

# Break Through Walls

Virgil Abloh

The allure of Daniel Arsham's work is explicitly tied to the current specific cultural moment. Old boundaries of art, design, fashion, and music have disappeared. This moment defines Daniel's work just as much as Daniel's work defines this moment.

Daniel takes objects from everyday life and transforms them in materiality and meaning. His *Fictional Archeology* series, for example, uses geological materials to create eroded "relics" of the recent past, from Walkmans to boom boxes to Casio keyboards. By seizing nostalgic objects, Daniel froze moments of his '80s childhood and turned them into precious artifacts. His elevation of what some consider mundane, like his cast sneakers and basketballs, proves that he skillfully taps into a global consciousness. Daniel freely samples from daily life and then shapes his findings in his own image of the world, preserving them for all time.

Daniel began in proximity to architecture; he studied at Cooper Union. What started as an architectural exploration—the act of breaking through walls—has matured into a slicing of time informed by architecture. A wall is just a temporary divide, a soft curtain; a figure falls through the ceiling; a hung clock forces a wall to droop. His erosions and reshaping mirror traverses across once-separate disciplines like music, architecture, and visual art. Daniel's exploration of the aesthetics of production, branding, and labeling are tools he uses to create new environments for a new time.

The "white noise" of domestic space—the walls, the shelves, the doors, the vents, and the mirrors, which have passed so long without examination—take on new shapes in Daniel's work. His figures relate to this concept: they are anonymous actors hiding and moving and reaching within the walls. They are formed by the surface of the architecture. The mark is an implication of presence in time, now gone. The blanketed figure, more than an optical effect, is a close read of our position in the world: unstable.

These new modes of thinking and creating have expanded opportunities for audiences. Daniel shares this generation's transparency of practice by engaging with his peers and followers and revealing as much of his constructive process as he can. He has a deep understanding of the language created by globalization and social media—two developments that are often criticized. He is an alchemist working in a time of seismic cultural shifts. Building with recognizable elements, he uses shorthand to communicate with a new audience. It surprises the "establishment," but never himself.

Daniel's audience spans geographic location and age demographic effortlessly. All audiences will understand exactly the language he is speaking. His art takes its inspiration from things that were made without an eye toward future applications: he understands the importance of the past, what is hitting in the present, and what could happen in the future, and slides between these different zones as freely as he moves between disciplines. He aims to give anyone the gateway knowledge to enter a field, to broaden the context into which a new generation of creative collaborators can enter. More work will be seen by more individuals than ever before as a result of his practice, as he bridges audiences and traditional cultural barriers. In a way, his deconstruction is constructive.

In the pages that follow, a little bit of Daniel's world is revealed. There are essays and discussions and examples of work, with a lot of attention on how things are made. This making is the part of the story that glues Daniel's world together: the construction and inspiration. After all, it is the context of an object, the human element, that defines its meaning. Daniel softens and breaks the boundaries of the world to make it ready for more change.

# Parallel Realities

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Let's begin with the beginning. I wanted to ask you how it all began—how you came to art, or how art came to you. Was there a kind of epiphany?

Daniel Arsham: I studied photography in junior high school. My grandfather gave me a camera for my twelfth birthday, and that was sort of the origin of an idea of making images or making something that I thought of as art. I ended up going to a high school that specialized in architecture, which led me to apply to Cooper Union. Originally with Cooper I thought about going to the architecture school, but it seemed to be much more practically based than the pursuits I had in mind. So I ended up in the art school at Cooper. I'm sure you're familiar with Cooper and the kind of education there. It's quite loose in its way of thinking and there's not a particular focus that you put down. So my interests varied from architecture to painting and sculpture. I studied with some amazing people there: Hans Haacke and Walid Raad and Do Ho Suh and a lot of people who taught me, I would say, more how to think than how to make. So that was the origin of at least my education in art.

HUO: I always think it's interesting to think about where an artist's catalogue raisonné starts and school ends; where the real work kicks in. When would you say your student work ended? What's the first work in your catalogue raisonné, the first work you were satisfied by and you made sure you would put in an exhibition?

DA: It's interesting because I've been going back and thinking about this a lot, and next week I'm giving a talk at the Cooper Union in the Great Hall and I'm re-staging my 2003 thesis exhibition exactly as it was presented fifteen years ago. My advisor for that exhibition was Anthony Vidler, whose writing had a big impact on my thinking early in my practice. And I would say that probably that work, that exhibition, would mark the first work in the catalogue raisonné. Looking back on it, there have been moments over the last fifteen years when I've thought less of this body of work. Now I'm sort

of coming back around to it. It's a body of work that deals with architecture that wasn't built for humans, so things like airports and parking garages—architecture that has a bizarre quality about it. The exhibition at Cooper included a building designed for a parking garage, and the floor plan of this building said the word REGRET if you looked it from above. So it was a kind of psychological architecture that contained an invisible element within it.

HUO: You mentioned Hans Haacke as a teacher.

DA: Certainly Hans was a big influence during school, but I think one of the biggest influences on my work are artists from the sixties and seventies, like James Turrell and Sol LeWitt and this very sort of minimal, reductive quality they held. There are times in my work when I've tried to limit both the palette and the expression to something simplistic like that—and reductive. This is also true for the work that I do in architecture, trying to pare things back to some core essence about material. I also studied with Doug Ashford, who is really kind of one of my heroes and influences in school in terms of thinking about material—material of a work as meaning, or having potential meaning, as much as the expression of it. That's translated to a lot of archeological works I've been making that house a materiality that is expressive.

HUO: How to create the materiality that is expressive—so that was kind of a revelation, no?

DA: I remember we had this assignment in the first year of school where everything was made of cardboard, and I remember him saying, "if you can make cardboard look like something else, make it look like water or cement or fabric or a different material—a shift in its materiality—this is where the origin of an idea can lie.

HUO: So that unleashed a lot of things no? It was like a trigger.

# Daniel Arsham in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist

DA: Oh yeah, certainly. And I've come back to this idea many times.

HUO: It's fascinating that you would redo the exhibition from fifteen years ago exactly as it was then. Could you describe it a little more?

DA: So the exhibition included a series of architectural drawings, much like you would find on a job site of a building under construction. It included plans and elevations—those kinds of documents for a building. The one in the show was a parking garage with the typical spiral ramp. And when viewed from above, let's say from an airplane or another building, the floor plan of the building read the word REGRET. So if you were inside of the building, you wouldn't necessarily see the word; it would be something that an architect can sort of hide within the building.

The exhibition was very simple. There was about eight or ten drawings within it that describe this building in a very matter of fact, kind of banal, architectural way. If you've ever seen a set of architectural drawings, there's something simplistic and elegant about them but they're really functional more than anything.

HUO: What's the second work after that? Because the exhibition at Cooper is still in the protected environment of an art school—what would you say stands as the first public exhibition?

DA: I met Emmanuel Perrotin in Miami around 2002 or 2003, right around the time I was finishing up with school. He invited me for an exhibition at that time. After school I had moved back to Miami and I was spending a lot of time near where I grew up in the Everglades, in Florida. It's a very kind of swamp-like area.

HUO: Yeah, there are crocodiles there!

DA: Yeah! And I was making a lot of paintings of architecture in between a state of construction and demolition. So within these paintings, it was a kind of purposeless architecture, but looked like a human had made it. Its purpose was undefined and it appeared either as if it was falling apart or as if it was being built. It was kind of ambiguous. And in 2005, I was in Greater New York [at MoMA PS1], which was a huge moment for me just as an artist. I always felt that that show was such a signifier at that time of what was happening in the city. I exhibited two different works. One was a painting of a cavern, and within the cavern, there were some stalactites and stalagmites and architectural constructions mixed within that. So you had a man-made—or the appearance of a man-made—structure within these natural forms. And then I had the inverse of that, where a corner of the actual architecture appeared to be eroding. So in one sense you had the architecture forming within a natural scenario, and in the building you had nature kind of creeping back into architecture. It almost looked like the wall had been eroded like a glacier, you know? I felt certainly like a moment of scale, in terms of showing the work, that I hadn't achieved on that level, but it also felt like a very cohesive understanding within my own practice.

HUO: It's interesting because in a way, very soon after entering the art world, you went into parallel realities: parallel realities in the world of performance, in the world of music, in the world of architecture. Those are separate, but at the same there are cross overs. That describes the architecture practice, Snarkitecture. Let's begin with Snarkitecture, because it originated, really, in this encounter with Alex Mustonen, who is the cofounder. You were still a student at Cooper Union and that began. It's very unusual that an art student would found an architecture practice. Vito Acconci, he founded a practice much later on, and for him it was a very different time. Acconci went from being an artist to being an architect. He always thought we should not say "I" anymore, we should say "we," and that's the moment he became an architect in a way. Then of course you have

artists like Ai Wei Wei and Olafur Eliasson, who also have followed this idea that within architecture is an artist's studio that would then also grow an architecture practice—but it's very unusual that that happens as a student. What prompted you to start Snarkitecture?

DA: It actually started out of a problem that occurred once I began manipulating architecture in my artwork. I could certainly get away with that in museums and galleries, where the mechanisms of building code and things of that nature don't necessarily always apply. But I was working on a project that required knowledge that was above and beyond my skill set, so I worked with Alex to achieve this project. After that, we started toying with the idea of starting a separate practice that would use some of the ethos that was present in my own thinking. But in contrast to what Vito Acconci did or what Olafur is doing, I didn't want my artwork to be within that. I wanted it to live separately, and I actually thought about them in different ways. Where as the architecture studio, Snarkitecture, produced things that had a specific purpose or function, within my own artwork I could make things that may have a function or a purpose, but that function was more ambiguous and open to interpretation. It really allowed me to operate in these two very opposing areas, and because the practices are housed within the same studio, I could move back and forth between you practical and—I don't want to say unpractical, but ambiguous, right? And this also had a big influence on Snarkitecture's thinking in terms of material, where some of the processes that are used in my sculptural work may be borrowed for architecture scale products. It's not often that you walk into an architecture studio and there are things actually being made within them, unless they're models. This is really how the thinking becomes unique here.

HUO: And of course there is the third element, which is the filmmaking. When was that added to the mix?

DA: When I got involved in theater. Shortly after I finished school, I was hired as a stage designer for Merce Cunningham.

HUO: How did you meet Merce?

DA: It was a very random occasion. He was in Miami and he happened to go to the Museum of Contemporary Art there, and some pieces of mine were in an exhibition—some of those paintings that I was describing before, with the architectural constructions in nature. He asked the director about the work and asked for my number. A couple of weeks later, he called me and he had been in commission for a project in Miami. I don't know why he particularly thought I could make a stage design—I hadn't done stage design, I didn't study it. But he hired me. I was twenty-four at the time. So I made that first stage design for him, and it premiered about a year and a half later. For me, as a twenty-four-year-old, it was terrifying, because he basically gave me carte blanche. He said, "you can do whatever you want to do as long as it doesn't injure the dancers or enter my space, my physical space on the stage." So that was, beyond people that I studied with in school, my other education in thinking.

HUO: Can you tell me about that first piece with Merce, EyeSpace? And then also tell us how, from EyeSpace onward, the collaboration evolved really until Merce Cunningham's death.

DA: The only thing Merce told me was the name of the dance, so after he called me, as I didn't have any experience, I went to see a number of his works. I certainly knew who he was, but I can't say, or I couldn't have said at the time, that I was very familiar with his work or even modern dance in general. So I spent a year educating myself through this and spending a lot of time with him, and I felt that I had much more knowledge about cinema and about film, just from an observation standpoint. I started to think about the image of the stage as a film. And Merce did this curious thing a lot, which is called a "crossover," in which a dancer will exit stage left, walk behind the upstage curtain and re-enter on the other side. It's this magical trick that is really only possible in theater. And I started to think: can I do

something like that, but vertically? Almost like the way that a film strip moves across the light and projects an image. So I trap this structure between the floor and the ceiling so it appears to sink into the ground, and the portion that would be underneath the floor is coming out of the ceiling—so it's this sort of vertical crossover.

