

Daniel ARSHAM

*Sotheby's,
A Modern Polymath : Daniel Arsham*

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A MODERN POLYMATH

DANIEL ARSHAM

The American artist explains his inputs ahead of a forthcoming show in Paris, from zen gardens to colour blindness

It's 5pm in Paris, and Daniel Arsham is finishing up a drawing for his forthcoming exhibition *Moonraker* at the city's Musée Guimet. I can actually hear the scratching sound of his pencil on paper. From October, he will fill the museum with a dozen sculptures based on iconic works from antiquity. He was drawn, for example, to the draping of a headless female divinity, and to the Venus of Arles, discovered in pieces, reassembled and partially dismantled again, except for the arms added by French sculptor François Girardon. "I like that work because of the layering of histories," he says. "It adds to the idea that archaeology is not fixed as we often imagine."

There is a continuation here of the ideas that have defined Arsham's practice; ideas that trace back to Hurricane Andrew, which demolished his home when he was age 12 and are present in his work with Snarkitecture, the design practice he co-founded to keep investigating the boundaries between disciplines. These themes also play into his collaborations with choreographer Merce Cunningham, fashion designer Hedi Slimane, Adidas, Dior, Porsche and Pharrell Williams, and are at the heart of *Future Relics*, his series of eroded objects excavated from some fictional archaeological site. "There is a sense in my works that they can float in time," he says. "Even if they seem in a state of decay, they could be falling apart or growing to some kind of completion."

His new body of works activate a vast collection of moulds at the Réunion des Musées Nationaux – Grand Palais (RMN), and will be showcased throughout the Musée Guimet, not just on the top-floor rotunda usually reserved for such *cartes blanches*. A zen garden, inspired by those he studied with monks in Kyoto, will occupy the latter space. "At night the patterns raked into the ground actually become more heightened, because of the angle of the moonlight." Hence the title of the show, *Moonraker*. It is a nautical term, as well as the name of a James Bond movie, but also a "made-up term", as Arsham puts it, that could refer to

PHOTO: GUILLAUME ZICARELLI; COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN; PHOTO: CLAIRE DORN; PHOTO: DANIEL ARSHAM STUDIO; PHOTO: NOAH KALINA; PHOTO: DANIEL ARSHAM STUDIO



“There is a sense in my works that they can float in time”

the artist himself. “When you are raking you are gathering things which, in a sense, is what I have done with the works in the museum – I have raked them together.”

This site-specific zen garden will be blue, in keeping with the one presented at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta in 2017, and in tribute to Jean-Baptiste Guimet, the chemist and father of Musée Guimet’s founder who created the synthetic ultramarine “Guimet blue” in 1828. This brings us to colour blindness – Arsham considered correcting his in 2015 with special lenses made by EnChroma Technology, which is how pinks and purples came into his work. “At first it gave me a broader feeling of colour but I did not really like that. So I quickly resumed to a more muted palette” – a palette true to the geological

materials he uses, from black volcanic ash to the white surface of walls he manipulates in the most unexpected ways.

There was a silver lining to quarantine. It allowed the artist, known for his tridimensional work, to go back to painting – which he once studied at The Cooper Union in New York – and prepare for an exhibition next January at Perrotin in NYC. The display will consist of a dozen contemporary *cappricii* – architectural fantasies bringing together buildings from different places and times. Once again, it’s all about blurring the lines.

Art, architecture, filmmaking, stage design, fashion, cars... when asked what is left for him to conquer, the multifaceted artist, so far quick to reply, pauses. Nothing comes to mind. “All of these fields do not feel that different to me. In whatever I create there are hints and clues, sorts of Easter eggs that reveal a larger narrative.” As a gifted all-rounder, Arsham is bound to believe that everything will eventually come full circle. “I will send you the sketch I was doing while we were talking,” he said. And he did – a small black and white study for the head of the Venus of Arles, riddled with crystals on the left side.

Moonraker, Musée Guimet, Paris, through 25 January 2021 —SARAH BELMONT

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2004

Arsham and several artist friends launch The House, an exhibition space where he met Emmanuel Perrotin the same year



2006

Dance choreographer Merce Cunningham asks him to design the set, lighting and costumes for his piece *eyeSpace*



2008

Arsham launches Snarkitecture with partner Alex Mustonen to make “architecture do things it is not intended to do”



2014

The artist creates *Future Relic*, a series of short futuristic films starring Juliette Lewis, Mahershala Ali and James Franco



2019

A pretend relic of Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* featuring blue calcite, quartz, and hydrostone sells at Sotheby’s New York



(Clockwise from left) Daniel Arsham; *Blue Zen Garden* (detail), 2017; Emmanuel Perrotin; Daniel Arsham in collaboration with Merce Cunningham for *eyeSpace*, 2007; *Slab Table*, 2010; *Future Relic* 03, 2015; *Eroded Brillo Boxes*, 2019