

# NERO

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### **Jay Heikes** *The Material Mine*

7 April 2011 ART



Opening Thursday 7 April - h. 6.00 9.00 pm

8 April - 12 May 2011

**Federica Schiavo Gallery - Piazza Montevincchio 16 - Rome**

This evening Federica Schiavo Gallery will present *The Material Mine*, Jay Heikes' second solo show at the gallery. A new series of works, shown in the three rooms within the gallery, continue his interest and exploration into the nature of materials and their inert identities.

A large-scale iron and bronze metal-work sculpture will be placed in the first room. In the process of making the sculpture, bronze is poured into a mould where shellac covered iron flakes are combined with the remaining bronze to yield an alloy of repulsion. The 'impossible league' of bronze and iron of these organic branch-like shapes underlines the bizarre coexistence of cultural and artistic references that, despite themselves, come together in a unique form that appears absolutely natural and plausible.

Also included in the show is an object similar in form to that of a cactus made of hand-dyed porcupine quills and driftwood. It is inspired by the landscape of Joshua Tree National Park and the conflicted tale of a new generation that inherits a decimated landscape created by one man's greed in Theodor Geisel's story 'The Lorax' from 1972. Heikes attempts to rationalize the notion put forth that you must use or destroy a material to create a new product and wonders about the provenance of his porcupine quills.

Most recently, he has created a new series of works made from a recipe of 'Salamander's Wool'. Heikes' fascination with the material comes from its hypnotic properties and myths, which it has historically inspired. It is believed that Marco Polo came across these textiles in parts of Eastern Siberia. Merchants declared it fire-resistant due to its superstitious make-up of the 'skins of salamanders'. Knowledge of chemistry identified it as the product of chrysotile asbestos leading to the boom of its use as a flame retardant; it became famed as the "savior of the material world." Later recognized as a carcinogen connected to the lung disease mesothelioma, its production has stopped completely.

Here is a short unpublished introduction to the exhibition recently written by the artist that explain his interests and research.

*For the last six months I've been haunted by the image of a material known as chrysotile asbestos. With its combination of emerald granite and silky white hairs, it hypnotized me. And probably hypnotized civilizations from the ancient Chinese, Egyptians and Romans enough to declare it the silk of the mineral kingdom. It would not burn and was known to have caused armies to back down at the sight of its magical wielding. Used in the funerary shrouds for the most distinguished of kings, the material was also used in temples where lamps with asbestos wicks would burn with an eternal flame. Around 1250, it is believed Marco Polo came across textiles in parts of Eastern Siberia sold by merchants declaring it resistant to fire by its superstitious make-up of the 'skins of salamanders'. His knowledge in alchemy led him to the realization that the material known as salamander's wool was in fact derived from the mineral chrysotile asbestos and his reports on the discovery led to the methods that were translated into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century manufacturing of the material in Italy. Its history, specifically to Italy is extraordinary when you think about the movement in the mid 1800's to print bank notes on asbestos paper only to be later abandoned upon the realization that it lacked tensile strength and could fall apart. While today, countries with the largest deposits of chrysotile asbestos like Canada continue to export their mined and refined asbestos to the chagrin of the developed world because of its connections to the lung disease mesothelioma, others have completely abandoned its promise as the savior of the material world.*

*With this my second exhibition at Federica Schiavo, I see it as a moment comparable to that of walking into a mine. I believe there is a point just beyond corrosion, one of complete alienation between human and material where there are things to be discovered but also the possibility of destruction. It is a space parallel to Yves Klein's immaterial deep blue. It exists only for brief moments when we ignore all of the scientific reasoning behind something and just allow practicalities to fall away. In the studio I feel more like an alchemist lately than a sculptor. I have been working with a range of materials from raw silk, aluminum sulphate, porcupine quills, iron, bronze, leather, concrete, goose feathers and steel. All of these endeavors are translating into a concern for very simple things like line, texture, space and scale. The materials have become the content and my hope is to understand how we relate to them even in a place as out of nature as the gallery space.*

Jay Heikes

Rome, February 27, 2011

**Jay Heikes** was born in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1975. He lives and works in Minneapolis. He has had a number of recent solo shows at museums and private galleries: *Project Space* at ICA-Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia 2007; *The Hill Upstairs* at the MoMA PS.1, New York 2005; *Inanimate Life* at Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York 2010; *Eroding Rainbow* at Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome 2009. His work has also been shown in multiple group shows: *A Basic Human Impulse*, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Contemporanea di Monfalcone, Gorizia 2010; *The Secret Life of Objects*, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis 2009; *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art*, Barbican Art Gallery, London 2008; *Looking Back: The White Columns Annual*, White Columns, New York 2007; *Ordinary Culture: Heikes/Helms/McMillan*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis 2006; *Day For Night: Whitney Biennial 2006*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 2006; *All the Pretty Corpses*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago 2005.

**Installation view (first room):**



Jay Heikes  
*Vertigo Revised*, 2011  
iron, bronze and rust  
183 x 387 x 424 cm  
courtesy of Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome