

**THE FIRST RETROSPECTIVE OF MATTHEW BARNEY'S  
DRAWINGS TO BE PRESENTED AT THE  
MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM THIS SPRING**

*EXHIBITION INCLUDES NEARLY ONE HUNDRED DRAWINGS EXPLORING THE  
CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARTIST'S WORKS ON PAPER  
AND HIS SCULPTURES AND FILMS*

*Subliming Vessel:  
The Drawings of Matthew Barney*  
May 10–September 2, 2013

\*\*Press Preview: Thursday, May 9, 2013, 10–11:30 a.m.\*\*

RSVP: (212) 590-0393, [media@themorgan.org](mailto:media@themorgan.org)



Matthew Barney  
*KHU: Djed*, 2011  
Brush and ink, gold leaf, iron, and lapis lazuli on black  
paper in polyethylene frame  
12 3/4 x 10 3/4 x 1 1/4 inches (32.4 x 27.3 x 3.2 cm)  
Private collection  
Copyright Matthew Barney  
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

**New York, NY, March 20, 2013**—Matthew Barney (b. 1967) is best known for his sculptures and films, but drawing also plays a critical role in his work.

*Subliming Vessel: The Drawings of Matthew Barney*, on view at The Morgan Library & Museum from May 10 to September 2, is the first exhibition devoted entirely to this aspect of his art. The show ranges from Barney's earliest drawings, made while he was a student at Yale in the late 1980s, to works related to his most recent project, *RIVER OF FUNDAMENT*. They trace his investigation of drawing as an activity both independent from and linked to his sculptural and performative practice.

In addition to Barney's drawings, the exhibition will also include a number of his storyboards—composed of sketches, photographs, clippings, and

books—which he assembles to map the narrative structure and imagery of his projects. Barney has selected books and manuscripts from the Morgan’s collections to display as part of his storyboards. These items—which include a more than two-thousand-year-old Egyptian Book of the Dead, a medieval zodiac, and poet Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*—demonstrate the breadth of Barney’s interests and underscore the importance of literature and mythology in the elaboration of his stories.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the artist will create a new *DRAWING RESTRAINT*, the twentieth in this ongoing series that examines the relationship between self-imposed restraint and artistic creation. It was his first *DRAWING RESTRAINT* performances in the late 1980s that brought Barney to critical attention. The drawings produced during the *DRAWING RESTRAINT* 20 performance will be on view in the Morgan’s Clare Eddy Thaw Gallery as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition is co-curated by Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings at the Morgan, and Klaus Kertess, an independent art historian, working collaboratively with the artist. The title, *Subliming Vessel*, with its references to chemistry and psychology, conveys the idea of drawing as a process of distillation, transformation, and metamorphosis.

“Since Matthew Barney entered the art scene in the early 1990s with works of startling originality that claimed a place for storytelling in the avant-garde, his sculptures, films, and performances have established him as one of the most important artists of his generation,” said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. “From the beginning, his work was closely linked to the practice of drawing. This exhibition demonstrates how strong that connection is and reveals that beyond his talent as a film director, actor, and sculptor, Barney is a superb draftsman as well.”



Matthew Barney  
*Mirror Position*, 2006  
Graphite on paper in self-lubricating plastic frame  
13 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 1 1/4 inches (34.3 x 29.2 x 3.2 cm)  
Courtesy of A. Peter and Kathryn Strietmann  
Copyright Matthew Barney  
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

