

On Saturday, December 15, the Sala Dorica of the Palazzo Reale in Naples will present the exhibition “wood, stone and friends” by Jimmie Durham, artist, essayist, poet and political activist. The basis of Durham’s artistic practice lies in the attempt to deconstruct the concepts of European culture by giving the essence of the object the power to tell its own story.

The principles of celebratory monumentality, permanence and universality of architecture and sculpture, for centuries regarded as means for affirming the identity of a people and its culture, are rejected to free the object from the human urge to control its nature: the lava rock that composes the Doric hemicycle of Piazza del Plebiscito has the capacity to describe itself and recount itself regardless of the character imposed by the artistic styles and currents that have configured its form by their succession.

The Sala Dorica in the Palazzo Reale becomes a contemplative space in which various sculptures assembled out of the wood of four different types of trees, together with masses of lava stone and industrial metal fragments, are used to create a surreal setting, midway between forest and factory. The sculptures are fashioned out of the dismembered and reassembled timber from two ancient olive trees from Puglia, a walnut tree from Molise, a chestnut tree and various tropical trees, while the masses of lava stone retain their original forms. The evocative space of the room, already divided rhythmically by its tree columns, is transformed into a place where viewers are invited to immerse themselves to reflect not on the symbolic meaning that objects may acquire after being shaped by the artist but on their organic nature. The richness of wood with its scents, nodes and stratifications of time, the tactile variety of its texture, capable of communicating the essence of their being and transfer into the space where it is placed part of the history of the places from which it comes and the events it has witnessed in the flowing of the years. In this way the viewers can experience the reality of the ambiance created thanks to the primordial and empathic relationship that develops from contact with the material. Durham is inspired here by the work of Brancusi and his attempt to capture and reproduce the essences of things through a sculptural process that seeks to bring out its actual reality, the idea underlying the object rather than its visible form. The lava stone is not shaped, because the strength of its physical presence does not require any codification.

Anthony Huberman, in an essay on the artist, wrote: “did you forget that history is nothing but a collection of stories dancing together?” the Sala Dorica of the Palazzo Reale contains much history and many stories, such as the two bicentenary olive trees and the solidified magma left free to speak silently to viewers, relying on their powers of imagination. The artist’s act is simply to recreate the natural environment from which the objects put into play come, creating a forest from what in itself is already a part of it.

In a city whose stones, on which millions of people walk every day, speak different languages and are rich in additions and visions implicitly represented through their presence, where the arches and vaults have been structured by the succession of architectural styles but have always naturally absorbed different forms and colors, Jimmie Durham's vision can be applied to a customary stroll through the alleys of the historic city, where one need only silently observe murals and washing hung out to dry to realize how human control or culture in any form is powerless compared to the natural evolution of things.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*