







San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

December 12, 1991 through

January 30, 1992

MATTHEW BARNEY : **New Work**



Organized by John Caldwell, Curator of Painting and Sculpture, and Robert Riley, Curator of Media Arts

MATTHEW BARNEY: NEW WORK San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

December 12, 1991 – January 30, 1992

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MATTHEW BARNEY: New Work

In the combination of Matthew Barney's "facilities" *Transexualis* and *REPRESSIA* and video related to each, unexpected new terrain in sculpture, performance, and video art is encountered. The material, source mythologies, and television that comprise Barney's multiplex installation create parallel contexts for sexual behavior, athletic prowess, and ambition in art.

Art movements in the latter half of the century set traditions and generational precedents for Barney's work, including the use of the body as a vehicle in art, a fascination with text and transactional objects by artists in Fluxus, and the introduction of performance and visceral materials as expressive media in the work of Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci, and Carolee Schneemann. More recently, the directions taken in the art of Chris Burden, John Sturgeon, and Marina Abramovic and Ulay, which deal with artists' heroic actions, their connections to the autosuggestive nature of video, and the use of the body as a vessel of perseverance and transcendence, are directly related to Barney's art. The horror movie genre in modern cinema, with its themes of transformation and threatening amalgamations of man and machine, provides other comparisons, as does an innovation of television that began in 1937—telecast sports.

Broadcast TV revolutionized sports by framing the field and delivering the stadium to the viewer. Televised sports were visually reduced at first but, following advances in the manufacture of the portable action-camera, and the instant-replay and freeze-frame technologies of videotape, spectators were brought closer to the field as well as to the athletes, introducing intimate visual advantages to their leisure-time activity. Television's dynamic focus framed and magnified the body in action, in both triumph and defeat. Generations of mechanical improvements now afford the viewer an even closer vantage

point, a proximity so intimate as to make sports programming not only about the game but about the physical and psychological states of the players themselves.

Matthew Barney identifies the physicality of sculpture, the gallery space itself, and the dynamic focus of television as art materials of similar metaphysical and narrative potential. His sense of material and media is fluid and is invested with intentional ambiguities. He casts objects such as barbells and hand-weights in wax or sucrose and coats them with petroleum jelly. He exploits the phenomenon of TV transmission, distribution, and reception of sports and stages rigorous actions for video using his own body. In Barney's hands, objects and video imagery articulate a sense of the body and express human traits such as anticipation, fatigue, willpower, and sexuality. Once spectators note Barney's formal devices of division and symmetry, his interest in the expenditure and recovery of energy, in notions of incline and decline, in sex and play, the artist's forms and linguistic correlatives can be meaningfully deciphered.

In the San Francisco exhibition, two video monitors, positioned in anatomical reference to the head, occupy a cerebral space adjacent to the locus of the installation—the refrigerated aluminum enclosure and yellow foam mat. These monitors, which begin and conclude with efflorescent, video-white fields, feature dual performances: a strenuous interior climb is shown opposite an edited sequence of repression and its destructive consequence. On one monitor, *MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR*, Barney's body is shown, banded with hooks and taped to sustain muscle strain. Through the use of a climbing apparatus, he ascends and descends the gallery and refrigerated space by shifting his body—and his center of balance—from one hanging device to the next. At irregular intervals, vertical shots are

inrercut with perspective views to establish the arena for a body struggling in the space it inhabits.

The opposite monitor features *DELAY OF GAME*, in which a sequence of images “dissolves” from close-up details to long-range action shots. Appearing in cross-dress, as a woman in a white turban, bathing suit and wrap, in high heels, Barney drops into the frame to pantomime gestures associated with football-field strategies and penalties. This visual representation of the feminine aspect of Barney’s “facility”—the configuration of the installation—contrasts with his references to masculinity, his boyhood idols Harry Houdini and Jim Otto, former Oakland Raiders center from 1960 to 1975. Recurrent themes of force, sublimation, and transmutation combine here with the societal rigors of training, dress, and a touch of autoeroticism. Images of athletic action such as the center’s “snap”—a distillation of repressed or propelled energy that may or may not put the ball in play—and coy gestures such as the placement of a pearl in an orifice in the mat as it is cast off from the artist’s elbow, question received assumptions about physical strength and gender. Barney’s fluid substances, video as well as materials transformed through hot and cold, become metaphorical devotions to sex and penetration. Concepts of slippage, surrender, daredevil escape, and internal reflexivity turn obsessive and polymorphous.