## SUBLIMING VESSEL

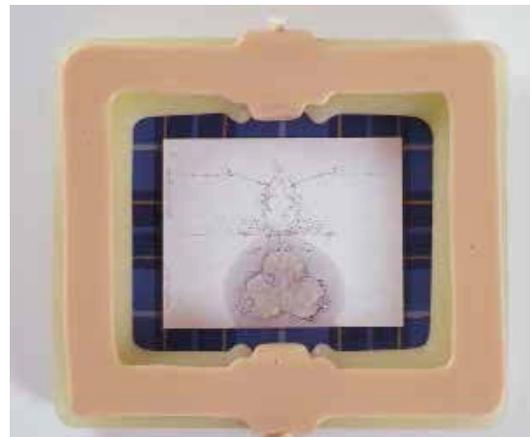


Matthew Barney  
*Ren: Headgasket*, 2008  
Graphite, gold leaf and silver leaf on paper in polyethylene frame  
11 7/8 x 9 1/2 x 1 1/4 inches (30.2 x 24.1 x 3.2 cm)  
Don and Britt Chadwick  
Copyright Matthew Barney  
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Barney's drawings fall roughly into two categories. The first is composed of the small preparatory sketches in which the artist plans his films and performances. Often presented unframed, amid other items he uses as sources in elaborating his narratives, these drawings form part of Barney's conceptual storyboards. The second category is made up of his independent finished drawings, presented in frames designed by the artist. It is in these drawings that the artist continues to develop themes found in his works in other media, distilling the narratives into intense, emblematic works.

The exhibition begins with the drawing *Condition 88* from the late 1980s, made while Barney was an undergraduate at Yale University. Like the other early drawings on view, *Condition 88*, which depicts abstract blotches and spontaneous eruptions of linearity, evidences the nascent forms that populate his later work. Among the other works on display will be drawings relating to Barney's 1992 video installation, *Ottoshaft*, involving the characters of Harry Houdini and the American football star Jim Otto, as well as a collection of works from Barney's ongoing *DRAWING RESTRAINT* series.

Over time, Barney's work has evolved into multicharacter productions that rely increasingly on storytelling related to the folklore and myth of a particular site. For instance, the fourth segment in his five-part CREMASTER cycle (1994–2002), filmed on the Isle of Man, incorporates the island's triskelion symbol of three bent legs joined at the thigh. Drawings based on this work show



Matthew Barney  
*CREMASTER 4: Manx Manual*, 1994-95  
Graphite, lacquer, and petroleum jelly on paper in cast epoxy, prosthetic plastic, and Manx tartan  
13 x 15 inches each (33 x 38.1 cm each)  
Private Collection  
Copyright Matthew Barney  
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Barney turning the fairies of local lore into three hyper-developed figures of ambiguous gender.

This metaphorical mixing becomes increasingly visible in Barney's work as he turns to the Egyptian-mythology-themed action of his seven-part *RIVER OF FUNDAMENT*, based on the first one hundred pages of Norman Mailer's novel *Ancient Evenings*. The drawings related to *RIVER OF FUNDAMENT*—which comprise approximately one third of the exhibition—explore possible narratives in connection with the performances and films that make up the work.



Matthew Barney  
*Ancient Evenings: Ba Libretto*, 2009  
Ink, graphite and gold leaf on paperback copy of *Ancient Evenings* by Norman Mailer, on carved salt base, in nylon and acrylic vitrine  
15 1/2 x 13 3/4 x 14 3/4 inches (39.4 x 34.9 x 37.5 cm)  
Marguerite Steed Hoffman, Dallas  
Copyright Matthew Barney

Like most of Barney's works, his drawings are not autonomous, but rather belong to a system in which the different media interact. "For me," Barney says, "[the different media] are all necessary. But there is a hierarchy in the sense of how one depends on the other. I visualize the system as an inverted pyramid. Drawing sits at the very top of this and from the drawing comes the film or performance or text and from the text comes the narrative object and from the narrative object comes the drawings again. So drawing exists at both ends."

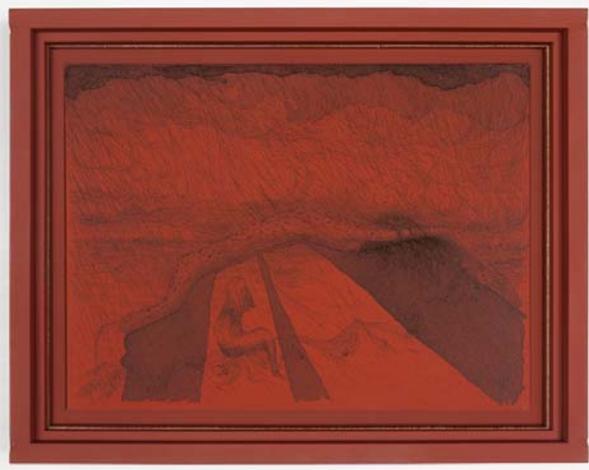
An important characteristic of the artist's drawings is his use of unconventional materials. Several of these—notably petroleum jelly and various kinds of plastics—are also found in his sculptures, highlighting the interchange between the two media. The frames in which his finished drawings are presented are an integral part of the work. They are often made of prosthetic, self-lubricating plastics. Their three-dimensionality connects them to Barney's sculptural productions.