Merce had a curious way of working where he never really discussed the work before, or even after, but he kept me. He asked me to work with him again, and he spoke highly of the experience of it, rather than what it produced, I would say. And I worked with him right up until his death in 2009.

HUO: You of course worked with several other performers. One very intense collaboration, as intense as with Merce because it is also ongoing, is the one with Jonah Bokaer. Can you tell me a little bit about it? It is very much a bringing together of the world of music, dance, stage design, and something else. Pharrell Williams of course joined for Rules of the Game, and I think with Pharrell the collaboration is occasional, but with Jonah Bokaer it's almost permanent no?

DA: Yes. Jonah was a dancer in Merce Cunningham's company when I first started working with them and, as I said, the process for working with Merce was collaborative, but I would say it was also not really collaborative—I never knew what he was doing.

HUO: Not even John Cage knew what he was doing!

DA: Yeah, and once I got past the initial shock of this, it was an amazing experience, but it also had its limitations in that I could never make anything that the dancers would interact with, because he didn't want to know what it was. When Merce died, Jonah and I started talking about collaborating, and a lot of our thinking in many ways was the opposite of how Merce produced dance—we thought about the elements on the stage that I designed as having a direct physical interaction with the dancers. And in many ways, the

stage elements motivated the movement of the performers, so there were a lot of things with spheres and things that roll and things that can bounce. This produced a number of works, the most recent of which is the one that you're talking about, Rules of the Game, which was a collaboration with Pharrell in which he created a score that was originally for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. So Pharrell composed the music, but it was played on an orchestra, so it was a new experience for him, as well. And this piece I think more than anything brings together a lot of the ideas in my work about destruction and reconstruction. There's a whole element within the stage design of things being destroyed and reassembled both in the structure of the dance itself and in the visuals, as well as in the physicality of what's happening onstage.

HOU: How is this evolving right now? How you take it from here to the next step?

DA: My world has been kind of unique in that as much influence on my career has come from Hans Haacke as Pharrell Williams—these very diverse backgrounds. And I think there's nothing specific that I'm working on with Pharrell currently, but we're always talking about ways of bringing his audience to the art world, and vice versa. As we see with social media and this new universe of communication, these audiences are collapsing into one another. I find that my audience on Instagram is not solely an art audience. I wouldn't even say it's more than half that. It's people from music and architecture and cinema and theater and, randomly, Japanese pop music.

HOU: So in a way we can say that there is a convergence of all of these. What is fascinating of course is that all of a sudden it becomes possible to bring all these things together. I was always very inspired by Sergio Diaghilev, the founder of the Ballet Russes, and the way he used the ballet as a device to bring together Stravinsky, Picasso, Goncharova, Massine, et cetera. I think it's interesting that maybe today

the art world can be that device. I was wondering if you were also inspired by Diaghilev, and if you're interested in the idea of the total artwork?

DA: The idea of a total artwork, I think, applies more to my work in terms of the way that the studio is set up as a mechanism, right? You can't see me right now, but I'm wearing the uniform that I wear in the studio. I did a long term collaboration with Adidas that produced specific shoes to be used in the studio. Everything here from the clothing, which is designed for the materials, functionality, all of that, to the graphic language of how the studio communicates—whether exhibitions or new films that are coming out, all of it is integrated, and the language of that is much more like a corporation, like something that is defined from the top down.

HOU: And that of course also means that you work in lots of different contexts. There is of course the gallery as a context, but then there is also the corporation with brands, and you recently had a collaboration with Adidas producing a film and a new sneaker collection. I was wondering if you could talk about how that's another part of that reality. The film references Hurricane Andrew, which hit South Florida when you were a child. We live in a moment now not only of climate change, but a moment about extinction, as Gustav Metzger said. It's only if we express or pronounce our extinction that maybe people will wake up. Our own species is in danger, and there are mass extinctions of species happening on the planet. And it's not only species; we see languages disappear, and within or amidst this climate of extinction, you revisit a hurricane of your childhood. Can you tell us about that? You were twelve I think at the time?

DA: I was, yes. That's a lot to unpack, so why don't we start with the storm. That was actually right around the time that I was given my first camera, and a lot of my first photographs were of the storm's aftermath. So this idea of an architectural manipulation, which has been present in my thinking sense then, really began at that moment.

If you think about a hurricane as a kind of violent destruction of architecture, a lot of the things that I've done are a slow, subtle manipulation of it. Stepping back a little bit from the notion of brands and partnerships and collaboration with brands, from the time that I was in high school, most of my friends were not artists. They were musicians and architects and dancers and others besides visual artists. I think that a lot of the people I'm around these days are in fields that are completely different from mine, and they often use the tools at their own disposal to communicate their own ideas. Whether it's in fashion with people like Virgil Abloh or Ronnie Fieg at KITH, they are people who are using a medium that is very different from my own. And I see value in exploiting those means for communication outside of the traditional art-world chamber.

You used Adidas as an example. This was an opportunity to really build a narrative around this experience that I had as a child and, I've said it before, I almost died in that storm, and it was less traumatic in the moment, but it has really stuck with me for so long that I still have dreams about this experience to this day, nightmare dreams. This opportunity came up to build a narrative around it, which would combine quasi-documentary footage of the present, of my way of thinking and my own work, with a re-creation of that past experience. And it's really building a universe around the sneakers that were made for the studio. So they play a role as a prop for it more than a focal point.

HOU: And it's interesting because the sneakers are your first wearable work.

DA: I've had an opportunity to go back into these heritage brands. I did a couple projects a few years ago with Leica, the camera manufacturer. That was one of the first cameras I had. I went back into their archive and was able to select historic cameras to make fictional archeological relics out of. With Adidas, I went back into their archive and selected three silhouettes: one from the past, from my childhood, one

from now, and a future iteration. As a lot of my work deals with a collapse of time, a collapse or stretching of time, this notion of using a mass-produced product as a signifier within this artwork worked perfectly for me in that sense. I often look for icons in my archeological series to cast, and this was an icon that was handed to me.

HOU: Of course, it's deeply connected, as you said, to Miami. You grew up in Miami, and you keep returning to Miami. I just reread the book by Joan Didion, *Miami*; it's one of my favorite Joan Didion books, and I wanted to hear you talk, if possible, more about Miami as a backdrop for many things you do, and of course also about the House, your artist-run space there.

DA: Growing up in Miami, I spent a lot of time in the natural part of it, both in the Everglades as well as out on the water. Miami has a unique geographic feature about it, which you can see when you fly into Miami. The city ends—it literally stops at a perfect straight line, and this line is a somewhat arbitrary delineation between the natural world and the man-made world. The line is where the Everglades, the swamp, begins and the architecture ends. It makes you aware at a certain point that the city itself is a complete fabrication; even the land that most of the city is built on is invented out of a swamp, created by draining and canal systems. I always found Miami to be this place of fantasy and invention: everything from the architecture there and the proximity to Disney World and this fantasy universe. When I was there after Cooper Union, during the period that I started the artist-run space, there was a huge building boom. This was the moment that I started to see buildings being torn down, and directly next to them you'd have another building going up. There's a point where they meet in the middle—where one building is appearing to be torn down, the other is starting to go up, and you can't really tell which is which. I think that sense really defines Miami for me, combined with the sun and the salt and the palm trees.

HOU: And can you tell me more about the House, how that worked? Because it's not just a normal artist-run space.

DA: There was a unique moment in Miami between 1999 and maybe 2005 when there were a lot of artists that had gone to school in New York or, you know, at MICA in Maryland, and they came back to Miami. Artists like Hernan Bas and Naomi Fisher; I was there; Bhakti Baxter. This was a moment where it was very cheap to live, there was a lot of tension on the city because of Art Basel, and instead of waiting for a gallery to come, we started our own space called the House, which was basically a typical Miami bungalow-style house that we gut renovated the first floor into a white box gallery. We lived upstairs. This space became a kind of legendary space because it was relatively short-lived, but so many people who were a part of that moment in the Miami art community exhibited something there. In fact, this was the way that I met Emmanuel Perrotin. He was in Miami and a number of people told him to come down and see what was going on there.

HOU: So it was kind of like a DIY situation in a way?

DA: Very much, but the design of the space on the interior was as much like a white box gallery as we could make it.

HOU: Now talking about ecology, we can move of course to your recent series, *Future Relic*. It's nine short films that predict the future civilization before and after the earth undergoes major ecological changes. I'd love for you to tell me about the genesis and process of making these films, to understand the more environmental side. What concerns you and galvanizes you to make this work?

And, of course, this series includes sculptures of petrified twentieth-century media artifacts that appear in a way to look like artifacts decaying from obsolescence. How do you choose these artifacts?

DA: The origin was really with the fictional archeological objects. I spent some time in Easter Island in 2010, which had a big influence on my thinking around the creation of a sculpture that could reverse engineer archeology. Could I take an object from the present and cause it to appear as if it had been uncovered in the future? And so I did this by imbuing these objects both with a visual decay and also materials that we associate with geology, crystal and volcanic ash. The objects had an element of truth within them, in their materiality. As I was showing these works in different places around the world, there were often questions like: What is the universe that you imagine these objects existing within? Is it a postapocalyptic world? Is it in the near future? Is it far in the future? And I had to answer those questions. I really went back to thinking about archeology as a kind of inevitability; whether or not there is an apocalyptic scenario, whether or not this current ecological crisis does in fact decimate our species, all of the objects and things that exist today will at one point become archeological objects, relics of the past. So the film was really a way for me to kind of explore some of those ideas.

I was fortunate to have the help of Jane Rosenthal to enter this universe of cinema and moviemaking and to be introduced to amazing talent, like Juliette Lewis and Mahershala Ali, to execute this idea. I didn't want this to be an art film. I don't come from a place of thinking about art film as the kind of end-all of this work; I look much more to, say, Spielberg and Cronenberg, and a more Hollywood universe. The story surrounded a future scenario in which these objects could exist, told in nine parts. It's a very human story about a father and a daughter and an ecological crisis that separates them. In the end, the film was never completed, but to continue the mythology around this series, I released a trailer for this film that ended up saying it will premier in the summer of 2089—a speculative premier trailer for a film in the future. And the trailer looks like a trailer for a real film. It has real talent, major talent in it, and I bought ads for this to run in major publications like Vanity Fair and the

Hollywood Reporter and the New York Times. It appeared as if it was an ad for a real film.

HUO: That leads us to the question of the objects, and the role of sculpture in your practice. Some objects, the miscasts, are like failures that you keep in the middle of your studio. When you first started casting these pieces, you didn't quite know how to get the materials to adhere together properly, and some of the early ones would slowly melt or fall apart. So a certain degree of entropy was involved in these early ones, and then many of course went into the world.

DA: Right. This idea of failure—I could say I took a page from Merce in employing failure in the execution of a work. When I returned from Easter Island, in trying to reverse engineer this fictional archeology, I brought back some stone from the island that was ash. I crushed it and tried to compress this into a mold. This was the mold that collapsed—the material collapsed. Over time, I developed a technique for using certain geological materials that I could get to adhere, but there was a process within the casting that caused certain parts of them to fall away. Eventually, I was able to control the language of the erosion in the works along with the selection of the object itself, which is very telling. I'll select the phone or the camera or the computer. How do I know which one to select? In many ways I'm looking for the icon of that object. So if it's a camera, it's not just any camera—it's this particular Polaroid camera that everyone remembers. If it's a phone, it's this very particular Westinghouse phone that everyone had at a certain point in time. It's almost like if you look at the emoji keyboard on the Apple phone; those are all icons of themselves and they are universal for anyone who has a smartphone. In many ways, I can select from that emoji keyboard in terms of the imagery that I'm looking for.