The original page layout of this publication reflects the exhibition’s variable relationships of site and scale. Through the use of video stills and documentary photographs of his previous installations, Barney constructs a “third facility”: an arena of both detailed and full-field representations in a storyboard format, suspended action and emblematic contortions that render pictorially the syllogistic forms of the full installations. Action, flashback, and hallucination in Barney’s electronic imagery engage the video screen as a psychotropic enclosure,

much as the appearance of monsters in film and television, while part of the entertainment culture, also objectify the subconscious.

Through the externalized expression of his inner dialogue, Barney’s climb and ultimate escape become aesthetic and ecstatic, themes that are also the elevated territory of contemporary American horror movies. Monsters are no longer zombies from other worlds, but supernatural phenomena that assume human form, or beings with mechanical features—robots, “replicants,” or “scissorhands” for instance—visible representations of functional technologies run amok. It could be argued that the development of most machines, including the video camera, film projector, and mechanical exercise devices, has monstrous consequences. Through them the dialogue between the self and the externally perceived world expands, but grows discontinuous at the same time.

Barney’s relationship to the mechanical world as it intercepts the entertainment culture of sports, film, and sexual antagonism is legible in his recent installations. While the comprehension of his work relies on such concerns, it also bears the weight of other interpretations. The unyielding prosthetic appendages and prophylactics typically found in the arena of the laboratory, sports, and sex, and the starch and sugar of catalytic exchange, are avenues for transformation. The association of Barney’s sculpture and video with the horror and suspense film genres, and with a mechanical world where similar dichotomies frighten and inhibit, fosters a tension and exhilaration that are at the core of creation in his art.

Robert R. Riley
Curator of Media Arts

With appreciation to Matthew Barney for his generous and candid conversation.

Several of the works seen in Matthew Barney's San Francisco installation—*REPRESSIA*, *Transexualis*, and the video action *MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR* paired with *DELAY OF GAME*—were exhibited in June of this year in Los Angeles. A related, but often very different, installation, which served to complete, in a metaphorical sense, the action Barney had begun in Los Angeles, was shown in October in New York. The video actions *MILE HIGH Threshold* and *DELAY OF GAME* are shown here as recorded in Los Angeles. Although two new, purely sculptural works are included in San Francisco, the artist conceives of the exhibition as, in essence, a document of the Los Angeles show. The catalogue, however, includes visual material from both the New York and Los Angeles presentations of Barney's work, and he sees it as existing on yet another level. It constitutes a narrative of both exhibitions and is, in a certain sense, more complete than either. The images in the catalogue roughly follow the sequence of the Project Index.

This catalogue has been made possible through the generous support of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's Collectors Forum, John Bransten, and Norah and Norman Stone.

PROJECT INDEX

1. The Jim Otto Suite, 1991

—OTTOblow

—Houdini: October 28, 1926 – October 31, 1926
—The Whopper

—AUTOblow

—Glucio Jack
—Clean and Jerk

video, light-reflective vinyl, prosthetic plastic locker, NFL jersey, hydraulic jack with glucose syrup, petroleum jelly, 3/4-inch video
installation dimensions variable

2. Transexualis, 1991

—HYPERTROPHY (*pectorals minor*) H.C.G.
—JIM BLIND (m.) —hypothermal penetrator
OTTO: *Body Temp.* 77°

walk-in cooler, formed and cast petroleum jelly decline bench, human chorionic gonadotropin, speculum
12 x 14 x 8 1/2 ft. (366 x 427 x 259 cm)

3. (action) MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR, 1991

—Elevated Heavy Petting CONSENT → Fornication with the Fabric of Space [2 1/2]
internally lubricated self-threading flight blocks, titanium ice screws, carabiners, full-body harness, 3/4-inch video (color, 41:42 mins.)

4. case BOLUS, 1989–91

—A value : O value
(sweatloaf) (sweetloaf)
—JIM BLIND (andro.) —*rec. majora*
—*rec. minor*

cast petroleum wax and petroleum jelly Olympic weights and 8-lb. dumbbells, speculum, mouthguards, glass case, cast sucrose, foam and nylon pads, binding belts
installation dimensions variable

5. REPRESSIA, 1991

—pre-snap site
—cadence → motion → audible → DELAY OF GAME →
(HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR)

—JIM BLIND (fem.) — *warm down*/Summer Collection '91
wrestling mat, Pyrex, cast petroleum wax and petroleum jelly Olympic curl bar, cotton socks, sternal retractor, skeet, salt water pearl, petroleum jelly
14 x 18 x 12 1/2 ft. (427 x 549 x 381 cm)

6. (action) DELAY OF GAME, 1991

—diagram: double reverse:
cadence → motion → audible → DELAY OF GAME
... (HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR)
wardrobe, sucrose, skeet, 3/4-inch video (color, black and white, 2:59 mins.)

