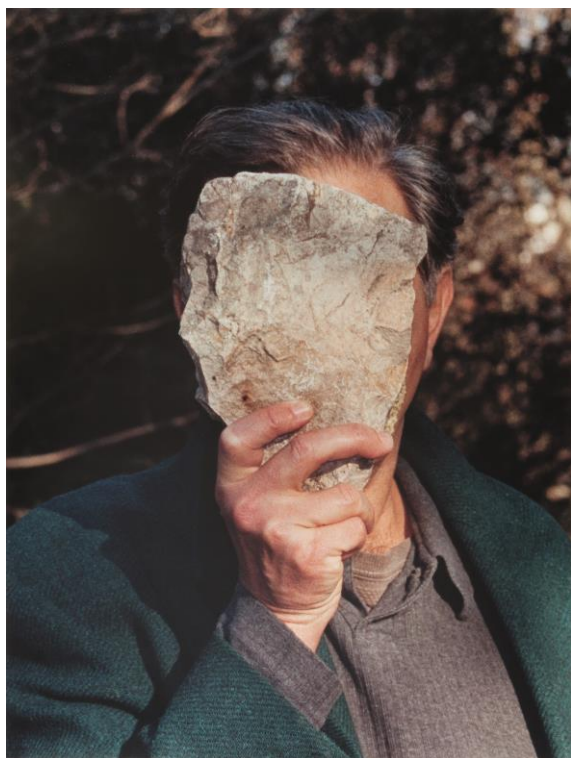
# WHITNEY

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# PRESS RELEASE



Jimmie Durham, *Self-Portrait Pretending to Be a Stone Statue of Myself*, 2006. Color photograph. Edition of 1 + 1 AP. 31 ¾ × 24 in. (80.7 × 60.9 cm). Collection of fluid archives, Karlsruhe. Courtesy of ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe.

## THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT FIRST U.S. RETROSPECTIVE OF JIMMIE DURHAM

**NEW YORK, September 20, 2017**—The Whitney Museum of American Art will host the first North American retrospective of artist, performer, poet, essayist, and activist Jimmie Durham (b. 1940), one of the most compelling and multifaceted figures working internationally today. On view from November 3, 2017 to January 28, 2018, *Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* features approximately 120 works from 1970 to the present, including sculpture, drawing, collage, printmaking, photography, and video.

Durham has, over the past nearly five decades, produced wryly political art, often raising questions about authenticity and making visible the ongoing repercussions of colonialism, both within the U.S. and globally. Frequently working with a combination of natural and found materials, he approaches his subjects with a poetic wit and a potent blend of irony and insight.

“The Whitney is delighted to present the work of Jimmie Durham, who has made a singular contribution to contemporary art since the 1970s,” said Adam D. Weinberg, the Whitney’s Alice Pratt Brown Director. “This retrospective provides an opportunity for audiences to gain a deeper understanding of Durham’s expansive practice, or perhaps to discover his work for the first time. We are grateful to the Hammer Museum, in particular to director Ann Philbin and curator Anne Ellegood, for organizing this long-overdue retrospective.”

Whitney curator Elisabeth Sussman, who is installing the exhibition at the Whitney together with assistant curator Laura Phipps, noted, “Although Jimmie Durham has lived as an expatriate for decades, his work has remained connected to crucial developments in American art, such as found-object assemblage, appropriation of text and image, institutional critique, performance art, and the politics of representation. This is Durham’s first substantial solo show in the United States in twenty-two years and it’s a rare chance to celebrate his extraordinary accomplishments as an artist and to revel in his wit, his fascination with language, and his remarkable use of materials.”

After studying art in Geneva at the École des Beaux-Arts from 1969 to 1973, Durham returned to the U.S. to become a full-time activist for the American Indian Movement, an advocacy group founded in 1968 to address issues facing Native Americans. Durham's activist work influenced him in the years that followed his return to art, and he has frequently explored the ways in which Eurocentric biases impact representations of Indigenous peoples. Durham became part of the vibrant New York City downtown art scene in the 1980s. He moved to Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1987 and then to Europe, where he has lived in a number of different cities since 1994, currently splitting his time between Berlin and Naples. Durham has rarely exhibited in the United States over the past twenty years. Since his participation in *Documenta IX* (1992), however, his work has been widely shown and critically embraced in Europe. Since leaving the U.S., Durham has immersed himself in the culture and history of each adopted home, drawing on the local language, materials, and architecture to reframe his larger political, historical, and philosophical questions. Throughout his travels, he has dryly declared wherever he happens to be—from Mexico City to Berlin to Naples—the “center of the world.”

