

MONA: Matthew Barney, River of Fundament, Nov
22 - Apr 13

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F U N D A M E N T

MATTHEW BARNEY

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MUSEUM OF OLD
AND NEW ART



MATTHEW BARNEY: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT

NOVEMBER 22 TO APRIL 13, 2015

November 21, at 5pm, the film RIVER OF FUNDAMENT- Federation Concert Hall, Hobart.

November 22, at 1pm, A Conversation: Matthew Barney and David Walsh, Hobart's Odeon Theatre.

November 22, 8pm, the exhibition Matthew Barney: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT at MONA.

November 23 the exhibition opens during regular museum hours.

Matthew Barney: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT combines elements of narrative sculpture, traditional cinema, live performance, storyboards and drawings to create an immersive experience. This exhibition follows an evolution of RIVER OF FUNDAMENT from its inception in 2007 through its unique presentation at MONA. Following the project's inauguration at the Haus der Kunst, Munich earlier this year, the exhibition at MONA is Matthew Barney's Australian debut in a singular national venue.

Many of the works in the exhibition took shape as a symphonic opera and are the brutally elegant distillation of an intuitive, multi-disciplinary, creative process that mark Barney's singular artistic approach. RIVER OF FUNDAMENT takes two forms: Barney's creation of the ritual through sculptures, drawings and storyboards, and the ritual made real in the form of an epic film of the same name, by Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler, the artist's musical collaborator since 1996.

For the exhibition, MONA's curators worked closely with the artist to select sculptures, drawings, and Egyptian antiquities from David Walsh's collection. Barney has selected some works to be incorporated into his own installations and storyboards.

Inspiration for RIVER OF FUNDAMENT was Norman Mailer's novel, *Ancient Evenings* (1983), which tells in explicit detail the story of an Egyptian mythic journey from death to rebirth. The novel draws from the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" and is a sexually graphic, ferocious telling of the recurring rebirth of Menenhetet One. The novel took Mailer 10 years to write; it was panned by most critics of the day as unreadable. New York Times writer Benjamin De Mott described it as "ludicrous blends of Mel Brooks and the Marquis de Sade," however critic Harold Bloom, reviewing the novel for the *New York Review of Books*, wrote that he saw the central character as a metaphor for Mailer's personal obsessions and his dying hope for literary resurrection through the novel. This is the view that Barney highlights in his film - a reinterpretation of Mailer's mythologies that, while described within the context of ancient Egypt, is strongly

rooted in the heart of a modern American pathos.

In 2007, not long before his death, Mailer asked Barney to read the novel's first 100 pages and the project RIVER OF FUNDAMENT became the culmination of their two desires: Mailer's to redeem the novel he loved, and Barney's to portray in sculpture and ritual pageantry the post-industrial myths and mayhem of their country.

At MONA, Matthew Barney: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT is curated by the artist with David Walsh, Nicole Durling and Olivier Varenne. This exhibition premiered at Haus der Kunst, Munich, and was curated by Okwui Enwezor in collaboration with MONA.

MONA Curator Olivier Varenne

“Matthew Barney's sculptures are created from chance and ritual action. They are the result of an experiment to make works that are neither props nor ancillary to his epic film River of Fundament. They stand as narrative sculptures. MONA is proud that Matthew accepted our invitation to have his first solo Australian exhibition with us.”

MONA Curator Nicole Durling

“On reflection having Matthew Barney's work at MONA was meant to be. Well before the museum was built the ritual narratives in his work resonated with us. “River of Fundament folds together personal, historic and cultural myths in an epic tale, so the inclusion of select pieces from David's Egyptian antiquities adds yet another layer - ancient and contemporary - in our tomb-like galleries.”

The artist:

Matthew Barney (born San Francisco 1967) is known internationally for such works as his visionary five component films forming the CREMASTER cycle (1994 – 2002) and his DRAWING RESTRAINT series (1987 – ongoing), currently consisting of 21 filmed actions, the most recent of which took place at Haus der Kunst in early 2014. He describes his films as “hybrid”: neither

documentary nor straightforward cinema but something in between. The current project fully encompasses all aspects of his artistic practice: physical action, stamina, role playing and complex narratives exploring extended meditations on his personal development, American culture, history, politics and mythology. Barney has received numerous awards including the Aperto prize at the 1993 Venice Biennale; the Hugo Boss Award in 1996; the 2007 Kaiser Ring Award in Goslar, Germany and the San Francisco International Film Festival's Persistence of Vision Award in 2011. He lives and works in New York.

The composer:

Jonathan Bepler (born Philadelphia 1959) was self-taught on many instruments by the time he attended Bennington College in 1982. His major areas of study were composition with Louis Calabro, improvisation with Bill Dixon, percussion with Milford Graves, and performance with artists and choreographers including Lisa Nelson and Min Tanaka. His interest in collaboration and interdisciplinary work continued in New York City, where his work often involved co-mingling many seemingly disparate elements, a love of chaos, and a thirst for reconciliation. Bepler has worked with many choreographers, including John Jasperse, Sasha Waltz, Jennifer Lacey, and Wally Cardona, and has also led ensembles of both improvised and pre-composed music, appearing often in New York and Europe. His concert music includes commissions for the Ensemble Modern, the Glenn Branca Ensemble, and the Basel Synfonietta. His collaboration with artist Ann-Sofi Siden, featuring actors, technicians, and architecture of the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden, was shown in Stockholm and Berlin. His work with Matthew Barney has spanned nearly 20 years and has included seven films and nine performances. He lives and works in Berlin.

Matthew Barney: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT is supported by the Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager, Basel; Gladstone Gallery, New York; Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Sadie Coles HQ, London. The film RIVER OF FUNDAMENT is produced by Matthew Barney and Laurenz Foundation, written and directed by Matthew Barney, music composed by Jonathan Bepler.

The catalogue:

Matthew Barney has created a 311-page artist's book. It includes essays by Okwui Enwezor, Hilton Als, Diedrich Diederichsen, Homi K. Bhabha, and David Walsh, along with librettos from each of the three live performances; extracts from Jonathan Bepler's musical scores; Barney's drawings and storyboards, installation images of each of the related sculptures; a selection of photographic references, and an expansive edit of production stills from the film.

Matthew Barney: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT is published in conjunction with the exhibition Matthew Barney: River of Fundament, held at Haus der Kunst, Munich, March 16– August 17, 2014; and at Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Tasmania, Australia, November 22, 2014–April 27, 2015.

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The November launch of the film RIVER OF FUNDAMENT is a co-presentation with Sydney Festival 2015.

MONA is located at 655 Main Road, Berriedale, Hobart, Tasmania
+ Open 10am to 6pm, closed Tuesdays and Christmas day.

Entry: \$A20, free for Tasmanians and under 18s. Concession \$A15.

Website: mona.net.au

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