HUO: When I started to see your objects they were achromatic, and that of course had to do with your colorblindness. Then, at a certain moment, or your past colorblindness and this abnormal color arrived; and, of course, with black-and-

white photography there was a moment when color suddenly arrived. Can you tell me about the arrival of color?

DA: So much of my work was in a reductive palette. When there was color, it was very muted, and it wasn't something that I particularly noticed. I thought of it as being true to the existing color in the materials that I wanted to use. The volcanic ash was black, so the works were black. Or the crystal when crushed was white, so it was white. And there was a whole body of work that we haven't yet discussed—the manipulation of the surface of architecture with figures and all of these things. I often thought of it as: I'm using the color that's already there in the object or in the material. I did an interview where this question of color and colorblindness was raised and it really got me thinking about where the place of color is in the work. It was right around the time that I was introduced to a company that was developing the lenses that would correct the colorblindness that I have, so I used these lenses and was very much enamored with them in the beginning. To have a new perspective on it, and more so than enjoying it—because I don't really wear the glasses anymore—I saw it as a way to be objective about color. I could use color because I know that what I'm seeing is what you see, but even then my eye doctor would say that it's still completely objective and the glasses weren't really doing anything for me. So I've continued to use them in the studio as a tool to look at color or look at materials and then take them off and not really use them.

HUO: Back to the question of the selection of objects: I think it's interesting what objects you choose to cast. How do you choose?

DA: I spend a lot of time on eBay, a lot, and over the last five or six years, I've started to think of eBay as this sort of repository of almost everything that has ever been made by humans at any time. It's astronomical. It's like a library of things, and almost anything can be found on there, so when I'm searching for a particular camera, I'm able to really look

through so many different variations of the same thing, and eventually I select by instinct, actually. At a certain point I just have a feeling that this is the right one.

HUO: Can you tell us what you've recently cast?

DA: The most recent piece that I've done is actually a cast of my backpack from junior high school. It's a relic of its own time. There are no children carrying around these backpacks anymore with books in them. But it also has patches; there's an MTV patch and a NASA patch and a Nine Inch Nails patch on it. These are things that for me document a particular moment in time—both personally but also for many people. The patches themselves, when cast, take on a very strange quality. When you cast fabric in this way there's something that deceives you in the feeling of it. When you look at it, you imagine that it's soft to the touch, but it's hard. And so I've been continuing on with these casts of patches; enlarging them, playing with scale, using icons. Before I was selecting objects, some of the more recent things are iconic, almost characters from childhood—cartoon characters and a NASA patch and things like that.

HUO: What about some objects that you never cast, or objects that you would never cast?

DA: That is a harder question to answer. I think almost anything, as I said, will become a relic at some point. Almost anything can take on this quality. The thing about casting these objects is that, first of all, they're destroyed when they're cast. So anything that I cast that's rare, like old Leica cameras, I was aware that doing so would remove them from existence in a way. But also, in order for an object to appear in its cast state, it needs to have physical qualities, not printed qualities. So, for instance, if I cast an iPhone, it would just look like a block of material. There's no detail in it.

HUO: I'm interested in this complex of the unrealized, more generally. Architects have unrealized projects; they publish

their unrealized projects very regularly. We know much less about artists' unrealized projects. I remember I spent time with Louise Bourgeois. She had this dream of doing a little amphitheater. Only very few people knew about it. What would have happened if people had only known that she wanted to do this? That's why some years ago I started to map artists' unrealized projects. It's an ongoing archive, and it's also the only recurring question in all of my interviews. I wanted to ask you about, beyond casting, your unrealized projects, your dreams. Projects can of course be unrealized for many different reasons; they can be too big to be realized, too expensive to be realized, they can also be too small to be realized. This is a very pragmatic question because I want people to know about it, to maybe help you get it done.

DA: Certainly, on the architectural side, I have dreams of creating as you say a kind of *gesamtkunstwerk*, like a house for instance. But on the art side, the unrealized project is a project that you already know, that you're actually very much involved with: the re-creation of the Voyager Record. My dream would actually be to create the space ship that would house this record—and when I say space ship, it's more like a small spacecraft that would house a document of humanity. In my intro to NASA at JPL [Jet Propulsion Laboratory], they asked me to propose something to work on there, and this idea of a twenty-first-century version of that would be much more comprehensive. It would include artwork, which is the area we look to you to form. I wasn't really concerned with the curation of it or the organization; rather, I visualized as much information as was in the original Voyager spacecraft. There was the Golden Record, which included a document of humanity. But there was also the design of the spacecraft itself, which, if discovered, could tell so many things about humanity. Certainly you would know that an intelligent species created it. You could understand things about scale and mathematics, science. You could understand that we dream, that we sought to explore things outside of ourselves, that we understood that there may be other life. The physicality of that in a new form is something

that I've begun to explore, and really was my part of this project, to actually design the housing for the spacecraft.

HUO: That's indeed a project with Jefferson Hack, maybe with NASA, Alexander Gleeman, Pharrell Williams—it was like an expedition to another planet in a way.

DA: This idea encapsulates so many things present in my work: time, the collapse of time, archeology, the future, the manipulation of history, all of these things.

HUO: The future: that leads us to your film company, *Film the Future*, and the question of sci-fi. You've been reading Philip K. Dick and also Jonathan Lethem's *The Girl in the Landscape*. I want you to tell us a little bit about this idea of sci-fi.

DA: I think that the truth is always much more bizarre than what we can write, and there are real life people that are living a sci-fi narrative. Think of people like Elon Musk, who really is a kind of futuristic persona for me. But I think sci-fi also houses the dark side of technology and a kind of impulse toward the future. I'm fascinated by both the potential and the negative qualities of progress.

HOU: And progress brings us to technology. Near Miami, in Ft. Lauderdale, I have thought about Magic Leap, a company there which Ali Baba and Google made huge investments in. Many artists who still work in the art world are all focused on VR. The future clearly is AR—augmented realities or mixed reality—and I wanted to ask you about your projects with VR and AR.

DA: Yes, I have played both with virtual reality and augmented reality. The virtual reality was more of an experience of one of my exhibitions. It was simplistic. I haven't experienced many good things within it that were not very, very simple. So rather than create a huge narrative within it, I relied on the sculptural qualities of an installation to carry the project.

The AR project that I did was actually in collaboration with Snapchat, where I created a filter in which you could place one of my sculptures in any space and you could walk around it, you could move within it, you could scale it. It's a complex filter where there is a sculpture of a figure; it appears like a white sheet is blowing over the figure; and on the back side, when you walk around, there is no figure inside—so it's a hollow form, like a ghost shell. So you can place this sculpture through a snapchat lens. Lets say you're on a beach, you orient your camera out toward the water, and Snapchat will map the surface of the landscape and allow you to place the sculpture within your scenario. If you turn your camera, the sculpture stays where you placed it, so it's a complete augmented reality sculpture in place. This was something that was activated for a certain period of time, and people were placing it all over the world and sending me images of it from South Africa and Australia. Not only is it the idea of bringing something to reality that isn't real, but its also a geographic exploration of a work, which is quite magical. It was actually a magical experience for me as well, because it allowed me to visualize the scale of this object bigger than it could ever be made.

HUO: And what are you doing with Magic Leap?

DA: Nothing, other than I'm interested in it. I think Magic Leap is a pinnacle right now of this idea of augmented reality, and I have studied a lot about both augmented reality and this idea of artificial intelligence and the notion of the singularity. Rather than being interesting to me for their application, I'm more interested in what they mean for people's relationship to my work. My work is so much about obsolescence and the future. When we think about Magic Leap's goal, in a big way, it's to make all screens—and really a lot of things where we absorb information—obsolete. Certainly Google Glass, a device that was kind of a failure, predicted this future where you might be able to project a screen in front of you, you would be wearing glasses, and you don't need a physical screen. So it immediately makes the physical-

ity of all of these devices and physicality in general really obsolescent. Think about an entire exhibition: you create one exhibition, you scan the objects three dimensionally. This exhibition could travel the world with no shipping cost.

HUO: That's a great interaction to introduce one of the last questions, about Snarkitecture. The name Snarkitecture was actually drawn from Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of The Snark," a poem that describes the impossible voyage of an improbable crew to find a mysterious creature.

DA: An inconceivable creature.

HUO: Tell us about the inconceivable creature, which sums up the work of Snarkitecture and the connection to Lewis Carroll.

DA: In Alice in Wonderland there's this idea of everything beyond the looking glass; that has been a fascination of mine since childhood, and Snarkitecture has always been about searching for something that is not yet known. Often we are using an existing material or an existing architecture but transforming it into something new—and we think about it less as something new and more as an alteration. And in the story, there are a bunch of idiots sailing the sea looking for a beast called the Snark and they don't know where it is, they don't know what it looks like. It's this kind of formless entity, and they have a white map in order to find it, a blank white map. We saw this as a kind of comical parallel—a playful parallel to what we hope to do.

HUO: It would be interesting to hear a little bit more about your studio. What would I see right now, in February 2018, if I was in your studio in Queens? And what projects do you have on the horizon? What's next?

DA: Well as everyone knows, the best view of the city is actually not from within it, and when you arrive at the studio you have an amazing view of the Manhattan skyline, because we are directly on the river in Queens. We are basically

right across from Roosevelt Island, where you have Louis Khan's Four Freedoms Park, just to situate yourself. The studio is a former factory, about ten thousand square feet, very tall ceilings, and all natural light. It's all white and it's divided in three parts. As you enter the studio, you walk into what is the workshop—so the messiest space. And this is intentional, that everyone who enters the studio enters the messiest place first and ends up in the cleanest. They're able to see what it takes to actually achieve the things that they see images of later. The second space is my studio, where assembly and some fabrication occur, and it's often a lot of shelves and things drying. Much of the work goes through a process after casting. And there are many different ideas and things in process, from large-scale hourglasses to a new series of armillaries—these kind of medieval armillaries. There are a bunch of bonsai trees, and on the other side of the studio is Snarkitecture, which is much more clean and orderly. It's a series of about fifteen desks with computers on them, and Alex keeps that side of the studio, you could say, architectural.

HUO: Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a little book Advice to a Young Poet. What, in 2018, would be your advice to an art student who is just beginning?

DA: People ask me this a lot on Instagram. When I started the House, it was about making an opportunity. I think there are a lot of questions for young artists: How do I begin? How do I meet the people that will both influence my work but also let me exhibit my work? And rather than waiting for that, there are so many opportunities today to create that. Whether its through means of social media or augmented reality and even physical space, create your own opportunity.

HUO: What about your own Instagram account? You're one of the artists with the most followers. You have 325,000 followers, and you are obviously fond of Instagram. Your most recent post is a mold that took six months to fabricate; it's a very complicated casting process you describe. At the

same time there are some drawings, there are cars, sometimes photos of the young you with Robert Rauschenberg.

DA: I use Instagram both as a way to exhibit completed work and as a way to lend people an insight into process. Often when, in the past, people would see things in an exhibition, it was very difficult for them not only to understand the process, but the amount of time that actually physically goes into the creation of a lot of these works, because even if I produce many exhibitions throughout the year, many of them I've been working on for a year or more once you've seen them. I think the other part about it is in my stories. In the stories, I try to make it much more personal. There are things in there about my personal life; I have two children, two young boys, and my wife, and that sort of universe that often comes to influence my thinking, as well as my travel, things that influence me. I think people gain a larger understanding; I certainly have, in looking at other artists' universe through Instagram. Even if I knew their work well before this—it's about really understanding their background and how they arrive at ideas and process.

