

Haus der Kunst



Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler, *River of Fundament*, 2014. Production still. Photo: Hugo Glendinning. © Matthew Barney. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Matthew Barney: *River of Fundament*

March 16–August 17, 2014

Opening: Saturday, March 15, 6pm

Artist talk: Matthew Barney in conversation with Okwui Enwezor

European premiere: Sunday, March 16, 9pm at Bayerische Staatsoper

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Haus der Kunst is pleased to present the world premiere of *Matthew Barney: River of Fundament*, an exhibition that brings together for the first time, the entire ensemble of Matthew Barney's multi-part *River of Fundament* project, comprising the symphonic film of epic length (five hours) *River Of Fundament*, large-scale sculptures, drawings, photographs, story boards, and vitrines. In its entirety, the project is one of the artist's most complex and ambitious works to date.

Matthew Barney has been developing the project in collaboration with the Berlin-based American composer Jonathan Bepler since 2007. The work is inspired by the American author Norman Mailer and his novel *Ancient Evenings*, set in Ancient Egypt from 1290–110 B.C., which when it was published in 1983 was criticized for its excessive nature. The film presentation and the exhibition at Haus der Kunst constitute the multi-part *River of Fundament* project, a new Barney Gesamtkunstwerk since his celebrated *Cremaster* retrospective more than a decade ago.

River Of Fundament represents the culmination of seven years of intense meditation on death, rebirth, transformation and transcendence. Mailer's novel depicts the spiritual path of the Egyptian Menenhetet I through three deaths and rebirths; Barney replaces reincarnation with recycling and the man's soul with the automobile. "REN," the project's first act, documents a live performance in a car dealership in Los Angeles in 2008, where a car—the 1967 Chrysler Crown Imperial from *Cremaster 3*—undergoes its first death. "Burning shrapnel and rock salt spray through the space, ricocheting off



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windows. Sheet metal tears away from the chassis", is how the description in the libretto reads. The second act, "KHU," is set in Detroit and brings the Chrysler back to its birthplace, reincarnated as a 1979 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am. In "BA," the automobile's soul travels to New York, where the myth materializes as a sculpture.

At the center of the exhibition in Haus der Kunst is DJED, a massive iron sculpture that was cast during a live performance, "KHU." The primary form and iconography of DJED is the undercarriage of the Chrysler Imperial. For this work—witnessed by a live audience—25 tons of molten iron were poured from five custom-built furnaces into an open, molded pit formed in the earth at the site of a derelict steel mill along the Detroit River. The work shares a formal similarity with the djed pillar, the Egyptian hieroglyph representing eternity and stability. Originally, the djed pillar was represented by a bundle of reeds or branches, a symbol of fertility. The erection ceremony of the djed pillar, in which the pharaoh raised the pillar using rope, was later absorbed into the cult of Osiris, the god of death and fertility, and so strongly associated with the god that the pillar was interpreted as Osiris' spine. Spell 155 of the Book of Death refers to this: "Spell for a djed-pillar of gold placed on the neck of the transfigured spirit: O weary-hearted One; you have your vertebrae. Raise yourself Osiris, to place yourself on your side, so that I may place water under you. I have brought you a djed-pillar of gold so that you may rejoice by it."

The exhibition includes a suite of new drawings, photographs, storyboards, and vitrines, intricately mapping the character and thematic development of the project. It continues the program Barney has developed over the last seven years in which narrative sculpture is generated through a complex system of storytelling that intertwines personal, historical, and modern mythologies. The central question is if there is a coherent identity, a spiritual property retaining a person's particular characteristics not just throughout life, but surviving physical death.

The catalogue is published by Rizzoli and includes contributions by Hilton Als, Homi K. Bhabha, Diedrich Diederichsen, Okwui Enwezor, and David Walsh, as well as installation views from the exhibition in Haus der Kunst, ISBN 978-0-8478-4258-2.

River of Fundament is curated by Okwui Enwezor and organized by Haus der Kunst in collaboration with Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Tasmania, Australia.

The European premiere of the film is presented in cooperation with Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. *River of Fundament* is produced by Matthew Barney and Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager Basel.

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Further on view at Haus der Kunst:

Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Autoconstrucción Suites
till May 25

Pictures in Time
Goetz Collection at Haus der Kunst
till June 15

Ellen Gallagher: AxME
till July 13

Manfred Pernice: Der Öffentlichkeit – Von den Freunden Haus der Kunst
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