

Matthew Barney
Crown Zinc

10 October – 13 December 2014
62 Kingly St London W1
Tuesday – Saturday, 11 – 6pm

In his third exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Matthew Barney presents a series of new sculptures. They have their origins in his 2014 film *River of Fundament*, a six-hour tour de force which premiered at the English National Opera this summer to wide acclaim. Each work condenses the film's dominant themes – death, rebirth, and the twilight era of modern America – into totemic sculptural form, while invoking the complex personal iconography that Barney has developed over his twenty-year career.

Featuring an operatic score by Jonathan Bepler, *River of Fundament* transports the myth-laden narrative of Norman Mailer's novel *Ancient Evenings* (1983) – itself based on the Egyptian Book of the Dead – into a contemporary American setting. The transmigration of the human soul (principally Mailer's own) is symbolised by three iconic American cars: a 1967 Chrysler Imperial, a 1979 Pontiac Firebird, and a 2001 Ford Crown Victoria Police Interceptor. Each vehicle formed the centrepiece of an epic outdoor performance – staged between 2008 and 2013 in Los Angeles, Detroit and New York respectively – in which it underwent deconstruction and transformation echoing the distribution of Osiris's body parts in Egyptian mythology.



Barney's sculptures translate motifs from *River of Fundament* into autonomous works of art, bearing witness to these set-piece performances while recasting their themes of decay, regeneration and alchemical metamorphosis. *Crown Victoria* is a zinc cast of the third vehicle's undercarriage, the prototype for which was created in an elaborate hieratic ceremony, BA (performed in New York in 2013). Sprawling and skeletal, it emanates the melancholic grandeur of an abandoned ruin or sarcophagus. Loops of corrugated tubing, arrayed like ribs along the chassis, evoke mummified remains; a large coiling pump speaks simultaneously of biological systems and insensate machinery. Marooned on blocks, the object stands both as a decimated vehicle and a body undergoing reincarnation: deposits of salt crystals at the two 'poles' of the sculpture seemingly presage a new transmutation.

In *Crown Zinc* a smaller fragment of the same vehicle has been cast in zinc and plated with gold. It is modelled on the grill from the Crown Victoria – an object that travels and transfigures over the course of *River of Fundament*. After being removed from the police car, it becomes the crown for which the Egyptian deities Set and Horus ritualistically compete. At several points in *River of Fundament*, a vehicle part is melted to produce a molten cast of an Egyptian Djed column (the symbol for Osiris's spine, related to the Egyptian hieroglyph representing eternity and stability). This symbol finds a subtle manifestation in the mottled gold 'pillar' that clings like a shrunken fist or arcane seal to the immaculate plated surface of *Crown Zinc*.

Was takes the form of a vitrine containing a silver crow bar laid against a tubular mass of sulphur. The crow bar figured prominently in the stand-off between Set and Horus. This assemblage encapsulates the antithesis between creation and destruction that pervades *River of Fundament*: the crow bar appears simultaneously to carve out and chip away at the 'raw substrate' of the luminous green sulphur, sculpting it in the same moment as assailing it. Such a dualism inevitably recalls other cycles of production and destruction – from the geological to the corporeal. Referring to Mailer's novel, Barney has commented that "you have elemental waste coming from the earth like sulfur, molten iron ... [These] elements are interchangeable with the waste products of the body." The show will include two new sculptures, *Head of Norman III* and *Head of Young Hathfertiti*, created using the 'water casting' process whereby molten metal is poured directly into water. The heads' unique contours form naturally as the zinc cools and hardens in the water. Combining ancient methods of casting and gilding with emblematic materials – zinc, gold, crystals, silver, sulphur – Barney's latest works reach into the murky recesses of ancient history and the human psyche. Within their spectacles of metamorphosis, his enduring artistic concerns – whether with alchemy or occultism, vitality or waste, *eros* or *thanatos* – well into view.

Matthew Barney (b. 1967) is one of America's most significant living artists; over the past two decades he has evolved a practice that encompasses filmmaking, performance, drawing, painting, and sculpture. Current and recent major exhibitions include *River of Fundament*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2014), touring to the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania (November 2014 – April 2015); and *Subliming Vessel: The Drawings of Matthew Barney*, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York (2013), and the Bibliothèque nationale de France (2013-2014). 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. He has received numerous awards including the Aperto prize at the 1993 Venice Biennale and the 1996 Hugo Boss Award. The artist lives and works in New York.

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