HUO: You wrote on my Instagram, "the past is present, the future is now."

DA: You know that comes from *Back to the Future*, the 1980s Robert Zemeckis film. It's a nonsense sentence—it basically means that everything is now. Everything that has ever existed or that will ever be made exists at this moment in different forms. If it's going to be created into something, its materials just need to be brought together. And it's a collapse of time.

**Something Is Not Quite Right:**  
The Work of Daniel Arsham  
*Jane Rendell*

For the *Miami Nice* exhibition at the Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris in 2004, artist Daniel Arsham showed an architectural model and a series of drawings. *Untitled* (2004) is a mound of expanded polystyrene or EPS, sitting on top of a shiny trestle table. Embedded in its mountainous formation, which one assumes to be ice-covered rock, or perhaps even an iceberg, is an architectural structure which appears to be uninhabited.

EPS is used for insulated panels in building structures, as a molded packing material, and in the making of architectural models. Its irregular form means that it can never achieve crystallinity, and as such has no melting point. A long chain hydrocarbon, EPS is described as having ‘chiral backbone carbons’.<sup>1</sup> The chemical term *chirality* derives from the Greek word for hand. It refers to a form of asymmetry where an object cannot be superimposed on its mirror image. The human body forms the most obvious example, where a left hand glove cannot be worn on the right hand.

*Untitled* (2004) is made of a material that has no melting point, but it represents one that does. Today ice is melting so fast that it will soon hit the point of no return, what climatologists have described as a ‘tipping point’,<sup>2</sup> where the heat that the melting ice releases will cause it to disappear faster, and the replacement of reflective white ice with absorbent dark water will rapidly increase the melting time even further, leading to an irreversible situation. The construction of architecture – involving the extraction of materials and the burning of petrochemicals – contributes to the diminishing of finite resources and increases the temperature of the planet in the process, while the occupation of buildings produces, in the form of cities, islands of heat rather than ice.

Surrounding the isolated outcrop of *Untitled* (2004) are entrancing scenes of other lost buildings discovered adrift in strange surroundings, on top of icebergs and inside caverns. *The M-House got lost and found itself floating on the sea, affecting salination*

*levels in the North Atlantic (blue)* (2004) shows a wild-looking architectural structure with numerous walls and roofs all facing in different directions. Like a lonely bird with ruffled feathers, it perches on a crisp iceberg, which floats in turn on an empty ink blue sea. Fronds of grey mist swirl over the water, rising into the eerie jet-black sky. M House is a project designed in 1999 by Michael Jantzen, a fine artist turned architect, whose intention was to produce a house composed of single units combined in multiple configurations as a single home, or in response to a wider range of possibilities.<sup>3</sup>

The title of the work, its formal composition and the scene it depicts, relate to Arsham’s *Moshe Safdie got lost and found himself floating on the sea, affecting salination levels in the North Atlantic* (2004). The architectural structure depicted here, also shown on the top of an iceberg, is Habitat ‘67, a housing complex located on the Marc-Drouin Quay on the Saint Lawrence River in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The design, based on Safdie’s master’s thesis at McGill University and built as part of Expo ‘67, was intended to offer diverse housing possibilities within a modular apartment building. The overall form is composed of 365 smaller prefabricated units arranged in three clusters consisting of 158 residencies in a range of sizes.<sup>4</sup>

The two works, *The M-House got lost ...* and *Moshe Safdie got lost ...*, form an odd pair. In suggesting various combinations for a number of smaller units they both embrace quite similar innovative approaches to design. In the sense that the two schemes dream of a new way of housing humanity, they also share a utopian vision. But although Arsham has given them matching titles, there is one key difference. The negative impact of the architecture, pointed to via the reference in the titles to altered salination levels, which are causing huge disruptions to global climate systems, is linked in one case to the architect, and in the other to the architecture.

Miami Nice  
2004  
View of the exhibition  
curated by George Lindemann  
Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin  
Paris



Another two works in the series also share a strange chirality, not a visual (a)symmetry but a conceptual one. *Monastery Proposal* (2004) shows that icon of modernism, Le Corbusier's last major work in Europe, The Dominican Monastery of La Tourette (1957–1960) built in France at L'Eveux-sur-L'Arbresle, Lyons. Described by its title as a proposal, this work suggests a similarity to Arsham's *One Peachtree Center Proposal* (2004). However, in contrast to La Tourette, One Peachtree is an icon of postmodern design, a multi-purpose development located in the central business district of Atlanta, Georgia, designed by architect/developer John Portman in 1976, the same year as the completion of The Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, another complex by Portman, that, following the publication of cultural theorist Frederic Jameson's seminal book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, became a key figure in postmodern urban discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Building on political economist Ernest Mandel's discussion of the development of capitalism through key periods or stages, Jameson aligns representations and experiences of urban life with changes to the modes of capitalist production and consumption. He argues that the postmodern does not end the modern, but develops out of it. The concealed entrances, lifts that move between inside to outside, and the reflective mirror facades of the Bonaventure which give away nothing of the interior they cover, produce feelings of confusion and disorientation which Jameson describes as a form of 'schizophrenia'. For Jameson this spatial and psychological experience reworks the alienation of modernization and is typical of the 'cultural logic' of postmodernity.

From his adoption of architectural forms of representation – models and drawings – and his fascination with scale and setting, to the process of architectural design itself and the propositional mode of the suggestion, the solution and inevitably the intervention, Arsham's work often draws on architecture. He investigates modernist concerns and acknowledges architecture's fall from

grace – the failure of the modernist dream when measured against its aims as a sociological project, and the rather grandiose ambitions of modernism to use architecture to change the world. This is not a topic uncommon in contemporary art, from Tacita Dean, to Rut Bles Luxembourg, to Jane and Louise Wilson, the arrogance of both technologically naïve versions of modernism, as well as the more socially bombastic programmes for how to make a better world, have come under harsh critique.<sup>6</sup>

However, I see Arsham's attitude towards modernism as more ambivalent than a simple rejection.<sup>7</sup> The architecture he has chosen to reference and the way particular projects work in pairs complexify his position. The implicit comparison made between Le Corbusier and Portman certainly raises an old argument concerning the merits of modernism versus postmodernism. While we are familiar with thinking of Le Corbusier's work in terms of utopian visions, easy targets for a criticism of modernist architects as high-handed and arrogant social engineers, placing them next to a John Portman design allows us to think of both in a different light. Portman's work could be viewed as a vision of a sort, the scale of his operations – 4000-room conference hotels, for example – are overwhelming in their scale, and arguably express a postmodern and rather cynical version of utopianism, whose only desire is to get rich quick. Corbusier's designs for La Tourette, in comparison,

1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polystyrene>

2 See for example <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/global-warming-past-the-point-of-no-return-507030.html>: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6171053.stm>: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/main.jhtml?xml=/earth/2008/04/24/eararctic124.xml>.

3 See for example <http://www.arcspace.com/architects/jantzen/>

4 See for example <http://www.msafdie.com>.

5 Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

6 See my discussion of Tacita Dean's *Delft Hydraulics* (1996) and *Sound Mirrors* (1999); Rut Bles Luxembourg's *London: A Modern Project* (1997) and Jane and Louise Wilson's *Stasi City* (1997) and *Gamma* (1999) in Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: IB Tauris, 2006) pp. 85–89.

7 See Felix Burrichte, 'Daniel Arsham', *Pin Up* (Fall 2006) pp. 26–33, p. 30 for Daniel Arsham's own views on modernism. See Jessica Lack, 'Daniel Arsham', *J-D*, n. 265 (April 2006) for a critic who believes his art 'pays homage to our failed love affair with modernism'.

**Crystala**

2004

EPS foam, mixed media

91 x 56 x 51 cm

36 x 22 x 20 inches

Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin Collection



come across as thoughtful and considerate – how else might one think of a design for a religious order of silent and studying monks, whose lives have been described as so austere they are sometimes known as the ‘begging brothers’.<sup>8</sup>

And if we turn to the pairing of Jantzen and Safdie, both the buildings chosen by Arsham could be described as ambitious – the seed of something bigger. But the extent to which they fulfill dreams and create new social systems varies. Jantzen’s M house is visionary in its aim to be self sufficient, powered by alternative energy sources such as the sun and the wind, but quite humble in scope, needing only four people to assemble one building in a week. He built his own house solo. Safdie’s projects are far grander. The far-reaching social agenda first seen in his approach to housing in Habitat ‘67 has continued in later work. As a committed Zionist, he has designed significant Holocaust memorials in Israel as well as places of religious teaching. He is currently working on the United States Institute of Peace, but in the design of Mamilla, for example, his hope to make a bridge between Jews and Arabs could be seen as rather misplaced, for this new settlement is built on land in East Jerusalem, unilaterally annexed by Israel, an action which breaches international law.<sup>9</sup>

Arsham shows One Peachtree and La Tourette inside magically coloured caverns furnished with fabulous formations. He paints these architectural projects in their alien settings in gouache on mylar. Like EPS, mylar is also a material favoured for architectural representations, most often for drawings to be used in construction, rather than the images one might show a client or developer to convey the more ethereal and imaginative elements of a scheme. Mylar is not strictly speaking *papier calque* (tracing paper) but drafting film – its trade description is polyester film/plastic sheet.<sup>10</sup> The two are rather different, and this difference is important if we are to understand the potential critique offered by Arsham’s use of mylar to create fabulous scenes.

Made of plastic, mylar is easy to wipe clean. There is no need to scrape away erroneous lines with a scalpel and then apply a new thin veneer of plastic by rubbing with a special eraser. The drying time is faster too, making mylar a much easier material to use than tracing paper. But lacking the velvet finish of tracing paper and its ability to tease sensual sighs from the tip of a rotating pen, I have always considered it to have less poetic appeal. Certainly, during my time as an architect, before the fully-fledged arrival of the computer, drawing film was preferred in professional offices, yet the more artistically minded studio of architectural education favoured tracing paper. I therefore find Arsham’s use of mylar intriguing. In applying bewitching landscapes, painted in gouache, to its bland surface, he has transformed a material associated with ‘getting the job done’ into representations where reality becomes fantastical.

When rain – a weak form of acid – drips through and dissolves limestone, it changes its composition. The calcium carbonate reforms as calcite crystals forming caves and fascinating natural sculptures including stalactites and stalagmites. The iceberg habitats of the M House and Habitat ‘67 are also constructed of crystals. Ice, a mineral made of hydrogen oxide, has a crystalline structure with a hexagonal composition, whose variation is differentiated by ordering and density. In this series of works by Arsham, crystals of ice and calcite create glacial and cave settings for buildings whose own architecture is composed out of an intricate and changing combination of parts. An Arsham sculpture, also from 2004, consists of the front façade and corners of an art deco building – presumably a cinema – leaning back into a table, revealing the congealed brown glue in which it is resting. It is titled *Crystala* (2004) and has the word ‘crystala’ written vertically down the front of the building as a sign. Whereas in the two dimensional works from the ‘Proposal’ series the architecture placed in the caverns gives the illusion of having grown there, here the situation is reversed, and the building collapses onto, or alternatively, is pushed up by, the crystal formations.

