

VISUAL ARTS

Slick, engaging work from a pair of risk-takers

Jimmie Durham: Various Items and Complaints/Rachel Rose: Palisades Serpentine Gallery, London

REVIEW BY KAREN WRIGHT



There are currently two engaging shows at the Serpentine Gallery in London. In the new space, there's a debut London exhibition solo show for a rising star, Rachel Rose. The American artist is Frieze Young Artist 2015 and she's soon to be showcased at the Whitney Museum of New York and the Castello di Rivoli in Turin. In the older space, there's an artist's artist, Jimmie Durham, a self-imposed American exile.

Durham, a Native American born in 1940, left the US permanently having long been an activist for rights for his people. He lived in Mexico for years, and like many of the Latin American artists around him collects materials and transforms them into assembled objects.

Durham has the ability to be very funny while addressing serious issues, often taking his anger out in his work, but always delivering with a lightness of touch. His *Arc de Triomphe for Personal Use*, the shape clearly an airport security screening device, invites us to walk through.

Songs of My Childhood, Part One: Songs to Get Rid Of, Part Two: Songs to Keep, a small two-screen video projection, shows him in a wheelchair (he has had serious health issues recently) performing songs from his youth. This poignant soundtrack follows the viewer around. Durham's tweaked lyrics, "Praise the lord and pass the ammunition/ And we will all go marching on", shows the political activist and poet is still alive and well. *Sweet*,

Light, Crude, a nearby sculpture, comments on the destruction caused by the oil industry utilising piled up, lollipop-coloured oil cans, a material that Durham has been using in recent years, here adorned with slogans.

Rachel Rose shows two films complete with immersive sampling surround sound. The more ambitious, *A Minute Ago*, weaves together the iconic architecture of Philip Johnson's glass house with an apocalyptic hail storm in Siberia. A ghostly vision of Johnson, sampled from archival footage, coupled with a soundtrack ramped-up from the unexpected storm alerts the visitor that all is not well.

The slick installation and skilful editing leads inevitably to comparisons with Durham's film, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. The cast includes the Albanian artist Anri Sala, with Durham himself on percussion and his wife Maria Thereza Alwes behind the camera. Its blatant comment on money and art could be seen as almost childish, if it did not reinforce serious issues about the art world that we inhabit.

Years ago I visited Durham, then living in Rome. He told me one of those aphorisms that stick in the mind: "If you do not make bad work, you are not a great artist". Risk-taking is part of the game, and I would pass this adage on to Rose whose films are undeniably engaging, polished and of the moment. Do not miss these shows, and take time to listen to Durham, read the texts and allow them to penetrate your heart.

He has the ability to be funny while addressing serious issues



To 8 November (020 7402 6075)



Outstanding in its field: Rachel Rose's 'A Minute Ago' is polished and of the moment