7. Anabol [A]: PACE CAR FOR THE HUBRIS PILL, 1991

—A.P.B. → 00
internally lubricated plastic, cast sucrose capsule
48 x 56 x 40 in. (122 x 142 x 102 cm)

8. unit BOLUS, 1988

—Wad in, CONDITION, Wad out.
(disciplinary funnel)
cast petroleum jelly 8-lb. dumbbell, stainless steel, electronic freezing device
28 x 18 x 10 in. (71.1 x 45.7 x 25.4 cm)

9. Anabol [A]: PACE CAR FOR THE HUBRIS PILL (équipe), 1991

—A.P.B. → 00
—veer option OTTO shaft
reentry tile

internally lubricated plastic, cast sucrose capsule, cast sucrose, thermal gel pack
43 x 46 x 96 in. (109 x 117 x 244 cm)

10. CONSTIPATOR BLOCK: shim BOLUS, 1991

—OTTO shaft — (transverse) TFE squat
—HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR (2)
cast large-pearl tapioca, Teflon, socks, thermal gel pack
8 3/4 x 144 x by 24 in. (22.2 x 366 x 61 cm)

11. (action) RADIAL DRILL, 1991

—square hip → engorged iris → stroke
—SUBLIMATOR (reentry): ∅ → ⊕ → l.p. TAP
—HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR (2)
cultured costume pearl, skeet, large-pearl tapioca, Teflon, Pyrex, cast sucrose, 3/4-inch video (color, black and white, 4:59 mins.)

12. REPRESSIA (decline), 1991

• OTTOgate: square hip → engorged iris → stroke → HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR (2)
• JIM BLIND (fem.) *warm down* / Holiday Collection '91
wrestling mat, Pyrex, cast petroleum wax and petroleum jelly Olympic curl bar, cotton socks, sternal retractors, skeets, large-pearl tapioca, and petroleum jelly
16 x 18 x 14 3/4 ft. (488 x 549 x 450 cm)

13. (action) BLIND PERINEUM, 1991

—Elevated Heavy Petting CONSENT → Fornication with the Fabric of Space [2 1/2]
DESCENT Field Dressing
internally lubricated self-threading flight blocks, titanium ice screws, carabiners, full-body harness, 3/4-inch video (color, 87:05 mins.)

14. Transexualis (decline), 1991

—HYPERTROPHY (*pectorals majora*) H.C.G.
—JIM BLIND (m.) —hypothermal penetrator
OTTO: *Body Temp.* 66°
walk-in cooler, formed and cast petroleum jelly incline bench, human chorionic gonadotropin, speculum, silicon gel pectoral form
12 x 14 x 8 1/2 ft. (366 x 427 x 259 cm)