Homesick  
2005  
View of the exhibition  
Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin  
Paris



The focus on crystals brings to mind Robert Smithson's fascination with the ability of crystalline structures to transform the commonplace 'into a labyrinth of non-objective abstractions',<sup>11</sup> and the connections he drew, made on a trip to explore minerals in New Jersey, between the structure of ice and other crystal-like materials that he encountered at quarries and the architecture of the roadside, including, for example, the tiled surfaces of tunnels.<sup>12</sup> In its creation of a fantasy environment, Arsham's work can also be compared to *The Crystal Chain*, a 'utopian correspondence' between a group of artists and architects initiated in 1919–1920 by architect Bruno Taut. This exchange of ideas rejected the more materialist and positivist attitudes to design prevalent at the time and focused on a visionary approach to the form an ideal society and architecture of the future should take, expressed in a series of letters and drawings.<sup>13</sup>

Arsham has described how, during a visit to New Mexico, he discovered caves that dwarfed high-rise structures in their size.<sup>14</sup> I wonder whether *Untitled* (2004) and *Crystala* (2004) are designed to reproduce within the gallery that feeling of encountering a building of diminished size that Arsham imagined would occur if a structure usually considered huge were to be placed in a cave in New Mexico. The choice of scale for a model certainly provides a way of producing surprises in size. Arsham's play with scale, apparent in the dwarfing effect of the 'Proposals', is also present in the 'Got Lost' series, where, similar to the surrealist tactic of 'making strange', the removal of architecture from its usual context and its repositioning on an iceberg of indeterminate size makes it almost impossible to guess the dimensions of the built construction.

In the first of what is set to be a series of collaborations with the veteran dance choreographer Merce Cunningham, Arsham produced an even larger model of a deco building cut in pieces, also sitting at an angle to a horizontal surface.<sup>15</sup> For *ODE/EON* (*Set for Merce Cunningham's eyeSpace*) (2007) the top half of

the architecture sinks into the stage, while the bottom pierces the ceiling. Arsham's understanding of the architecture of the stage, which for him works like a folded structure, where passages from one side of the stage lead directly to the other, inform the work. His aim was to make the horizontal fold into a vertical passage.<sup>16</sup>

*Lobby* (2005), which featured in Arsham's first solo show, *Homesick*, at Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris in 2005, is of a similar scale to the earlier *Crystala* (2004) and like the later *ODE/EON* (2007) also deals with an in-between passage or space. *Lobby* is not built at the usual scale of an architectural model, but something more like that of a doll's house – these tend to be constructed at 1:12, or less frequently at 1:24. Like a doll's house, *Lobby* uses the cut-away section to show both internal spaces and external finishes. But unexpectedly it is made of the actual materials with which one would construct a building – drywall, or plasterboard, metal studs and paint. In this sense it differs from both the conventional architectural scale model that shows the full-size design but in coded

8 <http://www.galinsky.com/buildings/latourette/index.htm>

9 See Jad Isaac and Fida Abdel Latif, 'Jerusalem: The Strangulation of the Arab Palestinian city', 9 July 2005, Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem. [http://www.arji.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=26&lang=en](http://www.arji.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=26&lang=en) and Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Head of PASSIA (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem, 'Documents on Jerusalem', June 1996, Jerusalem. [http://www.passia.org/jerusalem/publications/Documents\\_on\\_jerusalem.htm](http://www.passia.org/jerusalem/publications/Documents_on_jerusalem.htm) See also Susannah Tarbush, 'Architects protest Brown's JNF Patronship', *The Electronic Intifada*, 10 September 2007. <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article8982.shtml> and <http://www.btselem.org/english/Jerusalem/Index.asp>

10 [http://www.grafixplastics.com/mylar\\_what.asp](http://www.grafixplastics.com/mylar_what.asp)

11 See Robert Smithson, 'A Short Description of Two Mirrored Crystal Structures' (1965). See <http://www.robertsmithson.com>.

12 See Robert Smithson, 'The Crystal Land' (1966). See <http://www.robertsmithson.com>.

13 See for example Iain Boyd Whyte (ed.) *Crystal Chain Letters: Architectural Fantasies by Bruno Taut and His Circle*, (Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985). One member of the group was Paul Scheerbar, an author of fantastic drawings and literature, best known for his book *Glasarchitektur* (1914).

14 See Gean Moreno, 'Miami', *Contemporary*, n. 86 (2006).

15 See 'Various Kinds of Possibilities: Daniel Arsham meets Merce Cunningham', *Uovo* (January–March 2008) pp. 136–163. In Cunningham's view collaboration involves the coming together of a number of independently created works – art, dance and music. Following John Cage, it is the chance nature of such an encounter, which makes the creativity of the collaboration.

16 Elisa Turner, 'Critic's Pick', *Art News* (March 2007) p. 168.

**Staircase (Detail)**

2005

Wood, pigment, paint, plaster, aluminium

228 x 29 x 68,5 cm

7.5 feet x 11 1/2 inches x 27 inches

Edition of 3

Private Collection

Private Collection, Aventura, Florida

Private collection, Wyoming



materials, for example, where cardboard stands in for concrete, and 1:1 mock-ups or facsimiles of details which demonstrate the use of materials at the scale of 'real' life. In *Lobby*, then, the usual rules that accompany the choice of materials in a scale model do not apply. The sight of familiar substances conjures up images of *their* real size and so reduces the viewer's ability to imagine the building at full scale. Unable to gain access, one is left to reside at the threshold (or lobby) of one's imagination.

Like contemporary artist Nathan Coley, Arsham has an interest in both the differing materials and the possible scales of architectural models, in particular in how variations from the norm can effect viewer's perceptions and conceptions of the relation between real and imagined space – do viewer's see the work solely as an object in itself and/or do they make a connection to a referent proposed or constructed? Coley's *The Lamp of Sacrifice*, *161 Places of Worship*, *Birmingham* (2000) and *The Lamp of Sacrifice*, *286 Places of Worship*, *Edinburgh* (2004) were made at a small scale and of a material typical of an architectural model – corrugated cardboard,<sup>17</sup> while *Show Home* (2003)<sup>18</sup> also made in material usual of a model – ply – was constructed at 1:1, what curator Claire Doherty has called a 'facsimile' or copy rather than a model. However, like Arsham's *Crystala* and *Lobby*, Coley's *I Don't Have Another Land* (2002), a stained-wood model of the Marks and Spencers building in Manchester's Arndale Centre, blown up by the IRA in 1996, and presented with a line from a Jewish folk song as its title, is located at scale somewhere in between the object and its referent, leaving the viewer to oscillate between what is there and what is not.<sup>19</sup>

Arsham's two staircase sculptures continue his investigation of scale, something he describes in figurative rather than numerical terms. For Arsham, *Staircase* (2005) is the scale of a 'toy soldier' while *Open Staircase* (2006) a 'newborn baby'.<sup>20</sup> The absent mention of scale in the title of Arsham's work removes the anchor that could be offered by this kind of reference point, freeing the sculptures to

operate as things-in-themselves. But at the same time, because of their model-like appearance, the assumption is that these works have been built to a particular scale and that they have a referent. And so the referent keeps returning, something (or somewhere) else is continually referred to, a double of the sculpture that is not fixed, but flexible and plastic, producing in the viewer a feeling that is destabilizing and could perhaps be described as uncanny.

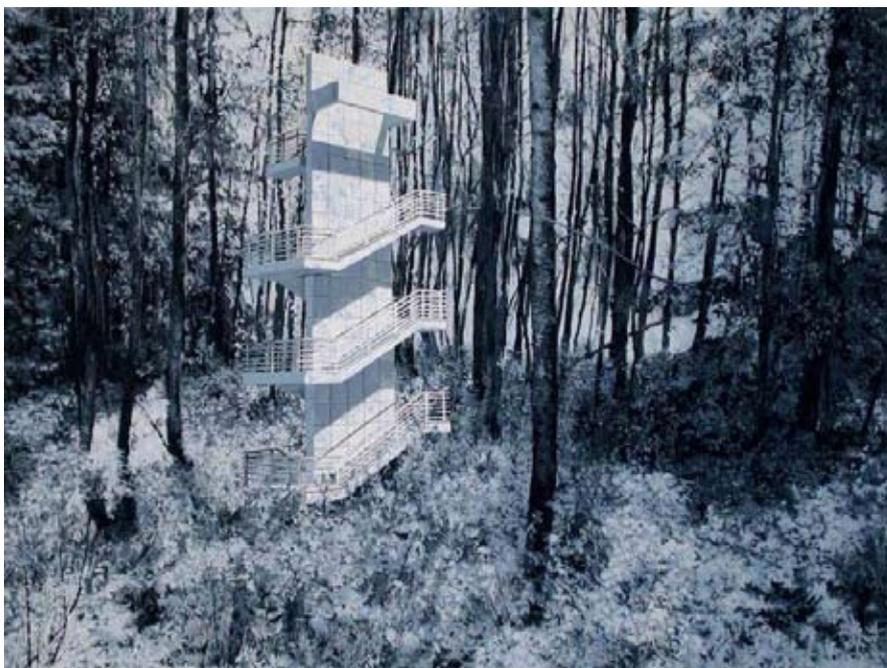
In his essay on 'The Uncanny' (1919) Freud's main argument, that the return of the repressed is the homely (*heimlich*) returning as the unhomely (*unheimlich*), is grounded in the connection he makes between home and the mother's body:

There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness' and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body ... the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix 'un' ['un-'] is the token of repression.<sup>21</sup>

Through a discussion of the etymology of the term and examples of uncanny doubles in literature, especially the relation between alive and dead, animate and inanimate in E. T. A. Hoffmann's story 'The Sand-Man' (1817), Freud shows how the uncanny is 'frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar'.<sup>22</sup> But he is careful to stress that not everything unknown and unfamiliar is uncanny, rather, and here Freud follows F. W. J. Schelling, the *unheimlich* is everything familiar that has been buried, 'that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.<sup>23</sup>

A series of monochrome paintings, gouache on mylar, bear the title *The Return*. They all show architectural elements, white and geometric, in lush and empty natural settings, still ponds fringed by tall reeds, and overgrown woodlands, reminiscent of the

**The Return #13**  
2005  
*Gouache on mylar*  
76 x 102 cm  
30 x 40 inches  
Collection of Judi Roaman



mangrove swamps of Florida. In some, such as *The Return #2* (2005), there are obelisks, and in others, like *The Return #8* (2005), columns and beams, and in yet others, like *The Return #4* (2005), high-level walkways isolated at either end. But the most common architectural element featured is the staircase. There are stand-alone staircase structures in *The Return #13* (2005) and *The Return #14* (2005), parts of stairs which seem to have come from nowhere in *The Return #1* (2005), and in *The Return #5* (2005) and *The Return #7* (2005) the returns of stairs have nowhere to go. The 'return' of a staircase has a double meaning in this case, since 'return' is also a technical term locating the point where the steps change direction, for example, on a dogleg staircase this is by 180 degrees.

So what is it that returns in Arsham's fantastic landscapes? Does nature return to architecture or architecture to nature? Is the return a blissful reunion, or does it bring the threat of retaliation, conflict or even the possible annihilation of one by the other? The simple forms suggest that architecture returns in the guise of modernism, or that modernism, when it returns, will do so in a pristine state, untouched by time, unoccupied in any way. Or are these geometrical fragments doubles that have come from somewhere else, that we mistake for the return of the original banished modernism? And are we right to assume that this is a return to the here and now, or are we looking at a future reappearance, in some other place. Perhaps the return is the other way around. It is architecture that has been here all along, and the natural setting that has returned, so recently that its arrival has not, as yet, had a chance to make a mark. It is possible that this repressed vegetation, which has been described as 'Florida's endangered wilderness',<sup>24</sup> has re-emerged, at once, taking architecture by surprise.

