

PRESSBOOK

Daniel ARSHAM

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Daniel Arsham Q&A: Fictional Archaeology

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Miami-born artist **Daniel Arsham** questions the relationship between artefact and truth in his exhibition *Fictional Archaeology*.



Hi Daniel! We are fans of the organic appearance of the works in *Fictional Archaeology*. What is the inspiration for this exhibition?

This idea about archaeology is inspired by a trip I made to Easter Island in 2011, where I saw archeologists at work. A lot of the works in this exhibition are kind of creating an archaeology of the future, and I'm doing so by the use of materials. One piece here is made entirely of crystals, crushed crystals. The black, larger sections of another one are made of volcanic ash. I'm trying to imbue the object with the material quality that really feels like they're from a different era, from the past.

Why crystals and volcanic ash?

When I first started making these works, I made it appear like it was something from now, viewed from the future. I didn't want to do a trompe l'oeil effect, so in selecting the materials, I feel that when you look at this object, knowing that it's made of ash, it has this quality of truth and realism that comes from the material, beyond the form of the sculpture itself.

The sculptures remind us of the Pompeian residents encased in ash...

Exactly. I was thinking about those objects, or figures, when I was making these two works. The other thing for me that's present – you know sometimes when you go to a museum and you see a sculpture from antiquity that's made of marble? Oftentimes the archaeologists didn't find the whole sculpture – they reassembled pieces of it and sometimes there are sections that are missing so they had to reconstruct it. Sometimes they have a diagram below that explains the missing sections. And in relation to my other work, it conveys this idea of decay and growth. When you look at my sculptures, you can't tell if they're growing together or falling apart.

What is the core idea of this exhibition?

If we think about history, about archaeology, as this invented idea, and it's from the past, can we then not project that idea forward and say, if we don't actually know what the past is really like, can the future be the same? The idea that archaeology can be fiction, not entirely truth, is informing a lot of this exhibition.



What are the difficulties in creating these works?

I've made similar sculptures before in smaller sizes, so scaling them up to this life size, there's the problem of weight. There's no established technique for making sculptures out of ash, so it's just a process of trial and error. Sometimes when I make these for the first time they don't work properly. The break happens within the mould, so it's all done at one time.

So you've currently got a dozen art students drawing on the blackboard, some frantically drawing circles, some carefully writing text. Can you talk a bit about the blackboard and what is going on here?

The chalk work is about taking these objects used for communication (telephones, gestural hands, camera, guitars) and them being translated by visitors to a mark which actually destroys the original object. You ask somebody to make a drawing about time, and many different things come out. It's about communication translated.

Fictional Archaeology is on at Galerie Perrotin until Sat Oct 10. Visit bit.ly/DanielArsham for more information.