

## **Galerie Barbara Wien**

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Julia Halperin *Jimmie Durham, Whose Trenchant Art Needed American Identity and Colonialism, Has Died at 81*, artnet, November 17, 2021

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### **People**

## **Jimmie Durham, Whose Trenchant Art Needed American Identity and Colonialism, Has Died at 81**

The artist's work about the role of Native identity in American culture gained him wide acclaim and pointed scrutiny.

**Julia Halperin**, November 17, 2021

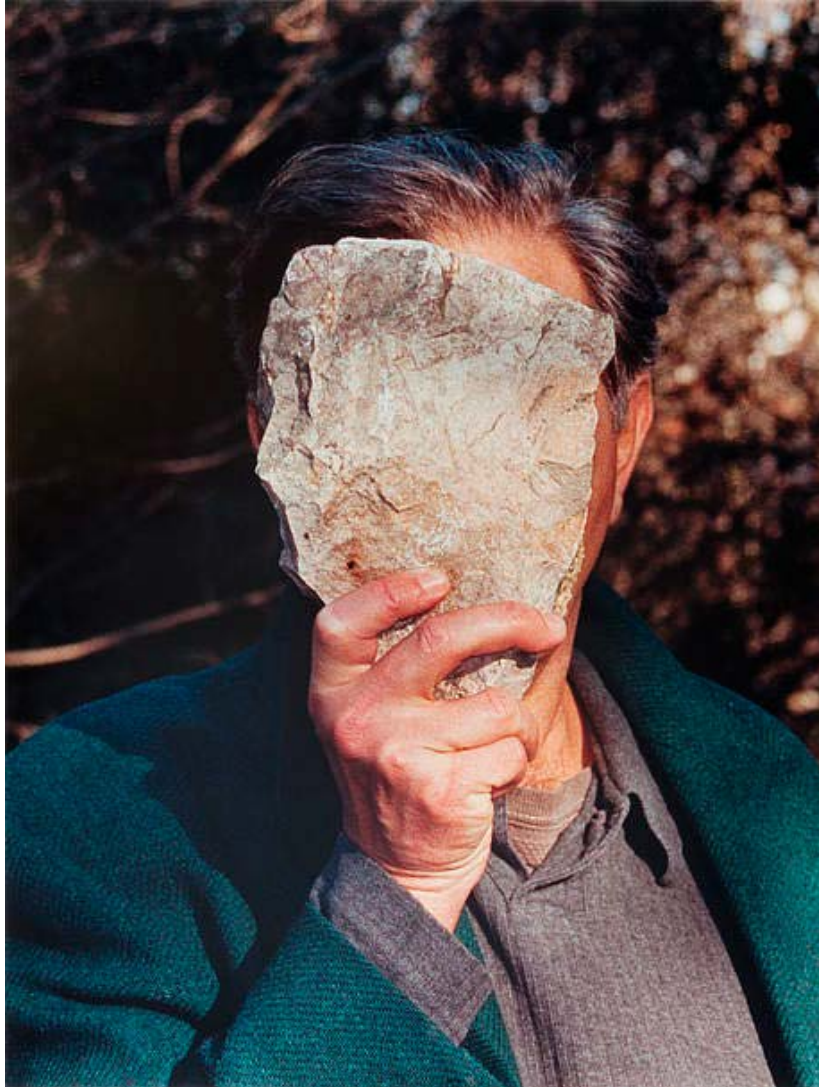


Jimmie Durham in Goslar, Germany. Photo by Holger Hollemann/picture alliance via Getty Images.

Jimmie Durham, a performer, sculptor, activist, and writer who resisted easy categorization in both art and life, has died. He was 81.

The news was confirmed by his gallery Kurimanzutto in New York. The artist died in his sleep on Tuesday night at home in Berlin due to a medical condition, a representative from the gallery said.

From a sculpture made by dropping a nine-ton volcanic boulder onto the roof of a black Chrysler, to figures assembled from New York street trash accessorized with “Indian” touches, to a parody film about what it’s like to be discovered as an artist, Durham made art that blended incisive political and cultural commentary, humor, and wit.



Jimmie Durham, *Self-Portrait Pretending to Be a Stone Statue of Myself* (2006). Courtesy of ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe.

He is perhaps best known for making art that examined the legacy of colonialism and the role of Native American identity in American culture. It is this work that gained him wide acclaim—but also pointed scrutiny.

When a major traveling U.S. solo exhibition opened in 2017, it reignited a debate over whether Durham, who was not a recognized or registered member of the Cherokee tribe but self-identified as Cherokee, was capitalizing on an identity he had no right to claim.

Durham, for his part, resisted that label and any other. “I’m accused, constantly, of making art about my own identity,” he said in a 2011 interview. “I never have. I make art about the settler’s identity when I make political art. It’s not about my identity, it’s about the Americans’ identity.”

Over the course of his celebrated career, Durham appeared in most of the world's important contemporary art exhibitions—more than once. (His [official CV](#) is 25 pages.)

He [won the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement](#) at the 2019 Venice Biennale, having appeared in the exhibition's 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2013 editions. Durham participated in the 1992 and 2012 Documenta exhibitions in Kassel, Germany, and the 1993, 2003, and 2014 Whitney Biennials in New York.



Jimmie Durham, *Brown Bear* (2017). Image courtesy Ben Davis.