Arsham's *Building Cut (column #2)* (2005) also addresses what appears to be a recurring theme in his work – the untouched or perfect ruin. A white column does not meet in the middle. On the one hand it might comprise two parts that have not yet met, one

growing up from the floor like a stalagmite, and the other growing down from the ceiling like a stalactite, on the other it might have, as the title suggests, been cut in the middle. Yet the material of which it is comprised – EPS – shows less the signs of a cut followed by disintegration through erosion, than the appearance of having melted or dissolved. We know though the EPS does not melt and cannot be dissolved, so making the situation even more mysterious. *Building Cut (column #2)* is quite clearly a bizarre artifice. Yet while this work does not ask us for deductive analysis it does demand that we consider carefully the kind of qualities we associate with the materials that comprise architecture and nature, and the unstable line drawn between them.

It turns out that the illusion of erosion or melting is achieved through the use of a fluid combination of plaster and joint compound (itself a powder mix of plaster and gypsum powder).<sup>25</sup> This material, commonly used to fill the gaps between drywall, provides smooth seams and surface finishes. It is popular in the building industry for its ease and speed of application, and ability to make joints invisible. Beyond fulfilling this practical function, it appears not to have a particular aesthetic quality of its own. This is not a substance one would specify because of its materiality unlike wood, or slate,

17 See for example Nathan Coley: *There Will Be No Miracles Here* (Edinburgh and Newcastle: The Fruitmarket Gallery and Locust+, 2004).

18 See <http://www.showhome.org.uk/> and Paul Usherwood, 'Nathan Coley: North Shields', *Art Monthly*, n. 268 (July 2003) pp. 46–47.

19 See 'Nathan Coley in Conversation with Claire Doherty', Claire Doherty (ed.) *Thinking of the Outside: New Art and the City of Bristol* (University of the West of England and Bristol Legible City in Association with Arnolfini, 2005) pp. 30–37.

20 Personal conversation with the artist.

21 Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' [1919] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) pp. 217–256, p. 245. Accessed from <http://www.pep-web.org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/>.

22 Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' [1919], p. 220.

23 Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' [1919], p. 225.

24 Eisa Turner, 'Critic's Pick', *Miami Herald* (7 July 2006).

25 Personal correspondence with the artist.

**Cypress**  
 2006  
 Gouache on mylar  
 101 x 152 cm  
 40 x 60 inches  
 Lindemann Collection  
 Miami Beach



or steel. However, Arsham's work shows that it does not lack specificity; rather it is the perfect material for supporting illusions. Behind two differently broken columns, and making up the installations *Untitled* (2005), are two screens, one entitled *Magnolia and Irises* (2005), which draw strongly on the visual motifs of Art Nouveau, referencing the work of architects like Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Hector Guimard, Victor Horta, and the textile work of Margaret Macdonald. Art Nouveau appears to celebrate the symbiosis of culture and nature, but in different ways something disturbing happens to the natural. In Mackintosh's more decorative work, nature is (hung) drawn and quartered to form the structure of chairs and lamps, and the pattern for motifs on fabric and glass. In Horta's and Guimard's more florid excesses, architecture contrives to duplicate natural forms, making floral petals out of glass, curved tendrils out of iron, while wood is carved to look even more like itself. When dead materials mimic live ones there is something of the uncanny, and it is this reference that the natural forms represented graphically in Arsham's screens pick up on.

A later set of works by Arsham also shows a meeting of architecture and nature, but the quality of the encounter has changed. Here we have smaller fragments of construction often given natural names. Small white cubes, the size of bricks, float among textured ancient mangrove swamps, forming little structures the height of a child or elf in *Cypress* (2006), attaching themselves to tree trunks in *Fungi* (2006), and taking more elongated forms in *Grass* (2006). Other works show similar forms but take architectural titles, such as *Flats* (2006), where cubes somewhat larger and of different sizes appear in amalgamated configurations reminiscent of M House or Habitat '67, hovering just above the ground, or *Triangle* (2006) where a collection of rectangular objects gather to create a wigwam. These architectures seem weightless, to have blown onto, rather than grown out of, their surroundings. Attracted to one another by an invisible force field, they appear to float through their environment. Arsham's images offer a glimpse of a single moment in their passage.

Arsham states he has been fascinated by the speed of building in Miami, and the strange juxtaposition of construction and destruction,<sup>26</sup> which, with the speed-up of production and the reduction in the use of controlled explosions in demolition, it is hard to tell what is going up and what is coming down. The out-of-place alien feel to the fragments in the gouache works may reference fast-track architecture, created at speed, often of dubious quality, and designed to be nowhere at all. The aspiration of modernism, to cast aside the old-fashioned restraints of context and to embrace instead the freedom of autonomy – the design of buildings as self-contained objects – was at least governed by an aesthetic principle, whereas the drive behind many of these contemporary structures is simply a desire to make money.

Perhaps the title of Arsham's first solo show in Miami, *Building Schmuiliding* in 2006 at the new Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, is a nod at the schmoozing nature of developer architecture rampant in Miami. It is certainly interesting to compare Perrotin's Miami building with his other gallery, located in a seventeenth-century mansion in Paris's Marais *arrondissement*. Arsham's *Miami does Paris* (2006), a work that also approximates to child scale, brings together the main staircases from the two galleries, alluding to the plastic nature of architecture, its increasing flexibility of construction, as well as its fascination with style and surface depth. At first it might seem that Paris stands for a serious sense of style with 'proper' historical credentials set in relation to Miami's more recent surface gloss. But it is worth reflecting that the building in which the Miami gallery is located, a motorcar salesroom from 1959, may, at the time of its construction, have been considered an architecture associated with speed and light, yet fifty years later, those very technologies that governed its function, have, through nostalgia, gained it a weighty retrospective charm. Extensions of earlier works like *Building Cavity (Corner)* (2005) where the corner of a wall appears eaten away, are developed in *Building Schmuiliding* as anomalies, deviations from what is standard,



normal, or expected. The deviation that is *Wall Erosion Anomaly* (2006) does not 'take away' in order to overturn what is expected of the gallery, as in Michael Asher's work at the Clare Copley Gallery, Los Angeles in 1974, where he removed the partition between the office and exhibition space to show to the viewer the usually hidden operations that allow the gallery to function economically.<sup>27</sup> Instead Arsham's removals have the performative self-consciousness of a Gordon Matta-Clark 'cut', as for example, in *Splitting* (1974) where he sawed two parallel slices through a wood-frame house in Englewood, New Jersey.<sup>28</sup> Yet while Matta-Clark's 'cuts' expose architecture's fiction, revealing walls believed to be solid as hollow instead, Arsham's 'erosions' maintain this fiction, extending the white mass of the surface into the erosion's depth.

Arsham's alterations are not all erosions or removals. Some draw attention to the architectural qualities of the gallery by the addition of an ambiguous artificial construction. In *Vent Anomaly (w)* (2006) the vent at first appears to be melting, but on a closer inspection it seems more likely that something else, the same white colour and consistency as the vent, is seeping through. As in 'Erosions' it is the material of the architecture itself, which, rather than provide structure and order, has dissolved into a malleable white goo. And then the viewer wonders whether the vent itself is part of the fiction. Where is the edge of this fantasy of architecture's meltdown?<sup>29</sup> Rather like the fictive constructions of Cristina Iglesias's *Vegetation Rooms* (2000–2002), where one illusion – entering an enchanted forest – is replaced by another – being overcome by the artificial landscape created by the artist through repetitions and replications of the flora and fauna on the screens,<sup>30</sup> first we are asked to 'make believe' that the architectural infrastructure of the gallery, usually invisible, has a life of its own and has transmuted from solid to liquid, and then we realize that the reality upon which this construct is based is itself part of the fiction.

Arsham's *Playground* (2007), his second solo exhibition at Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris, also shown in Melbourne, develops

further his manipulation of the architectural surface and his interest in the construction of artifice. A series of swellings point to a space beyond the physical limits of the architecture, suggesting that a gap exists just behind the white surface of the walls and ceilings. In *Hammock* (2007) a tiny person's form hangs down into the gallery (a child perhaps?) held by the tensile folds of the ceiling, and in *Sheet* (2007) the wall traps and wraps, maybe swaddles, another small human. In the subtle modulations of the other two pieces in this series the actual human form is absent, but its trace referenced. The draped edge of the wall just misses the floor in *Curtain* (2007), its undulations tilt upwards into the gallery like the hem of dress in movement, gesturing an event – something about to happen – that has so far been concealed, suggesting the drama, otherwise implicit, in the space of the gallery. In the discreet *Wrinkle (3)* (2007) fine creases ripple across the wall, transforming the permanence of the architectural edge into something flexible and fluid. For the opening of *Playground* dancer/choreographer Jonah Bokaer created a piece which addressed *Sheet*, continuing both Bokaer's critique of conventional modernist portraiture via unexpected movement patterns and Arsham's interest in collaborations with choreographers and the potential of human interaction to transform the permanence of architecture.

In a series of paintings from the same show, other elements attempt to stretch out across the edge of their accustomed settings.

26 Felix Burriche, 'Daniel Arsham', *Pin Up* (Fall 2006) pp. 26–33.

27 See for example Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (ed.) *Michael Asher, Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979*, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984, pp. 76–81.

28 See for example, Pamela M. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), James Attlee and Lisa Le Feuvre, *Gordon Matta-Clark: The Space Between*, (Porchester, UK: Nazraeli Press, 2003) and Corinne Diserens (ed.) *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2006).

29 The vents were fabricated and then altered. Personal correspondence with the artist.

30 Cristina Iglesias in 'A Conversation between Cristina Iglesias and Gloria Moure', Iwona Blazwick (ed.) *Cristina Iglesias* (Porto, Dublin and London: Museu de Arte Contemporanea de Serralves, Irish Museum of Modern Art and Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002–3) pp. 21–66, p. 65.

**Another light (Rising Beams)**  
 2008  
 Gouache on double sided mylar  
 66 x 46 cm  
 26 x 18 inches



In *Ocean (Blue)* (2007), for example, monoliths rise up out of the water at the sea's limit, in *Beams (Blue)* (2007) two obelisks reach across a forest setting, and in a reversal of the 'nature holds while architecture transgresses' pairing, in *Limb (Blue)* (2007) the transversal element is a fleshy, but hand-less arm which comes out of a wall to meet the floor. Rendered in carefully hatched ink lines, rather than in flat painted surfaces, this work references a period of art and architectural representation which precedes modernism, and so renders its 'otherworldly' vision in historical terms. That each piece in the series exists as one of a pair of hand-drawn duplicates, where every line is not quite the same as its twin, only serves to underscore the uncanny *doppelgänger* quality. Rather than forward-looking utopias cast adrift on icebergs or banished to caves, we discover the archaeological remains of another time (our time?) in the deadly calm of what might well be a post-apocalyptic scene. Arsham's version of the untouched ruins of the future are brought even more clearly into focus in his most recent series of paintings.<sup>31</sup> The beams have returned, painted now, not hatched, engulfed by, and not floating through, foliage. The colours that were previously indicated by the titles of the work reappear in the tone of the light infusing the painting – the strange orange glow of *Tornado Light* (2008), the reddish tint of *Another Light (am)* (2008), and the ethereal blue of *Another Light (pm)* (2008). Across the spectrum, all these hues bring with them a sense of disquiet.<sup>32</sup> Yet the light is not discordant, it is calm and soothing, and there is no sign that any event as dark as destruction has taken place, no clue even that it will. Nothing is necessarily wrong, yet something is not quite right.

It is this foreboding sense – that something is not quite right – which pervades Arsham's work. And no amount of careful deciphering will placate the demands made on me by the strangeness of the still-life scenes he offers. Somehow architecture is implicated – as victim or as perpetrator – it is not clear to me, nor is the paradoxical sense of time I am drawn into. It is as easy to believe that the

images predict a sublime aftermath, as it is to assume they have already forgotten a past disaster. But look elsewhere and Arsham suggests otherwise, soothing me that his scenes of lost catastrophes are mere fiction, teasing me with the gentle playfulness of his particular version of collapse and the exquisite delicacy of his apparently harmless white concoctions that creep mysteriously through the gallery walls.

