

**Daniel ARSHAM**

*Curbed,*

*Artist Daniel Arsham Invites You to His 'Signature Decay'*

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# Artist Daniel Arsham Invites You to His 'Signature Decay'

By Wendy Goodman



Daniel Arsham, *Cave of the Sublime, Iceland, 2020*. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli, Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin

The architect and artist Daniel Arsham is not afraid of the high concept. His firm, Snarkitecture, has designed, among other things, the so-called "selfie destination" Snark Park inside the mall Hudson Yards. Arsham himself has become known for his sculptures depicting decaying or fossilized modern objects and consumer detritus. For his latest show at Gallery Perrotin, "Time Dilation," he subjects both classical statuary and Pokémon to his "signature decay."

**I remember visiting your office in 2007, and you had this sky-high bookcase and funny broken wall down the middle, and you lived upstairs in a loft bed accessed by a steep ladder.**

That was a great space. We're not in that space any longer. We have another cavernous space maybe four or five times the space of the other one. A little more than ten years ago Jeffrey Deitch had a branch of his gallery here.

**But you don't live there any more?**

I've upgraded to the Norman Jaffe house.

**What is the latest with Snarkitecture?**

When Alex Mustonen and I originally founded the firm 2007, it was sort of creating things much more related to my art practice, and in some cases acting as a project architect on some exhibitions that I was doing. Over time with Kith and other brands it sort of gained it's own design language. The practice continues with 15 people. We're working remotely through the pandemic. We've been working on projects all over the world. We now have a Kith in Tokyo.



*Blue Calcite Eroded Bust of Laocoön, 2020. Photo: Claire Dorn, Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin*

### **How did you come to be inspired by archeology?**

A lot of this interest in archeology came about around 2009, 2010, when I did this book of drawings of Easter Island. I went there for a number of weeks, drawing, and there was a kind of — just a very simple, curious idea that sort of presented itself to me there, which was that because that island is so remote, imagine cars or old computers, they don't ship it off the island. It just goes into a landfill on the actual island, and I was sort of thinking about a thousand years from now, the distance between trashed computers and original moai statues would be closer together in time from this archeologist perspective, right?

### **What led you to making modern artifacts?**

I thought, *Could I reverse engineer this idea of archeology*, and that led to the creation of works that surround technology, so contemporary objects rendered in materials like crystal and ash that have been pushed to their material quality into the future. When I was invited to make this exhibition at Musée Guimet, in Paris, they told me, kind of in passing, that they owned molds of these works, which originally had been made for conservation and curatorial purposes, and some of the molds themselves date back to the 19th century. Like the actual mold is almost a historical artwork in itself. So they invited me to go visit them. And because Musée Guimet is part of this larger French museum complex that owns all of the works at the Louvre, at Versailles ... they had molds of *Venus de Milo* and Michelangelo's *Moses* and literally anything you could imagine. It was such a profound, strange experience to be in there; it's enormous, like the size of a football field. Remember that scene at the end of *Indiana Jones*, in the *Lost Ark*, where they put the Ark in this box, and they put it in this government facility in an enormous warehouse with crates ... that's what this is, but it's all molds of artwork.

### **Is it right in Paris?**

It's about 40 minutes outside Paris.

### **So you could use the molds.**

But under the condition that they couldn't leave France. Effectively, I had to ship my studio over. Some of my staff went there, and we worked in their actual facility, and we also did a number of tests of my materials to ensure that they wouldn't do anything to damage their molds. Actually, the newer molds that they use are almost identical to the way we create molds here at the studio, same technique, so it worked out. And the one other part is that when I went there ... I saw all these works that were not related to Guimet, and I asked if I could use them, and they said absolutely not. And it took a little bit of coaxing from the museum director to show them it was going to be out of respect to use these things, so they basically gave me access to everything. And

I have gone further into the archive and pulled things out that are used in this exhibition.



*Amethyst Crystallized Large Gengar*, 2020. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli, Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin ©2021 Pokemon. ©1995-2021 Nintendo/CreaturesInc./GAME FREAK inc.

### **And then what about the Pokémon part?**

That is something that I grew up with as a kid, collecting the cards and watching the cartoons, and my children are into it now. Basically, I created a sculpture of one of the characters from *Pokémon*, and the company contacted me and asked if I was interested in pursuing something larger with them. So I went to their facility in Tokyo, met with their original artists, and effectively came out of there with the rights to use all of the IP in my artwork. And my wife is half Japanese and half French, so in some ways the perfect combination of universes. But understanding the Japanese culture in the small way that I do through her, these characters in *Pokémon* are in some ways extensions of ancient Japanese ways of thinking about the afterlife and magic and ritual, and all of these you can sort of trace them back, so I thought about them in a similar way as these vehicles that could move through time, and this exhibition has become a combination of a lot of the Pokémon characters as well as these Greek and Roman sculptures ... [chuckling] kind of a whole blending of universes in time.

## **I just found this out: you're color-blind?**

Yeah, yes.

## **How does that affect your work?**

Yeah, and then in the other work there is just a limited palette, which, you know, I certainly never thought about it as any kind of disability. If anything, it makes things somewhat easier in that I am able to have more limitations, which makes things easier to choose because I don't have so many options.



*Blue Calcite Eroded Nymph with a Shell, 2020. Photo: Claire Dorn, Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin*

## **What is the takeaway from the show, for you?**

I think the works are definitely an invitation to rethink your position in time. With the crystal works in particular, there's a number of things happening within them: One is obviously the visual quality of seeing something degraded or with the appearance that it is falling apart, but then you also understand that it is made of different material and that material is something geological ... and then you start to think, *How is this thing actually made? Is it falling apart? Or is it actually growing together, crystals forming it?* So the material quality of it almost says as much about the sentiment around it as what it looks like, how it appears.