

GLADSTONE

Jerry Saltz, "the yesteryear issue, My '90s Art World 'I saw 25, 30 shows a week, made hundreds of studio visits, and everywhere I went I brought my camera.'" *New York Magazine*, April 20, 2026

VULTURE

The Show That Made Me Lose My Mind

1991



It was Matthew Barney's debut at Barbara Gladstone. The previous summer, I had seen a video of him performing *Field Dressing*, suspended naked from a cable and inserting dollops of petroleum jelly into openings in his body. The back of my head caught on fire. I thought, *I have seen the future*.

When I visited his studio in a West 14th Street loft, he was in his early 20s and fresh out of Yale. He showed me a Vaseline-covered weight bench and spoke about art in ways I had never heard. He described his work as an organism with a metabolism of its own and his body as a sort of enzyme that moved through exhibition spaces. If I interrupted to ask a question, he would take a long pause and begin speaking again from the beginning. It was clear he was on his own wavelength.

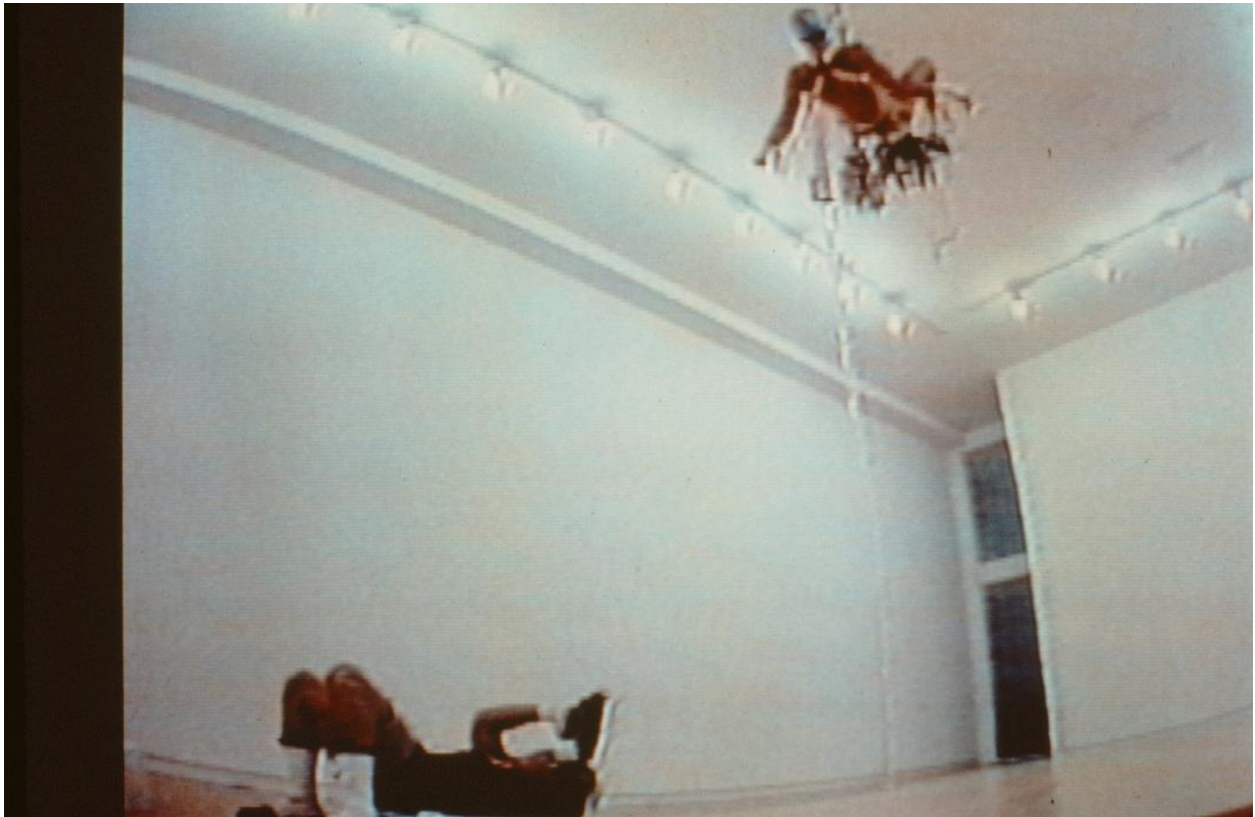
I remember having a conversation with him about which gallery he would join; various names were brought up, but he chose Gladstone, which struck me as strange. At the time, it was more of a 1970s, 1980s gallery with a revolving door, picking up and dropping artists. When I asked him why, Barney

replied, "The ceiling."