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### Biography

Professor Jane Rendell BA (Hons), Dip Arch, MSc, PhD, is Director of Architectural Research at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. An architectural designer and historian, art critic and writer, she is author of *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (forthcoming), *Art and Architecture*, (2006), *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, (2002) and co-editor of *Pattern* (2007), *Critical Architecture* (2007), *Spatial Imagination*, (2005), *The Unknown City*, (2001), *Intersections*, (2000), *Gender Space Architecture*, (1999), *Strangely Familiar*, (1995). She is on the Editorial Board for *ARQ (Architectural Research Quarterly)* and the *Journal of Visual Culture in Britain*, a member of the AHRC Peer Review College (2003–2007) and chair of the RIBA President's Awards for Research (2006–). In 2006 she was a research fellow at CRASSH (Centre for Research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities) at the University of Cambridge and received an honorary degree from the University College of the Creative Arts.

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<sup>31</sup> Martine Bouchier has pointed out the paradoxical state of the non-eroded ruin in Arsham's work. See Martine Bouchier, 'Daniel Arsham's Analogous Ruins'. See [http://www.galerieperrotin.com/artiste-Daniel\\_Arsham-17.html](http://www.galerieperrotin.com/artiste-Daniel_Arsham-17.html).

<sup>32</sup> Jeff Rian has compared Arsham's gouaches to Miles Davis's ballad, 'Blue in Green', from *Kind of Blue* (1959). Rian likens Arsham's 'modal aesthetics' to the way in which, for Davis in 'Blue in Green', 'mode replaced melody and the improvisations were based on color-like modulations'. See Jeff Rian, 'The World According to Daniel Arsham'. See [http://www.galerieperrotin.com/artiste-Daniel\\_Arsham-17.html](http://www.galerieperrotin.com/artiste-Daniel_Arsham-17.html).

DANIEL ARSHAM'S  
FICTIONAL ARCHEOLOGY.

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MARC QUINN, 2015

Is that the past or the future holding the line in the sculpture *Payphone*? The handset sitting, waiting, waiting, waiting for the caller who will never return. Is it the past calling the future, the future calling the past or the here calling the now?

What's on *Cassette Tape*?

What fateful day was announced through *Pill Mic*?

What was the last news on *TV*?

What was the last flash of *Graflex Camera*?

These are some of the questions that Daniel Arsham's future archeology sculptures make us ask ourselves. Like looking at our own culture through a million year telescope. In *The Dying Gaul Revisited*, Nike meets the Parthenon. Cultural memories refract and reflect with memories we might be having in the future. All art is time travel communicating with people from the present but also people who are yet to be born. Daniel Arsham's work speeds the process up and gives us the macabre thrill of seeing our culture how others might see it centuries from now. Of course, Arsham's sculptures themselves would have to be part of that archeology, being cast in volcanic glass, hydrostone, steel fragments, rock and crystal but what would the archeologist of the future make of that? Some strange historicizing cult would be conjectured, or perhaps a religion that looked to the future. Either way, we won't be there to find out but through his work we glimpse, from a safe distance, the ravishes of time which await us all.

And there is nothing more thrilling than dying by proxy and living to tell the tale.

## THE MEDIUM OF THE MEDIUM

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STEVEN MATIJCIO, 2015

Ruins and artifacts are the portrait of a past way of life—enduring as evidence of the way mankind shapes apparatuses, and the ways they, in turn, shape us. Over the past few years, Daniel Arsham has turned a variety of modern media devices and cultural objects into crumbling relics; “preserved,” in his words, “like petrified wood or the figures of Pompeii.” From phones, cameras, microphones and VHS tapes to film projectors, tires, keyboards and boomboxes he has produced close to 3,000 calcified effigies of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries from earthly substances like volcanic ash, obsidian, glacial rock and rose quartz. And while their introductory presentation in Miami as an archeological dig may seem slightly premature, there is no question that the physical object has been increasingly cast as abject. It is the anchor, the baggage, and that which must be surpassed in the name of progress. Cloud-based technologies, streaming media, virtual identities, e-books, experience economies and the post-nation citizen collectively advance a dematerialized future where the real grows increasingly ethereal. Facing this intangible, but rapidly approaching horizon, Arsham’s swelling time capsule takes on the ostensible guise of resistance: obsessively copying (and recopying) contemporary instruments with elemental dust to forge a sanctuary of solid ground.

Unlike utilitarian antiquities of the past such as axes or arrowheads, the media devices in “Remember the Future” seemingly depend on external information to be complete—transmitting content rather than carrying or constituting it. Moreover, as the pace of development continues to accelerate and we line up to buy the latest installment of the iPhone or Galaxy, handheld devices have become glorified placeholders; living briefly as stand-ins within a finite, ignoble “nowness” that is quickly rendered inferior by the unrelenting next generation, and the next. Upon this ceaseless march forward Arsham gathers jettisoned casualties of the perpetual upgrade and congregates an intervention by way of alchemy and archeology. Expounding upon media guru Marshall McLuhan’s (1911–1980) prophetic maxim that “the medium is the message,” Arsham alters the medium of the medium to give us pause: replacing the plastic and circuitry of electronics with the salt of the earth to revalue disposable devices with the weight of History. By casting various lineages of cameras, microphones, telephones and projectors in/as geological materials, Arsham slows their evolutionary trek and endows each stage with an otherwise absent aura of time. By ossifying the pawns that carry obsolescence in their DNA, he gifts these objects the paradoxical luxury to erode, rather than simply disappear. In this stay of execution, in an era where we backup ever more data and remember far less, and where the durability of the digital archive has yet to be fully confirmed, Arsham’s work enshrines these devices in the

enduring museological language of the artifact. By doing so—turning fossilized versions of our media dalliances into encyclopedic fetish objects—he enriches the intermediaries as repositories of History, devotion, entropy, and the lingering fingerprints of us, their authors.

Why do societies around the world go to such ends to preserve and venerate the physical remnants of those before them? The simple answer is because they are pieces of us, and our anthropocentric path through time. Arsham's most recent extension of "Welcome to the Future" are quite literally pieces of man: marrying the forms of his Pompeii-inspired self-portraits with the entropic casting process of his media archive. In a now well-known flashpoint of Arsham's personal history, we learn that, as a child, he and his family barely survived Hurricane Andrew as the storm ripped through their Miami home in 1992. Huddled in a closet as walls collapsed, windows shattered and insulation swirled like mist, he remembers, "The experience was one of architectural dismemberment—it was quick and violent." And while Arsham is wary of positioning this event as the sole foundation of his structure-bending practice, the wreckage he experienced fundamentally altered the perceived solidity of both the buildings and bodies we live. Decades later, deep into the evolving legacy of this formative—but now absent—moment, he fashions an ongoing series of full-body self-portraits out of crushed glass and marble. Seeking to overcome inherent frailties, fault lines and scars as matter-turned-metaphor, "The glass is really about taking this broken useless material," in the words of Arsham, "and reforming it back into something that has intention and purpose." His ensuing avatars are more meditative than monumental, standing ponderous and bewildered as if they had just emerged from hibernation. They have been made whole and hefty but lack the corresponding footing—searching for orientation as their plight propels them back to an archetypal quest for the fugitive condition we call reality. His reconstituted figures are less illusory apparitions than touchstones to a physical existence that continues to recede as we advance towards a cloud-based future. These figures are one with shattered glass, geological materials and the aging media objects, not as nostalgic soothers, but as catalysts for the 21<sup>st</sup> century mind to travel backwards and forwards at once.

Choosing translation over full-scale transformation, Arsham concludes, "I approach projects and spaces in a way that I try not to add anything to them, but instead take something we already know and make it do something that it shouldn't... Remake or reform it, giving it new purpose and possibility." In so doing, he highlights the crucial element of this casting and collection process—retaining the visual resemblance of our Darwinian consumer landscape but stripping these objects of their fleeting utility. These devices no longer function as they were originally intended, but as their societal value erodes their currency is reconstituted as these aging pariahs are cast—literally and figuratively—as catalysts of the mind. With present purpose evacuated, these pan-historical relics evoke memories of past uses and projections of what will take their place in the days ahead. In the process, Arsham thickens the present like a cloud of humidity—making our clothes sag and breath heavy—as he coalesces the otherwise intangible passage of time into a new terra, a new geology, to plant our feet.

# PARIS, 3020

BY LUDOVIC LAUGIER,  
CURATOR OF GREEK SCULPTURE  
AT THE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

*Paris 3020*, an exhibition by Daniel Arsham, opened at Perrotin Paris, Rue de Turenne, on January 11, 2020: its title a place name, Paris, followed by numbers, “3020,” which viewers may not initially interpret as a date, so unfamiliar are they with trying to think themselves so far into the future. And yet that is what “3020” indicates: the exhibition asks us to project ourselves forward by one thousand years. There we are faced with a series of familiar statues—antique, Renaissance, classical, venerable perhaps, certainly very old—that seem as though they have been rediscovered a thousand years from now, affected or altered by the passing of time. This creation of fictional archeology is typical of Arsham’s work. For more than ten years, he has brought the past into the present: taking everyday, modern artifacts that will be very familiar to his audience, some vernacular and some cult objects (albeit utilitarian ones), and translating them into eroded gypsum cement studded with quartzite and selenite crystals. For this exhibition, Arsham’s focus has changed and the *mise-en-abyme* goes deeper: the objects he has chosen to reproduce are antique works, most of them discovered between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, or produced between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sculptures that have already been ravaged by time, then restored, statues long considered masterpieces: timeless Venuses, imperious emperors, a prophet, and more. We find ourselves oscillating between a distant past and an impossible future, a time when these iconic statues, rather frighteningly for a curator, will be rediscovered in the ruins of our museums, battered by the centuries. A new aesthetic of ruins, ruins of ruins... The cracks running across his gypsum casts bring to mind streams of water flowing over them; the quartz Arsham embeds on their surface could also suggest the crystallization that occurs when marble, at its essence a metamorphic stone, is burned by fire.

Arsham chose these icons of art history, to be presented in this way, with an intuitive concern for variety. As he was planning for his collaboration with the Réunion des Musées Nationaux's casting workshop in Saint-Denis—where he was given unprecedented access to its exceptional collection of historical molds of masterpieces, to use as the vital matrices of his own creations—he became fascinated by the archaic sculpture of the Lady of Auxerre, a totem of early Greek art, and by the Venus of Arles, which for so long was displayed, in a blaze of glory, in the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles. He was struck as well by reliefs teeming with Nereids and Amazons, by the fierce emperor Caracalla, the debonair Antonine princess Lucilla, by Michelangelo's colossal Moses, and again by Antoine Coysevox's graceful wood nymph. A whole population of statues.

Among the antique works he chose, he decided to take on the Venus de Milo, that icon among icons, an image that has become almost invisible as a result of having been appropriated time and time again by artists and advertisers—Michelin tires, Levi's jeans, Ferrarelle water, the Paris Saint-Germain soccer club, Mercedes Benz, to name a few. He was, perhaps unwittingly, walking in the footsteps of Magritte and his *Copper Handcuffs* (1931), of Max Ernst, of Dalí, of Arman, of Clive Barker and his *Chained Venus* (1971), and of Jim Dine, who is obsessed with the Venus de Milo. But here she seems different, as she's never been seen before: more than Surrealist appropriation, what she conveys is the effect of uchronia, or an idealized version of the past. In addition, the Venus de Milo, as seen by Arsham in the Louvre, is part of a larger ensemble, placed alongside the Venus of Arles and Michelangelo's Moses, in a display that deliberately evokes those of the most traditional museums. At Perrotin, Arsham's works are aligned on pedestals—creating striking effects of perspective—while the reliefs are hung at the visitor's eye-level. The most monumental statues are placed on lower bases, copying the mode of presentation favored at the Louvre since the early 2000s in the gallery featuring the Venus de Milo. The hollow joins of these bases, which separate them visually from the floor, implicitly, even unconsciously, make reference to a landmark of classic display design: the presentation methods devised by the Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa, notably the ones he conceived for the Museo Castelvecchio in Verona. In Arsham's exhibition at Rue de Turenne, the lighting on the hollow joins discreetly emphasizes that motif.

