

Sam Durant: *Borrowed Scenery*

November 28 – January 16, 2016

Opening reception: Saturday, November 28, 6 – 8 pm

Blum & Poe is pleased to announce *Borrowed Scenery*, an exhibition of new work by Los Angeles-based artist Sam Durant. This is his tenth solo exhibition with the gallery.

Durant examines social, historical, and political issues through sculpture, installation, photography, and drawing. The works in this exhibition derive from two transformative moments in modern Japanese history — the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry’s naval fleet in Edo (Tokyo) Bay in 1853 and Japan’s victory in the war with Imperial Russia in 1905.

A suite of drawings and prints refers to the infamous encounter in which Commodore Perry forced Japan into negotiating a trade agreement with the United States by threatening a military attack. Perry was accompanied by William Heine, an artist who documented the encounter. Durant uses Heine’s work to symbolize the role of the artist in the political realm, the role of culture and identity in forming meaning, and his own position as an American artist making work for a Japanese audience. In three scroll prints, Durant pairs the images that Heine produced with Japanese depictions of the same scenes, offering a comparison between Japanese and American perceptions of the fateful encounter that changed both countries dramatically. Two sets of drawings, *Americans* and *Borrowed Scenery*, also mimic the scroll format but are less narrative. *Americans* proposes a typology of the new foreign visitors; there is both humor and foreboding present in the depictions.

Three smaller drawings of historical ukiyo-e prints depict aspects of the American arrival in 1853 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. These pieces also show different mapping styles, both Japanese and European. *1850–1900, Map of the World, America and Russia* portrays both American and Russian soldiers along with a map of Japan surrounded by foreign ships. It depicts a Japanese awareness of being an island nation at the crossroads of history and modernity. The diptych, *1853–1900, Map of the World, Japan Centered*, pairs a Japan-centered world map with a metaphorical image of an enormous hand reaching into Japanese life and people’s reactions to this intervention, ranging from jubilation to repulsion and indifference.

Another diptych, *1905, Japan Defeats Russia, Empire*, refers to the first defeat of an imperial power by an Asian country since the beginning of European colonial domination. The event can be linked to the independence struggles that have been fought around the globe during the 20th century and continue into the present. This drawing pairs a *shunga* image of a Japanese soldier raping a Russian soldier with an English atlas map depicting the effects of the victory in the region. This example of *shunga* (a genre of erotic woodblock prints dating back to the 9th Century) is significant not only for its shocking metaphor of victory in war — it makes plain the sexual dimension of conquest — but also that it signaled Japan’s own imperial desires.

Sam Durant was born in Seattle in 1961, and lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had solo exhibitions at the Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2015); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2014); Museo d’Arte Contemporanea Roma, Italy (2013); Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, MA (2006); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2003); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2002). His work has been

included in group exhibitions such as *Damage Control: Art and Destruction Since 1950*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2013); *The Living Years: Art after 1989*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2012); *2008 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, CA (2008); *16th Biennale of Sydney: Forms that Turn*, Sydney, Australia (2008); *8 Bienal de Arte de Panamá*, Panama (2008); *Freedom*, Hague Sculpture Center, the Netherlands (2008); *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY (2007); *2004 Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2004); and the *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, 50th International Exhibition of Visual Arts of the Biennale di Venezia, Italy (2003).