

# BIRNAM WOOD/GALLERIES

## DAVID DATUNA *ELEMENTS* OPENS MAY 1

### PRESS RELEASE

New York, April 9—Birnam Wood Galleries is pleased to announce that David Datuna's eighth solo show titled *Elements* will run from May 1st through June 7<sup>th</sup> at the gallery's Chelsea location in New York. The exhibition will be the artist's first show of new work since his installation *Viewpoint of Billions* at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in February drew 23,000 visitors, the largest crowds the museum has seen for a show in more than three decades. *Viewpoint of Billions* was also the first contemporary artwork to integrate the wearable computer Google Glass, creating a rich interactive experience.

Taking the measure of identity is fraught with risk for a visual artist. With this exhibition of portraits, David Datuna explores that challenge in ways that tell us much about the subjects' identity and simultaneously, something about ourselves and our shared narrative of history and culture. From Lincoln to the Beatles, from Martin Luther King to Andy Warhol, Datuna has chosen figures that allow him to decode the origins of influence.

The title *Elements* is taken from the centerpiece of the show, a diptych that pairs Albert Einstein with Euclid's *Elements*, the seminal work of mathematics written in the third century BC. Described as the second most widely published book after the Bible, the book's findings underpin much of logic and modern science. Its influence is immense. Einstein said it kindled his interest in science. Lincoln insisted it was the most influential book of his life.

At its core, Euclid's *Elements* is a guidepost for clarity that established absolute values. In this exhibition, Datuna's *Elements* probe for similar fixed elements of identity and influence in the modern world.

That theme has fascinated the artist since he arrived in the United States in the late 1990s. Growing up during the Cold War in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, the artist experienced first-hand a society where creative freedom was constantly under assault. In some ways, Datuna's story meshes with many of his subjects in the show as a tale of aspiration: in his case, a journey surmounting disillusionment and finding a place where the artist's creative voice can be celebrated.

His conceptual body of work to date has largely explored national identity and culture, re-imagining familiar, potent symbols like flags to create a narrative

about nationhood. The new portraits use the artist's unique conceptual device of layered optical lenses to focus and diffuse his distinct visual imagery. Here too, Euclid's influence on the artist is evident as the Greek scholar authored the first book on optics and the science of vision.

Though employing some traditional mediums like collage and paint, David Datuna's portraits are a multi-dimensional interpretation of the form. In the aftermath of his exhibition there, curators at the National Portrait Gallery have suggested his work is an archetype of 21<sup>st</sup> Century portraiture, groundbreaking in its use of new media and conceptual vision.

The subjects of *Elements* are iconic individuals whose influence resonated in their time. The portraits resonate as well, revealing a story of both the experience of these individuals and how it shaped Western culture.

David Datuna lives and works in New York. In addition to his recent showing at the National Portrait Gallery, he mounted dual solo shows in Moscow and Paris titled *Eye to Eye* in October of 2013. His work has been exhibited widely in the United States and internationally, and forms part of a number of important collections worldwide.

The exhibition opens Thursday May 1<sup>st</sup> at Birnam Wood Galleries, 514 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street in New York, and will extend through June 7<sup>th</sup>. There will be an opening reception on May 1 from 6-8pm.

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