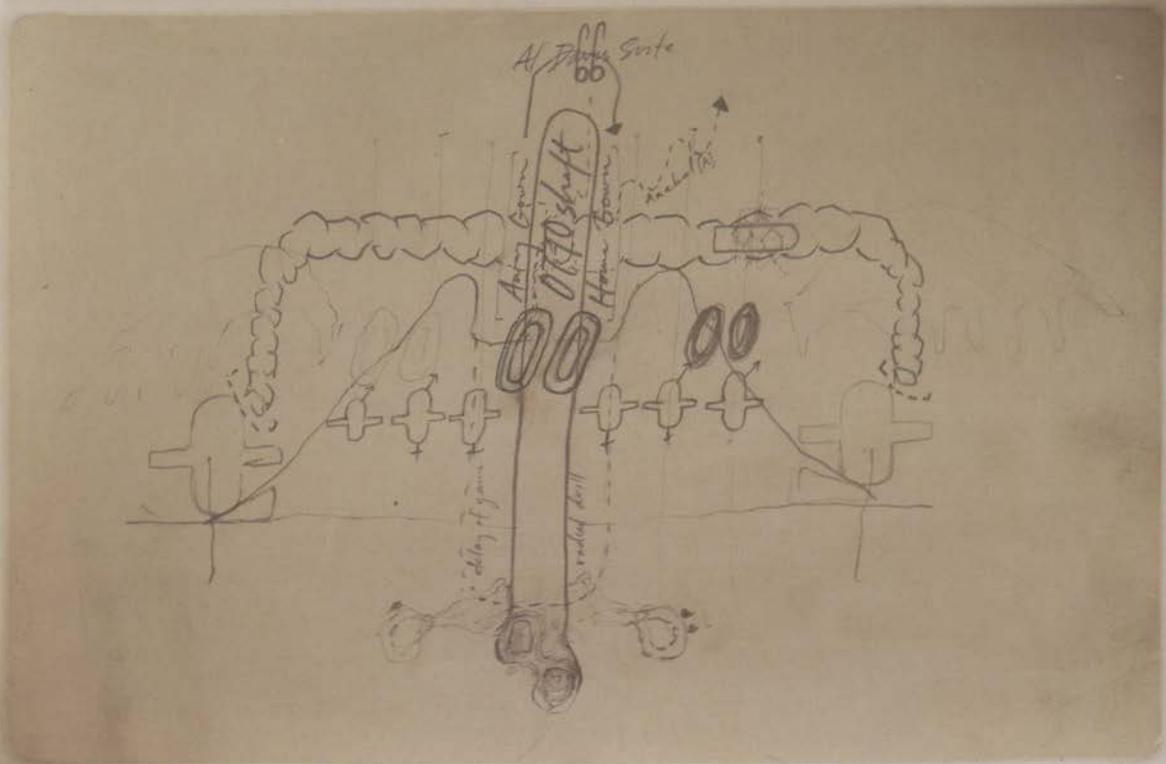
PROJECT DOCUMENTS

15. **Away Gown: JIM BLIND (fam.), 1991**
—HUBKIS PILI, *filtered*
heat-formed prosthetic plastic
swimsuit, cast large pearl tapioca, cast
sucrose and glucose
12 x 24 x 25 in. (30.5 x 61 x 63.5 cm)
16. **DRILL TEAM: screw BOLUS, 1991**
—XP
cast petroleum wax and petrolcum jelly
Olympic barbell and dumbbells, cast
Crainergestic dumbbell, titanium ice
screws, carabiners, prosthetic plastic
locker, NFL jerseys
installation dimensions variable
17. **DELAY OF GAME (manual A), 1991**
gelatin silver print, internally lubricated
plastic frame, petroleum jelly ed. 2/2
photo credit: Michael Joaquin Grey
15 x 13 x 1 in. (38.1 x 33 x 2.5 cm)
18. **HYPOTHERMAL PENETRATOR, 1991**
offset photographic print, internally
lubricated plastic ed. 1/2
17 x 15 x 1 1/4 in. (43.2 x 38.1 x 3.2 cm)
19. **STADIUM, 1991**
graphite on paper, internally lubri-
cated plastic, thermal gel pack, velcro
15 1/2 x 19 1/2 x 2 in. (39.4 x 49.5 x 5.1 cm)

The exhibition presented at the San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art, December 12,
1991 – January 30, 1992, comprises the
following works from PROJECT INDEX
and PROJECT DOCUMENTS:

2. **Transexualis, 1991.** San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art: Accessions
Committee Fund. 91.97.
3. (action) **MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT
with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR, 1991.**
5. **REPRESSIA, 1991.** Collection of Norman
and Norah Stone, San Francisco.
6. (action) **DELAY OF GAME, 1991.**
15. **Away Gown: JIM BLIND (fam.), 1991.**
Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery,
New York, and Stuart Regen Gallery,
Los Angeles.
16. **DRILL TEAM: screw BOLUS, 1991.**
Collection of the artist.
17. **DELAY OF GAME (manual A), 1991.**
Collection of Alan Hergott and Curt
Shepard, Los Angeles.
18. **HYPOTHERMAL PENETRATOR, 1991.**
Private collection, courtesy Thea
Westreich, New York.
19. **STADIUM, 1991.** Courtesy Barbara
Gladstone Gallery, New York.

The two actions, **MILE HIGH Threshold:
FLIGHT with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR**
and **DELAY OF GAME** are part of both
Transexualis and **REPRESSIA**.





