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Adam Pendleton recalls Modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi in exhibition at Artpace



Adam Pendleton, *i smashed my sickening face*, 2012. Installation view. Photo by Todd Johnson.
Commissioned and produced by Artpace San Antonio.

SAN ANTONIO, TX.- Artpace San Antonio announced its 12.1 International Artists-in-Residence exhibition. New works by resident Adam Pendleton (Germantown, New York) are on view through May 20, 2012. The 12.1 residents were selected by guest curator Jeffrey Grove, the Hoffman Family Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Dallas Museum of Art.

Through formally rigorous and visually spare means, Adam Pendleton's work serves as a conceptual intersection for unlikely past and future alliances. Specific reproducible media such as silkscreen print, ceramic sculpture, language-based performances, videos, and the written essay have provided the frame for his engagement with historical narratives and revisionism. Oftentimes these familiar cultural tropes are visual signifiers for the canonical structures he aims to dismantle.

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Merging forms of Modernism, Minimalism, and Conceptual art of the '70s with work from the Black Panther movement, queer herstories, and Latin American political dissident literature, he offers a proposal for another trajectory of history and future, one reorganized by subjective order. It is in this charged “what if” territory that new geneologies emerge, such as with the diptych *Black Dada* (2008) or with a black version of Sol LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes*. The work pivots on the friction created by opposing intentions and timelines of those references and forms. In a 2008 interview in *The Highlights*, he explained, “I want to juxtapose peoples, moments, events, and even forms with historical periods where their influence or presence is often not considered and at times (un)acknowledged.”

Emerging a couple of generations after African-American artists such as Glenn Ligon and Charles Gaines, Pendleton's work furthers the discourse around appropriation and identity politics of the '80s and '90s in a way that allows us to reexamine the richness of that history as well. As a new-generation black artist, experiencing an increasingly ahistorical moment flattened by the internet age, he moves beyond subverting history into the mode of producing fictions—and sometime science fictions—that carry within them moments of sincerity and authenticity. He seems to be carving out another time zone: one in which the past's version of the future meets the future's version of the past. He has also been greatly influenced by writers such as the Chilean Raúl Zurita (the title of Pendleton's exhibition is a line from Zurita's 1979 book, *Purgatory*) who invest their artform with political agency and question: “What can poetry do in the face of violence?” Similarly, Pendleton's work asks how something as simple as a font choice might illuminate insidious corporate oppression against the human condition. In the details of his materials, surfaces, reproduction values, and performances, one may locate the subtle but important shifts toward a poetic agency, or as he refers to it, a “poethical” stance. The term “poethical,” coined by Joan Retallack and used mostly in literary circles, has become a kind of signpost for Pendleton's own practice.

During his Artpace residency, Pendleton concentrated on the production and reproduction of a familiar set of forms that recall Modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi. As if to propose a faulty memory of the precise appearance of the Romanian artist's *The Endless Column*, Pendleton slightly skewed the shape so that it remains recognizable but incorrect. Aided by a studio team who crafted and sanded the molds meticulously to create an inky-black surface (a color Brancusi never used for his column sculptures), he designs a kind of “future ruin.” The forms, stacked at varying heights, appear as stand-ins for an impossibility. Not by coincidence, they also resemble totemic structures that carry ritualistic or mystical potential.

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