

Matthew Barney comes to MONA

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Using elements from the MONA collection, this Australian exclusive turns a book into a film and exhibition to operatic proportions



Production still from River of Fundament; Courtesy Matthew Barney

Matthew Barney is synonymous with big production artworks; so, too, is David Walsh, who has created a world-renowned museum around a very individual vision. It is not surprising that there is a sympatico to MONA's next exhibition-come-event.

Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) will exclusively present the Australian debut of American artist Barney's latest multi-dimensional project, *River of Fundament*, opening 22 November and continuing through 13 April 2015.

Best known for his five films, the CREMASTER cycle (1994 - 2002), and his ongoing *Drawing Restraint* series, MONA will bring *River of Fundament* to Hobart, a project that started in 2007 and continues to expand and respond to its journey.

MONA Curator Nicole Durling said: '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,' Durling added.

River of Fundament will take two forms for MONA: ritualistic sculptures and storyboards that Barney has created, and the making real of those storyboards into an epic film, a three-act opera in seven parts, to mirror the seven soul states of death in ancient Egyptian mythology.

It is a part-documentary of performances that took place in Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York City between 2007 and 2013, and continues Barney's long collaboration with Jonathan Bepler on the film's score.



Production still from River of Fundament; Courtesy Matthew Barney

The inspiration for *River of Fundament* came from Norman Mailer's novel, *Ancient Evenings* (1983). MONA's curators explained: '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.

Mailer contacted Barney in 2007, just prior to his death. MONA's website published their conversations: '[I don't want to make films right now \(http://www.mona.net.au/what's-on/matthew-barney/\)](http://www.mona.net.au/what's-on/matthew-barney/),' Barney said to him. 'I want to try something different.' He had been discussing, with long-time collaborator Jonathan Bepler, taking on the form of opera. 'I had lost my way with the films I had been making,' he says. 'I felt that I was going to repeat the same pattern over and over again.'

'In each performance, the human protagonist from *Ancient Evenings* is replaced with the body of a car (a Chrysler Imperial, a Pontiac Trans American, and a Crown Victoria) of significance to American industrial history. Over the course of the opera, the car-bodies are destroyed in wildly imaginative ways; what you see on display in the exhibition are the condensed, desecrated car-corpses from the live performances, as well as a selection of sculptures (film props, of sorts), and drawings', MONA's website described the film.

Barney worked with MONA's curators to select sculptures, drawings, and Egyptian antiquities from David Walsh's collection and incorporate them into his installations and storyboards.

Continuing the epic nature of Barney's films, a highlight of the exhibition will be the enormous 15-metre-wide sculpture *Boat of Ra*, weighing an epic 10,000kg.



Boat of Ra (2014), courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

'Matthew Barney's sculptures are created from chance and ritual action,' said MONA curator Olivier Varenne. '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.'

This exhibition premiered at Haus der Kunst, Munich, and was curated by Okwui Enwezor in collaboration with MONA. For MONA David Walsh has worked with Nichole Durling and Olivier Varenne on curating this unique version of the exhibition.

MATTHEW BARNEY: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT

- **21 November at 5pm:** Screening of the film RIVER OF FUNDAMENT – Federation Concert Hall, Hobart. The film RIVER OF FUNDAMENT is produced by Matthew Barney and Laurenz Foundation, written and directed by Matthew Barney, music composed by Jonathan Bepler.
- **22 November at 1pm:** A Conversation: Matthew Barney and David Walsh at Hobart's Odeon Theatre.
- **23 November - 13 April 2015** Matthew Barney: RIVER OF FUNDAMENT the exhibition showing at MONA; exhibition opening event 22 November.

MONA is located at Berriedale, Hobart

www.mona.net.au (<http://www.mona.net.au>)

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