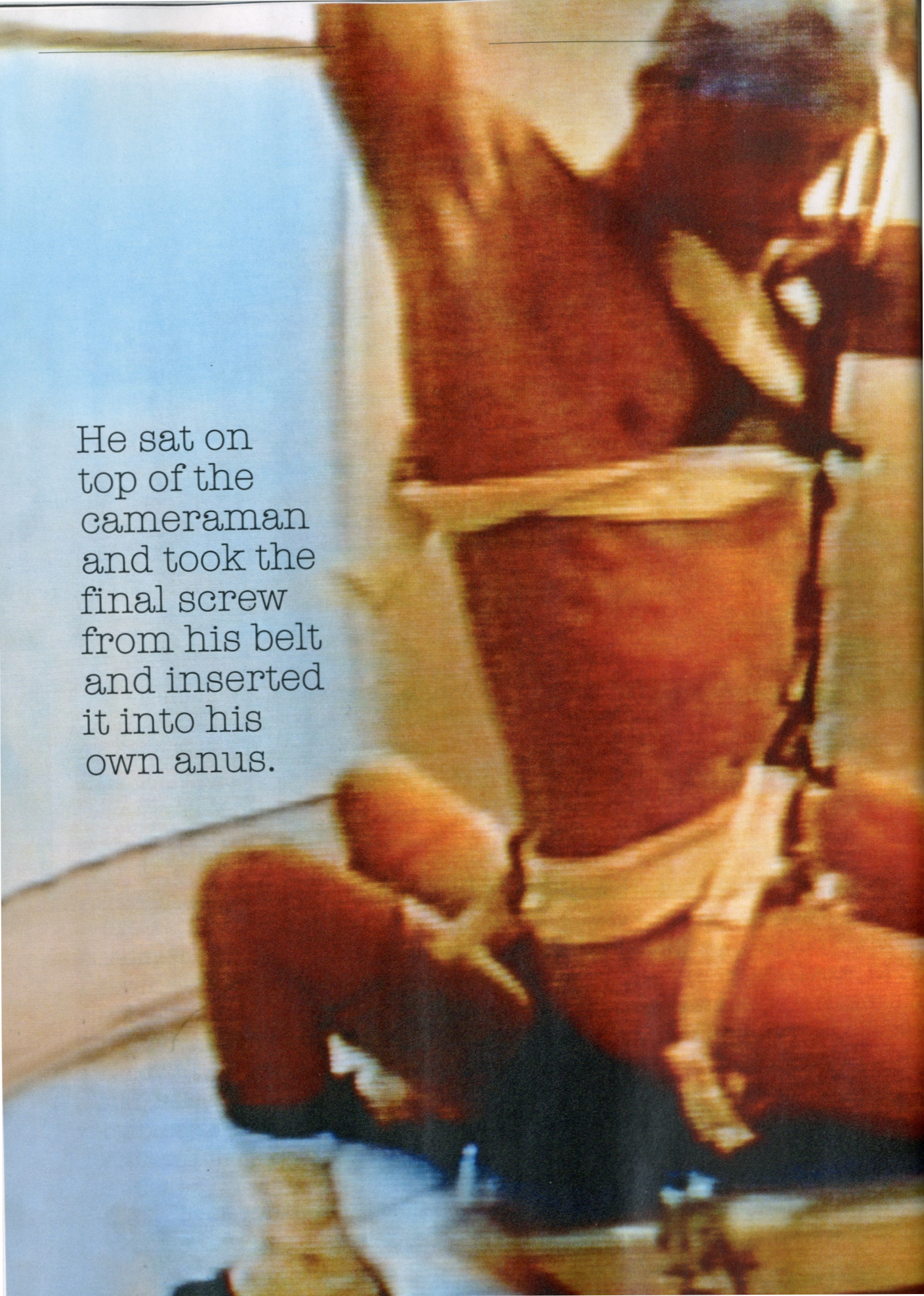
Matthew Barney, *BLIND PERINEUM*, 1991, color video, silent, 89 min. 20 sec. © Matthew Barney. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone. Video: Peter Strietmann

Before the opening of his first show there, Barney performed in the space with a videographer recording his actions. He was naked except for a swim cap, sneakers, and a harness outfitted with ice screws, which he would remove one at a time and screw into the ceiling. Moving slowly, he circumnavigated the gallery until he arrived at a walk-in refrigerator. Inside was a weight bench, similar to the one I'd seen below his studio. There, he sat on top of the cameraman and took the final screw from his belt and inserted it into his own anus. He was in effect crawling into himself, turning himself inside out. Here was obsessiveness, endurance, madness. To me, the show inaugurated a period of twisted originality and complete freedom. I returned to it dozens of times, and every time the gallery was packed. The '90s had found its Jasper Johns.


Matthew Barney, *BLIND PERINEUM*, 1991, color video, silent, 89 min. 20 sec. © Matthew Barney. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone. Video: Peter Strietmann





A photograph showing a person from the waist up, wearing a red tank top. They are sitting on top of a large, professional video camera. The person's right hand is raised to their mouth, holding a screwdriver. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall tone of the image is somewhat grainy and has a warm, reddish-brown color cast.

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