

Sam Durant
Proposal for Public Fountain

16 May – 29 June 2013
69 South Audley St London W1
Tuesday – Saturday, 10 – 6pm

Sam Durant's third exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, *Proposal for Public Fountain*, centres on a fountain sculpted from black marble – a prototype for a larger installation in a public setting – together with a series of related graphite drawings. The structure features a reproduction of an armoured water cannon, which sprays a jet of water onto a hooded figure



bearing an anarchist flag. Its note of polemic is a defining aspect of Durant's art. Poised between detached commentary and acerbic critique, it recasts a contemporary episode of state authoritarianism in the 'stately' aesthetics of public stonework.

Durant's tableau at once expresses the heroism and pathos of the defiant revolutionary. At the same time, a sense of absurdity clings to the frozen forms and intermittently spurting water: anarchist and riot truck alike appear locked in futile gestures. The two antagonists are based on two news photographs sourced online, showing uprisings in Santiago in 2011 and 2012 (and the title's allusion to Duchamp's *Fountain* of 1917 – the archetypal 'readymade' – subtly underlines the readymade quality of these sources). The work simultaneously reaches into a long history of artistic representations of individuals subordinated by states, whether paintings of Christ's flagellation or Goya's *The Third of May 1808*.

As in those and other historical precursors, Durant elevates specific events to the level of allegory. The monochrome, simplified forms of his fountain – both the blueprint on display and the unrealised final version – crucially universalise it. In its material, it invokes civic centrepieces such as Rome's Trevi Fountain with its elaborate stonework allegories, and other decorative follies of 'Old Europe'. It also harnesses the chiselled style and histrionic poses typical of totalitarian state art, and various other grand public statements such as the hard-edged countenances of Mount Rushmore. Forms ordinarily used to validate a nation's self-image here speak of state repression, and potentially of the abuse of power. The public fountain – customarily an anodyne backdrop to civil uprisings – has here become a fraught memorial to such events.

As the title suggests, the construction is provisional and subject to revision in different contexts: the series of graphite drawings (Durant's first since 2008) maps its potential development. This latest work is one of a series of ambitious projects which explore the form and functions of public structures – most recently *Scaffold* at 'dOCUMENTA (13)', Kassel, a combination of reconstructed gallows used in executions of significance throughout US history (now on display at Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh). Here, as in this latest exhibition, Durant highlighted the endurance of imperialist behaviour and draconian rule throughout the world, and linked modern-day political violence (and its often spurious pretexts) to episodes from history. Durant's long-term interest in public monuments is also reflected in his ongoing photographic archive of defaced monuments. In addition, *Proposal for a Public Fountain* follows a body of work commemorating the key figures of the Italian anarchist movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in a series of marble busts.

Sam Durant (b. 1961, Seattle) lives in Los Angeles, California. Current and recent solo exhibitions include those of *Scaffold* at Jupiter Artland, Scotland, and *Stroom Den Haag*, The Hague; *La stessa storia*, MACRO, Rome (until 01 September); and major group exhibitions include *dOCUMENTA (13)*, Kassel, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 2012; *The Air We Breathe*, curated by Apsara DiQuinzio, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (CA), 2011; the 2006 Busan Biennial, Korea; the 2004 Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, New York; and the 2002 Venice Biennale, Italy. In 2009 he curated *Emory Douglas: Black Panther* at the New Museum, New York.

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