The many statues and reliefs brought together by Arsham, the great majority of them antique, reprising originals found distributed around the different rooms of the Louvre, or even on display in Vienna and Rome, also evoke a particular art-historical genre, that of *capricci* (caprices). For example, certain paintings by Giovanni Paolo Panini show vertiginous accumulations of all the most iconic antique statues of eighteenth-century Rome: the *Laocoon*, the *Borghese Gladiator*

and Vase, the *Boy with Thorn*, and the *Dying Gaul* from the Capitoline Museum, a work that Arsham had already revisited back in 2010. As the artist's choice of masterpieces proves to be also personal and subjective, it might bring to mind the painting by Johann Zoffany, an admittedly rather fantastical composition, showing Lord Towneley, seated, surrounded by the collection he meticulously assembled: *Charles Towneley and His Friends in His Sculpture Gallery in Park Street, Westminster* (1782). One might think, finally, of the aesthetic of paintings that show the ruins of Classical Antiquity, above all those of Rome, this time in order to illustrate the passage of time. At the forefront of the masters working in this vein was Hubert Robert, whose dozens of works on the theme include *Two Young Women Drawing amidst the Ruins of Rome* (1787), depicting a landscape of ruins filled with statues and reliefs, either broken or eroded over the years. The artist was amusingly nicknamed "Robert of the Ruins." Perhaps, one day, looking back to the exhibition *Paris 3020*, there will be talk of "Daniel of the Ruins."

# MOONRAKER

BY SOPHIE MAKARIOU,  
PRESIDENT OF THE MUSÉE NATIONAL  
DES ARTS ASIATIQUES - GUIMET, PARIS

When the Musée Guimet gave American artist Daniel Arsham carte blanche to create a work in our rotunda, he drew on the Zen garden as a source of inspiration. In this installation he has recreated a *Ginkgo biloba*, a tree closely associated with Asia that has very special leaves. The ginkgo also happens to be the oldest tree in the world. Arsham's work contains a subtle reference to the Musée Guimet, the National Museum of Asian Arts, because we are fortunate to have two venerable ginkgo trees in our grounds.

Daniel Arsham completed this Zen garden with a lantern. Also known as *dai-dōrō* in Japan, the lantern is a very important feature in Japanese gardens. It is generally composed of five parts, which represent the five elements of Buddhist cosmology: the void, wind, fire, water and earth. These lanterns are present in many places in Japan, and are frequently associated with gardens, but initially they were found in temple gardens.

To make this piece, Daniel Arsham used traditional materials. He replaced the gravel that is traditionally present in Zen gardens with crushed crystals in a striking shade of blue. The color blue is associated with the museum and its founders, the Guimet family, who were industrialists and philanthropists from Lyon. It was Émile Guimet who founded the museum and gifted it to the state in 1889, but his family gained their wealth by inventing artificial ultramarine pigment. The special properties of this pigment enable light refraction, making it whiter, and is used in paper manufacturing to give wood pulp an appearance of bright whiteness. This artificial blue was known as "Guimet blue" and was also widely used to whiten laundry.

# Introduction

## Larry Warsh

Creativity may come in many forms, but as the following pages illustrate, drawing and sketching are two modes essential to Daniel Arsham's creative process and artistic practice. Although Arsham is well-known for his sculptural work with molds, his artistic origins are actually in painting and drawing—both of which he has returned to in recent years. An expert draftsman, Arsham exhibits a keen attention to detail in every aspect of his work, including the many drawings never intended to be seen outside the studio. Collected here for the first time, these sketches demonstrate the artist's technical skill and thought process, and flesh out his imaginary world.

Many of the sketches in this volume are more than just preparatory works, though, of course, they are that too—evidenced by the annotations he often includes on the page. Large-scale sculptures and architectural interventions require extensive planning and forethought. And for Arsham, both the early stages of a design and the deeper, more thorough planning processes take place on paper. Such can be seen in the drawings of architectural structures gone all loose and drippy; the unexpected ripple of a wall's surface, which is bunched up like a bedsheet, and partially enveloping a clock; cartoonishly oversized stairs; viscous goop dripping from an HVAC vent; and a standing figure, who has pressed through an elastic-looking white ceiling, and wears the architectural element like some comical ghost in reverse drapery: curiosities and wonders all, developed *first* on paper.

More than his paintings and sculptures, Arsham's sketches inspire me to think in terms of lists and categories; I can't help myself. As I leaf through them, I automatically think: cars (BMW, DeLorean, Mercedes, Porsche, Ferrari, Volkswagen); hats; cassette tapes; phones; Bugs Bunny and Mickey; Greek statues; keyboards; furniture; Pokémon; crystals; brands, brands, and more brands; cameras; and cartoons. The ideas seem individuated, less a cohesive whole than the rooms full of the three-dimensional works. It's so much easier to drill down on imagery in the sketches than it is in the bigger, more elaborate sculptural works. The ideas are plainer, more transparent.

While Arsham's sketches are vehicles and plans for his paintings and sculptures, they are also artworks in their own right. They manage to coexist as preparatory, formal, and artistic works. This counterintuitive coexistence is a through line and permeates much of Arsham's work and practice—for instance, in the ways he confounds by collapsing the space and time in between disparate points in history (a speculative, future history, even). There is a leveling of sorts that happens in the work, not unlike roaming an encyclopedic museum, and experiencing the incongruity of passing from one period room to the next.

There is often something inchoate about a sketch (even a framed one) that typically isn't present in a sculpture or a painting. (Examples from both categories tend to appear as fully formed, completed works. The sculpture sits on its plinth, waiting to be seen. The painting hangs on the wall and does the same.) In Arsham's case, however, sculpture is pulled back into a relationship with perceived time, with incompleteness, and becoming. And this is due to the simultaneous nature by which they seem to erode and decay, while also exhibiting crystalline growth. Their status is indeterminate, their objecthood laden with an unknown, fictional past (or future? or future

past?). Arsham's collapsing of time disrupts the generally agreed-upon time system, and thus the synchronicity that we often take for granted. It is exactly Arsham's *desynchronicity* that trips us up and forces us to question what we are seeing. At the same time, their very objecthood is held in a state of suspended disbelief: they are objects of fantasy, and yet we all know very well that they're works of contemporary art.

Arsham pulls the past into the present while passing the contemporary through a process of ruination, which gives it the appearance of an artifact. And though the objects appropriate the visual language of artifacts, they are in fact the opposite: the artworks are artifices, not artifacts. (They are *imaged* artifacts. This is, after all, "fictional archeology.")

So many ruins. So much detritus and ruination. And yet, all within settings decidedly nothing like the so-called trash heap of history. In one of Arsham's sketches, he has imagined a fragmented, standing figure with one arm pointed toward the sky. The figure's body has noticeably missing sections (part of a leg, parts of the arms), which are replaced by thin, solid lines, implying repairs. In his annotation on the page, we read, "Like a marble figure from antiquity that has stainless pipe completing the missing sections." While not a perfect analogy, this is reminiscent of Alfonso Cuarón's rendering of Michelangelo's *David* in his 2006 film *Children of Men*: there, housed in the Ark of the Arts, David stands upon an unceremoniously repaired leg, the missing marble between left ankle and knee replaced by a metal rod. For Cuarón's imaginary version of *David*, the figure has suffered damage and undergone repair, though not exactly restoration. Rather than a return to an idealized past (as implied in the act of restoration), the blunt nature of the repair forces us to grapple with the existence of objects in space across time. And this too is present in the sketches, this act of dragging material culture to and fro in a fantastical time span, and then examining the results. Ultimately, Arsham's world is *uchronic* and disturbs the mutually exclusive categories of reality and fiction. It's dynamic and ambiguous. Its metaphysics is speculative. In the sketches, we see these ideas in process, on the page.

Larry Warsh

LARRY WARSH  
INTRODUCTION

Throughout his career, Daniel Arsham has defied categorization. His work exists beyond the confines of art, architecture, or performance art. Despite strong ties to the visual, he is at heart a conceptual artist. He plays with the qualities of substance—making objects and materials “do what they’re not supposed to do,”<sup>1</sup> giving walls the qualities of fabric or liquid. He also plays with time, recasting objects from the present into a state of eroded decay, as if discovered by archaeologists in the future. Through his fluency in popular culture and insights into our present moment, his work has resonated with a global generation. Through transforming the mundane,

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1 Daniel Arsham, <https://www.danielarsham.com/about>.

he has presented us with the evidence of our material impact on the natural world, and what that narrative may look like in the future.

Arsham was raised in Miami, Florida. From an early age he was deeply influenced by the sense of illusion and fiction found in much of his surroundings, from the fantasies purveyed by Walt Disney World to Miami's very existence as a city built on swampland, its beaches lined with sand pumped in from elsewhere. At the age of twelve, Arsham's understanding of architecture was profoundly altered when Hurricane Andrew hit Florida, destroying nearly everything around him. His experience of the hurricane left a lasting impression, and images of that time have remained with him, deeply influencing his artistic practice throughout his career.

In 1999, Arsham moved to New York to attend the Cooper Union, where he excelled

in his art and architecture courses. Soon after graduating he came to the attention of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which invited him to tour with them as a set, lighting, and costume designer. Cunningham's unusual process of collaboration, in which each element of the performance—music, dance, and design—is developed completely independently, was a challenge for Arsham, who was only twenty-five at the time. But his success resulted in Cunningham selecting Arsham as the designer for the company's final six performances at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

Influenced by a trip to Easter Island, where he encountered a research expedition in progress, Arsham developed an interest in archaeology and the ancient past. He soon learned that much of what we understand about the past is created in the present and is often invented on the basis

of scant evidence. Combined with the profound impact that Hurricane Andrew had had on his psyche, this realization led him to develop the concept of “Future Relics.” In Arsham’s hands, familiar, everyday objects—computers, cars, gaming consoles, alarm clocks, phones—were made to appear deteriorated and eroded. Within the decay, however, Arsham inserted crystals, suggesting growth and regeneration. This concept of “Fictional Archaeology” took hold, becoming a defining thread throughout his career.

In parallel with his development as an artist, Arsham cofounded the design firm Snarkitecture with Cooper Union classmate Alex Mustonen. The firm quickly gained notoriety, combining sculpture, art, and architecture in a multidisciplinary practice. With a touch of humor, Snarkitecture projects are designed to lift participants out of the everyday and into

something unusual: a “beach” made of more than a million plastic balls, or a “house” that uses skewed perspective to explore the differences in how adults and children relate to the world around them. The firm’s success led them to work with top retail brands such as Kith, Valextra, and COS (Collection of Style), among others, in designing storefronts, interiors, and installations.

Arsham’s desire to reach a wide range of audiences, and his aptitude for doing so, has made him a true artist of our time. Engaging both elite members of the art world and those whom the art world frequently excludes, he transcends not only the labels of “artist” or “architect” but the realms of fine art and commercial art that such creatives usually inhabit. He manipulates the moment or place where opposite forces meet—the gray areas between construction and

destruction, illusion and reality, familiar and unfamiliar, human and inhuman. By utilizing a democratic language of materials and symbols, from Venus de Milo to Pikachu, he has broadened the scope of what it means to be an artist in the world today.

LARRY WARSH  
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