PRODUCTION CREDITS

The Jim Otto Suite

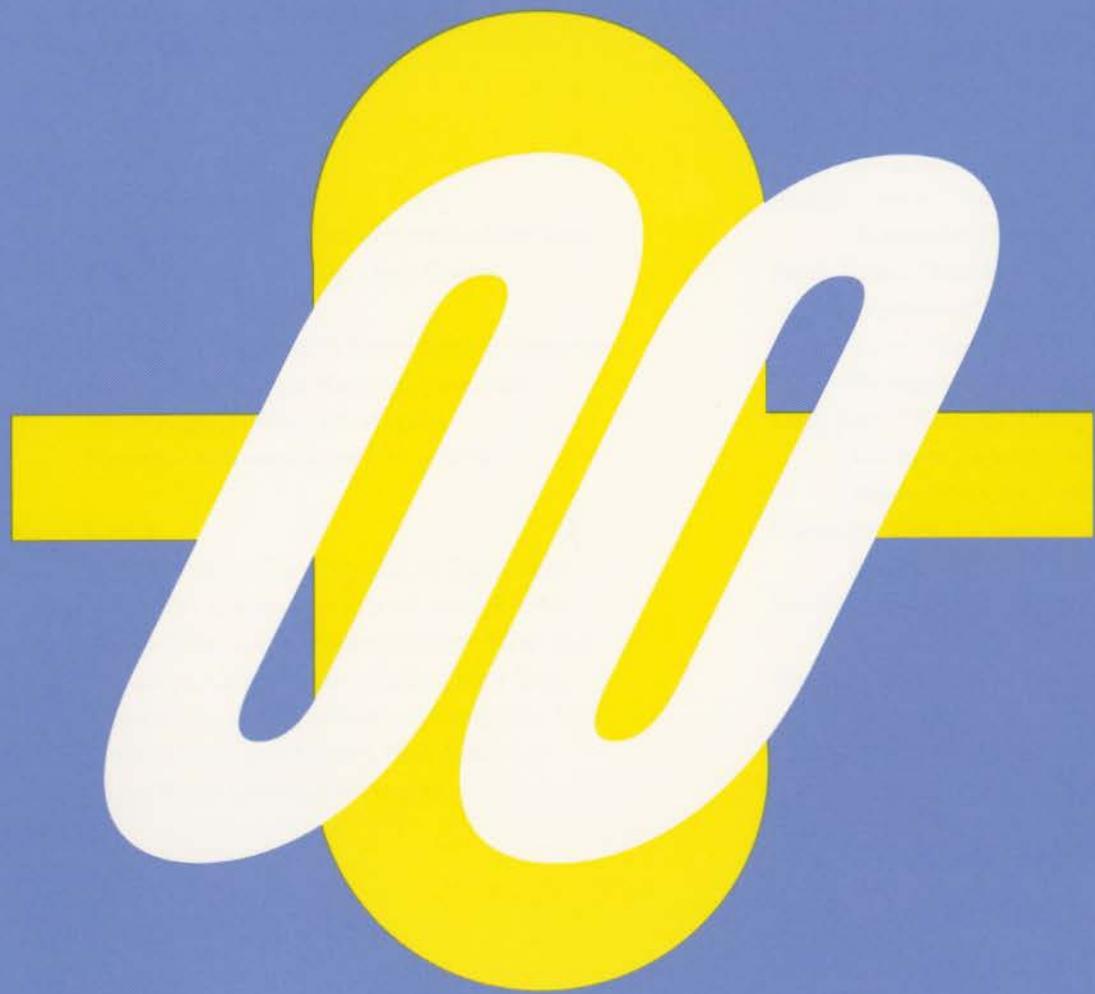
Video direction: Matthew Barney, Michael Joaquin Grey
Video Production: Peter Strietmann
Jim Otto: Michael Petty

INCLINE: Stuart Regen Gallery, Los Angeles, May 1991

Video direction: Matthew Barney, Michael Joaquin Grey, Peter Strietmann
Video production: Peter Strietmann, Bob Wysocki
Still photography: Peter Strietmann, Michael Joaquin Grey, Joy R. Grey
Stylist: Vincent Boucher for Sarah Swan/Stockland Martel
Hair and Makeup: Joe Poleski
Wardrobe: OMO Norma Komali, New York; Alain Mikli, Paris
Eric Beamon, New York
Jim Otto: Bob Wysocki

DECLINE: Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, October 1991

Video direction: Matthew Barney, Michael Joaquin Grey, Peter Strietmann
Video production: Peter Strietmann, Rick Grael, Bob Wysocki
Still photography: Michael Joaquin Grey, Lomé
Stylist: Vincent Boucher for Sarah Swan/Stockland Martel
Hair and Makeup: Patrick Swan for Sarah Swan/Stockland Martel
Wardrobe: Sylvia Heisel, New York, Manolo Blahnik, New York
Eric Beamon, New York; Lo Crosio, New York
Jim Otto: Bob Wysocki



MATTHEW BARNEY :New Work

Matthew Barney

Born in San Francisco, 1967

Lives and works in New York City

Education

Yale University, B. A., 1989

Individual Exhibitions

- 1988 *Scab Action*, video exhibition for the New York City Rainforest Alliance, Open Center, New York
- 1989 *Field Dressing*, Payne Whitney Athletic Complex, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
- 1991 Stuart Regen Gallery, Los Angeles
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Group Exhibitions

- 1990 *Viral Infection: The Body and its Discontents*, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo
Group Show, Althea Viafora Gallery, New York
Drawings, Althea Viafora Gallery, New York
Video Library, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
- 1991 Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
Stuart Regen Gallery, Los Angeles

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