The artist has continued to explore unorthodox



Matthew Barney  
*The Ballad of Nicole Baker*, 1999  
Graphite and petroleum jelly on paper in nylon frame  
11-3/4 x 9-1/2 x 1-1/2 inches (29.8 x 24.1 x 3.8 cm)  
Goetz Collection, Munich  
Copyright Matthew Barney  
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

materials in his most recent drawings. Many sheets that relate to the second act of *RIVER OF FUNDAMENT*, which took place in Detroit in October 2010, include metals and minerals, such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and sulfur. These symbolic substances emphasize the link between ancient myths and contemporary America that is at the core of *RIVER OF FUNDAMENT*.



Matthew Barney  
*RIVER ROUGE: Crown Victoria*, 2011  
Ink on paper in painted steel frame  
11 3/8 x 14 3/8 x 1 1/2 inches (28.9 x 36.5 x 3.8 cm)  
Julia Reyes Taubman and Robert Taubman  
Copyright Matthew Barney  
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Although a few characteristics remain constant throughout the twenty-three-year span represented in *Subliming Vessel*, a stylistic evolution is clear. Barney's early drawings reflect the changes that affected the medium in the 1980s; instruction sheets, quick notations, records of ideas and actions, and diagrams achieved a new status as works of art in their own right. The artist's drawings of the 1990s combine quick sketches plotting out or documenting performances with small diagrams and dotted lines, arrows, symbols, and inscriptions reminiscent of scientific plates and technical drawings. In the 2000s, and

particularly from 2006 on, Barney's drawings have reflected a broader art-historical tradition, stretching back to the Renaissance. The linear style of the *ANCIENT EVENINGS* drawings recalls late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century German drawings of the school of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach—a style indebted to printing techniques. In the same vein, his use of white ink on black or red paper calls to mind the frequent use of white medium on colored ground in Northern drawings of the beginning of the sixteenth century, notably in the work of Albrecht Altdorfer.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

### **ARTIST TALK**

**A Conversation with Matthew Barney**  
**Wednesday, May 15, 7pm**

Matthew Barney talks with Christian Scheidemann, Contemporary Conservation, Ltd.,

about works in *Subliming Vessel: The Drawings of Matthew Barney*, the relationship between drawing and other media, and the use of non-traditional materials in creating artworks. The exhibition will be open at 6pm especially for program attendees.

**Tickets**

\$15; \$10 for Members

[www.themorgan.org/programs](http://www.themorgan.org/programs); 212-685-0008 x560

**FILMS ON MATTHEW BARNEY**

**Matthew Barney: No Restraint**

**Friday, May 10, 7 pm**

**Friday, June 7, 5 pm**

(2006, 72 minutes)

Director: Alison Chernick

This voluptuous documentary follows Matthew Barney as he embarks off the coast of Nagasaki to film *Drawing Restraint 9*, a “narrative sculpture” telling a fantastical romance that transforms two characters from land mammals into whales. Also featuring Björk.

Free

**The Cremaster Cycle**

**A Conversation with Matthew Barney**

**Friday, June 21, 7pm**

(2007, 58 minutes)

Director: Michael Blackwood

This absorbing documentary provides insight into Matthew Barney’s work and his mythic Cremaster Cycle, as the artist guides the camera through this remarkable creation at the Guggenheim Museum, while being questioned by Michael Kimmelman, senior architecture critic for the *New York Times*.

Free

**ORGANIZATION AND SPONSORSHIP**

*Subliming Vessel* is organized by Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings at the Morgan, and Klaus Kertess, an independent art historian, working collaboratively with Matthew Barney.

This exhibition is made possible by a lead grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Major funding is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, with further generous support from the Charles E. Pierce, Jr. Fund for Exhibitions, Barbara Gladstone, Maja Oeri and Hans Bodenmann, and Nancy Schwartz.



The programs of The Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

### **The Morgan Library & Museum**

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

### **General Information**

The Morgan Library & Museum  
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405  
212.685.0008  
[www.themorgan.org](http://www.themorgan.org)

### **Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station**

### **Hours**

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

### **Admission**

\$15 for adults; \$10 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.