This exhibition, as it has traveled from its previous venues at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, has revived debates, dating back to the early 1990s, over the artist's claims of Cherokee ancestry. Durham is not recognized as a citizen by any of the Cherokee tribes, which as sovereign nations determine their own membership. Recent discussions of this point have prompted a wider audience to confront important questions regarding tribal sovereignty, and what it means—or does not mean—for an artist to self-identify as being Native American. This exhibition does not attempt to resolve these questions. Rather it contends that Durham's work—with its singular and vital critique of Western systems of knowledge and power—offers a crucial perspective on the history of American art and life.

### About the Artist

Jimmie Durham was born in 1940. In the late 1960s, he enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts in Geneva, where he worked primarily in performance and sculpture. At this time, he formed an organization called Incomindios, with Indigenous friends from South America, which attempted to coordinate and encourage support for the struggle of Indigenous people throughout the Americas. A lifelong activist, he returned to the U.S. at the end of 1973 during the occupation at Wounded Knee, in South Dakota, and became a full-time organizer for the American Indian Movement (AIM); he would become a member of their Central Council in 1974. That same year AIM established the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and appointed Durham the executive director. Durham relocated to New York City to run the IITC and become the representative of American Indians to the United Nations.

Durham resigned from AIM in 1979 and returned to a focus on art making. He was the director of the Foundation for the Community of Artists in New York from 1981 to 1983, and edited their monthly *Art and Artists Newspaper* (formerly *Artworkers News*) from 1982 to 1985. In 1987, Durham moved to Cuernavaca, Mexico, and then in 1994 to Europe, where he has lived in Dublin, Brussels, Marseille, Rome, Berlin, and Naples.

Durham's exhibition history spans several decades and continents. Recent solo exhibitions include *God's Children, God's Poems* (Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, 2017); *Here at the Center* (Neue Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, 2015); *Venice: Objects, Work and Tourism* (Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice, 2015); and *Various Items and Complaints* (Serpentine Gallery, London, 2015). Group shows include *Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology* (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2014) and *Documenta* (2012), among many others. A retrospective of his work—*A Matter of Life and Death and Singing*—was organized by the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp (2012), and a survey of his work from 1994 forward, *Pierres rejetées*, took place at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2009). Durham's works are included in major public collections around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Tate Modern, London; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp; the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent; the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and the Museo Jumex, Mexico City. Durham's work is also part of the Whitney's permanent collection. *Self Portrait* was included in the Museum's inaugural show in its downtown home in 2015, *America is Hard to See*, and in the 1998 exhibition *Art at the End of the Century: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art*, as well as in the exhibition *The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-2000 (Part II)*. His work also appeared at the Whitney in the 1993 Biennial, the 2006 Biennial, and the 2014 Biennial. Durham has also co-curated a number of exhibitions, including *Ni' Go Tlunh A Doh Ka (We Are Always Turning Around On Purpose)* at the Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, State University of New York Old Westbury, Long Island, New York, in 1986 (co-curated with Jean Fisher); *We The People* at Artists Space, New York, in 1987 (co-curated with Jean Fisher; special advisors Edgar Heap of Birds and G. Peter Jemison); and *The American West*, at Compton Verney in Warwickshire, England, in 2005 (co-curated with Richard W. Hill).

An avid essayist and poet, Durham has published many texts in journals such as *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, and *Third Text*. His book of poems, *Columbus Day*, was published in 1983 by West End Press, Minneapolis. A book of his collected essays, *A Certain Lack of Coherence*, was published in 1993 by Kala Press. In 2013, *Jimmie Durham: Waiting to Be Interrupted, Selected Writings 1993-2012* was published by Mousse Publishing and Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, and his book of poetry *Poems That Do Not Go Together* was published by Edition Hansjörg Maye.

## About the Catalogue

*Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* is accompanied by a catalogue comprising scholarly essays, an interview with the artist, an illustrated chronology, and a selection of Durham's poetry and essays dating from 1974 as well as a new essay written for this volume. It contains a central essay by exhibition curator Anne Ellegood and contributions by renowned scholars and writers Jennifer A. González, Jessica L. Horton, Fred Moten, Paul Chaat Smith, MacKenzie Stevens, Elisabeth Sussman, and Jessica Berlanga Taylor. The book examines the impact and importance of Durham's work in the context of American art; recounts his participation in New York's downtown art scene of the 1980s and his time living in Cuernavaca, Mexico; explores his attentiveness to materials and inventive use of humor and language; and highlights his ongoing emphasis on acts of resistance, ambiguity, and art as a critical and social discourse. An interview with Durham explores his philosophy and ethics, and a detailed chronology covers the early years of his career and subsequent practice in Europe, where he has lived since 1994. The catalogue is designed by Purtil Family Business and co-published by the Hammer Museum and DelMonico Books-Prestel.

## Public Programs

Beyond Jimmie Durham: Contemporary Native American Art and Identity

Thursday, November 16, 6:30pm

Susan and John Hess Family Theater

Tickets \$10/\$8 members, students, seniors

The exhibition *Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* has triggered critical conversations about who is defined as a Native artist. While these debates have recently entered the mainstream art world, they have been going on for decades in the Native art field, revealing the complexities inherent in the reception of Native artists in the broader contemporary art world. This roundtable discussion with artists, curators, and scholars addresses these debates and considers new ways that American institutions might approach Native art and artists in the future. The panel includes Jeffrey Gibson, Ashley Holland, Betsy Theobald Richards, and Jolene Rickard, and is moderated by Kathleen Ash-Milby.

Feathered Flags: A Lecture by Paul Chaat Smith

Friday, January 19, 2018 at 6:30PM

Susan and John Hess Family Theater

Tickets \$10/\$8 members, students, seniors

Drawing on his decades long association with Jimmie Durham as well as his recent curatorial projects at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, Smith explores the contradiction at the heart of the American national project. He argues that even though the vast majority of the people of the United States have little contact with Indians, they know their lives are shaped by a fundamental truth: the country's existence is inextricably tied to the dispossession of the original inhabitants. The ubiquitous place names and imagery that surround Americans throughout their lives are constant and powerful reminders, and a kind of meditation on that unresolved past that continues to shape our present.

Paul Chaat Smith is a Comanche author, essayist, and curator. He joined the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in 2001, where he serves as associate curator. His exhibitions include James Luna's *Emendatio*, Fritz Scholder: *Indian/Not Indian*, and Brian Jungen: *Strange Comfort*. Smith is the author (with Robert Warrior) of *Like a Hurricane: the Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. His second book, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*, was published in 2009 by the University of Minnesota Press. Although he spends most of his time crafting game-changing exhibitions and texts, he also enjoys reading obsessively about the early days of the Soviet space program, watching massive amounts of televised sports, and writing about himself in the third person.

Additional programs will be announced.

## Curatorial Credits

*Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* was organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and curated by Anne Ellegood, senior curator, with MacKenzie Stevens, curatorial assistant. It travelled to the Walker Art Center prior to coming to the Whitney, where its installation is being overseen by Elisabeth Sussman, curator and Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, and assistant curator Laura Phipps. Following the Whitney, the exhibition will travel to the Remai Modern in Saskatoon.

## Sponsorship

*Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* is organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

The exhibition is made possible, in part, by generous support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Henry Luce Foundation.

In New York, generous endowment support is provided by The Keith Haring Foundation Exhibition Fund.

### **About the Whitney**

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### **Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art**

Toyin Ojih Odutola: To Wander Determined	October 20, 2017–February 25, 2018
Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World	November 3, 2017–January 28, 2018
Laura Owens	November 10, 2017–February 4, 2018
Experiments in Electrostatics: Photocopy Art from the Whitney's Collection, 1966–1986	Opens November 17, 2017
Christine Sun Kim: 95 Horatio Street	Opens January 2018
Juan Antonio Olivares: Moléculas	Opens March 2, 2018
Zoe Leonard: Survey	March 2, 2018–June 10, 2018
Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables	March 2, 2018–June 10, 2018
Between the Waters	Opens March 2018
Nick Mauss	Opens March 2018
Mary Corse	Opens June 2018
Pacha, Llacta, Wasichay: Building the Indigenous Present	Opens July 2018
David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night	Summer 2018
Kevin Beasley	Opens Fall 2018
Andy Warhol	Opens November 2018
An Incomplete History of Protest:	Ongoing
Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1940–2017	Ongoing
Where We Are: Selections from the Whitney's Collection 1900–1960	Ongoing
Do Ho Suh: 95 Horatio Street	Ongoing

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Tuesday. Adults: \$25. Full-time students and visitors 65 & over: \$18. Visitors 18 years & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).

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