

GLADSTONE

Katy Diamond Hamer, "Athletics Through Film at Matthew Barney's 'Secondary' in New York,"
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GALLERY | AUGUST 6, 2024 | KATY DIAMOND HAMER

Athletics Through Film at Matthew Barney's "SECONDARY" in New York



© MATTHEW BARNEY, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GLADSTONE GALLERY, PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID REGEN
Matthew Barney, *DRAWING RESTRAINT 26*, 2024, Film still, Black-and-white video with no sound. Duration: 23 minutes, 30 seconds.

The first thing to know about Matthew Barney's new project, SECONDARY, is that it has been divided into four parts. Each is being shown respectively at Regen Projects (LA) *commencement*, Galerie Max Hetzler (Paris) *object impact*, Sadie Coles HQ (London) *light lens parallax*, and Gladstone Gallery (NY) *object replay*. The unique exhibitions overlap as the videos, central to each show, were filmed at Barney's Long Island City, New York studio.



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Installation view, Matthew Barney: *Secondary: object replay*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2024.

The work was expanded upon and performative gestures reawakened video through site-specific interventions.

At Gladstone Gallery in New York, a black and white video on a small television monitor replays actions that the artist (in a number 12 football jersey) and another man (in a number 32 football jersey, with the surname Tatum on the back) performed in the space. Each carries a weighted object made of red clay, dragging it on the wall with the intention of mark-making.

The two “athletes” walk to and fro— Barney carrying a slab of the red clay/plasticine on a rod on his shoulders, slowly drawing a mark while pressing his bodyweight into the wall.

His story is a conceptual retelling of an event in football that occurred in 1978, where a defensive back for the Oakland Raiders (Jack Tatum) tackled New England Patriots wide receiver Darryl Stingley, leaving Stingley paralyzed. Barney refers to the accident as having made a ‘lasting impression’ on his relationship to football, specifically when actively played.



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Matthew Barney, *SECONDARY*, 2023, Production still

For this gesture, in *DRAWING RESTRAINT 26* in *object replay*, the artist's stance echoes his youth in football. This theme has been consistent in his work for many years. At Gladstone, the video is a key factor in the accompanying installation, including a cast ceramic sculpture titled, *Power Rack with Fractured Barbell*.

Yet, as with most of his films, it functions nearly as an afterthought as one must enter the gallery, experience the installation, and only then see the film (which is installed about five feet from the ceiling) upon exiting. A documentation of sorts, most of Barney's films are a vehicle used to arrive at a sculpture or drawing — both of which are always related to movement.

The film is an active memory and reminds us how the marks and shapes on the gallery walls came to be. Their bodies— weighted down by what they held— slowly moved, scraping and dragging materials whose marks are from the physicality of form, a gesture left behind.

Barney has always said that his sculpture is more important than his film, or is it the other way around? One leads to the other, and without sculpture, the forms and painterly notations wouldn't exist. The films function as documentation, a didactic or proof that bodies were present and left their mark, not unlike cavemen of the past.

Raphael Xavier is the dancer who embodied Number 32 (Tatum) and moved in a very precise way aerobically, warming up as a football player might before a big game. At one point during the film, Barney puts one of the malleable clay weights on his head, first like a cowboy hat bent on the sides, then as a loose hood, which he rams into the wall.

Not a helmet, the shape slowly starts to decompose as he rotates his body against the wall, leaving a thick russet colored line. It is here— or perhaps, just in my awareness— that he starts to embody the Cremaster, his gaze blank, his skin pasty white, head shaven clean. In character, Barney can be quite intimidating. Out of character, he is shy, yet approachable, and soft-spoken.

This and the other exhibitions put his practice back on the lips of those who were waiting since his last show. In a time when masculinity has taken (somewhat) of a backseat regarding creative incentives, Barney retains his hold on the gender paradigm, not afraid to mimic, reference, or embody the stereotypes of the male athlete, broad, brawny, and at times, a caricature of itself.



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Installation view, Matthew Barney: *Secondary: object replay*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2024.



© MATTHEW BARNEY, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GLADSTONE GALLERY, PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID REGEN
Matthew Barney, *Stabler Falling (after Goltzius)*, 2024, Color pencil on paper in high-density polyethylene frame, 14 3/4 x 17 1/4 x 1 3/8 inches (37.5 x 43.8 x 3.5 cm)



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His work in our evolving society still represents a large part of humanity and the psychological energies that fill a space, even after the figures are gone.

Across the United States on the West Coast, Regen Projects was one of the venues showing the full-length, five-channel film, *SECONDARY*, in addition to sculptures and framed drawings. Unlike *DRAWING RESTRAINT 26*, the gallery was repurposed as an arena, including Astroturf. The drawings followed the drawn patterns of what a football play might look like.



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In all of Barney's new works, performative actions are the starting point of the resulting objects or marks (drawing). They extract and engage trauma and the way that violence infiltrates sports and cultural arenas. Barney often uses his personal experiences within an auto-fictional narrative. Taking a cue from Jean Paul Sartre's existential musings, his assertion for beauty is more often than not overshadowed by the abject truth from whence each story lies.