

MATTHEW BARNEY

27 January – 06 March 2010
69 South Audley St London W1

In his second show with Sadie Coles HQ, Matthew Barney is presenting a group of new drawings relating to his project *Ancient Evenings*, an ongoing performance in seven acts in collaboration with composer Jonathan Bepler. Based on Norman Mailer's symbolic and erotically charged novel of 1983 reimagining ancient Egyptian mythology and ritual, the operatic performance piece is structured according to the seven stages the soul passes through after death – Ren, Khu, Sekhem, Ba, Ka, Khaibit and Sekhu. It transposes the central myth of Isis and Osiris into a contemporary industrialised dystopia: the opening instalment in 2008 supplanted the entombed body for the battered Chrysler that also figured prominently in Barney's film *Cremaster 3* (2002).



Encased in self-lubricating plastic frames, Barney's highly intricate drawings mirror the themes and iconography of all seven acts, and variously allude to masquerade, mythology and the cycle of death and reincarnation. Enigmatic and organic, the drawings are delicately realised in graphite and ink: Osiris is shown sitting on a watery black throne; a blindfolded figure with multiple top hats takes spectral shape against a network of fine lines in a reference to the late performance artist James Lee Byars and his trademark costume. Diagrammatic and textual elements underline the drawings' allegorical nature, such as the five-cornered polygon labelled "Five Points Make a Man", a Byars title derived from Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man*. Several of the works also contain alchemical ingredients – gold, silver and copper leaf and bright blue Lapis pigment – investing them with an aura of sacred and archaic merit.

The show also features working storyboards for the *Ancient Evenings* project, installed in seven freestanding cabinets and consisting of photography, clipart, drawing and collage. Like the drawings, these form a conceptual analogue to the performance. In contrast to the narrative sequence of a conventional storyboard, they assemble central motifs in a nonlinear fashion, hinting only elliptically at their interrelationships. The sculptures in the exhibition further exemplify Barney's forensic strategy of isolating and recombining certain materials to reveal their physical progress – copper, halite, polyethelene, gold plate, magazines and salt – and create totemic objects.

Matthew Barney (b. 1967) studied art at Yale University. He has received numerous awards including the Aperto prize at the 1993 Venice Biennale and the 1996 Hugo Boss Award. He has been included in group exhibitions worldwide such as *Documenta IX* in Kassel, Germany; the Whitney Biennials of 1993 and 1995; and the groundbreaking *Post-Human* exhibition in 1992. His solo exhibition *The Cremaster Cycle*, organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, travelled to the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The large-scale exhibition of the entire *Drawing Restraint* series was organised by the 21st Century Museum for Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, and travelled to Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Serpentine Gallery, London; and Kunsthalle Vienna. A retrospective of the *Cremaster* and *Drawing Restraint* videos was presented by the Fondazione Merz, Torino, in 2008.

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 Opening hours Tuesday – Saturday 10 – 6pm