

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Ella Martin-Gachot, "At the Fondation Carier, Matthew Barney Traces the Formal Aftermath of One of Football's Greatest Tragedies," *Cultured*, June 7, 2024

CULTURED

ART FILM

At the Fondation Cartier, Matthew Barney Traces the Formal Aftermath of One of Football's Greatest Tragedies

The visionary artist looked back to his football past, and a moment that changed the sport forever, for his 2023 film *Secondary*. With a suite of new exhibitions, the master of extremity is taking the new work it generated on a world tour.



Matthew Barney, *SECONDARY* (Production Still), 2023. Photography by Jonathan O'Sullivan. All images courtesy of the artist and Fondation Cartier.

American football has only made one appearance at the Olympics, during the Summer Games that took over Los Angeles in 1932. The reasons for its disqualification are myriad; among them are an incompatibility of timing (a week-long break is required between professional matches), the sport's propensity for injury, and the fact that the United States would undoubtedly win out.

But the game will leave its mark in another way during this summer's Olympic Games in Paris. A 20-minute Métro ride away from Arena Paris Sud —the venue that will host volleyball, table tennis, weightlifting, and handball competitions—Matthew Barney will populate the Fondation Cartier with his meditation on the sport and its discontents: “SECONDARY.”



Matthew Barney, *SECONDARY* (Production Still), 2023. Photography by Jonathan O'Sullivan.

At the heart of the exhibition and its titular five-channel film is an incident that shook the American pastime to its core. On August 12, 1978, during a preseason game between the Oakland Raiders and New England Patriots defensive back Jack Tatum's shoulder pad slammed into wide receiver Darryl Stingley's helmet, leaving him paralyzed for life.

Now an art-world avatar best known for his extreme performances and canonical video works, Barney was then an 11-year-old youth league quarterback, and, although he didn't see the impact happen live, it haunted him. “I watched the replay over and over in every halftime show and broadcast that happened throughout that year,” he recalls. “That's how I absorbed it—a kind of relentless replay.”



Matthew Barney, *SECONDARY* (Production Still), 2023. Photography by Julieta Cervantes.

SECONDARY, which made its U.S. debut in Barney's former Long Island City studio last spring, doesn't so much reenact the moment of impact as reimagine it through a series of exacting and abstracted somatics. Over an hour, the camera follows as Barney and 10 other performers—in the roles of Stingley, Tatum, Raiders owner Al Davis, a referee, an anthem singer, and a handful of additional players—move through training, game-day drills, and the elaboration of sculptural props (weights, protective headgear) with painstaking precision.



Matthew Barney, *SECONDARY* (Production Still), 2023. Photography by Jonathan O'Sullivan.

The film is a vessel for a suite of concerns—including America's fictions, physical decay, ritualistic violence, the production and preservation of memory—but it is never a condemnation. "I'm not really interested in the work functioning as a kind of judgment,"

Barney explains. And he doesn't see the story's cultural DNA as a roadblock for European audiences either. "I'm always looking for a way to take the specificity of my narrative and to make it more universal, to broaden the entry points into the work."

That outward thrust is pursued in the Fondation Cartier exhibition and a quartet of satellite gallery shows (at Gladstone, Sadie Coles HQ, Regen Projects, and Galerie Max Hetzler) with a new series of ceramic sculptures that crystallize a sense of resistance and brittleness. Barney sees the pieces as an inquiry into the ways materials exhibit stress, like a form of sculptural reflexology.



Matthew Barney, *DRAWING RESTRAINT 2*, 1988. Photography by Michael Reese. Image courtesy of the artist; Gladstone Gallery; Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager; and The Museum of Modern Art.

Rounding out the Cartier exhibition are a selection of the artist's early "DRAWING RESTRAINT" videos, in which he constricts his movements with a slew of apparatus while making drawings. For the occasion, he will stage a new iteration with Raphael Xavier, the breakdancer who played Tatum in *SECONDARY*, attached to a resistance training bungee cord.

Although their execution and results diverge, the connection between the ongoing series and 2023 film is clear: Barney is taken with the formal aftermath of transgressing a physical limit and understanding both the risk and catharsis that lie beyond it. He knows that where there is pain, there is an audience ready to behold its visual collateral. We are all too ready to watch the extreme on replay without paying the price of experiencing it.

"SECONDARY (<http://www.fondationcartier.com/en/exhibitions/matthew-barney-2>)" by Matthew Barney is on view at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris from June 8 through September 8, 2024. "SECONDARY: object replay" by Matthew Barney is on view at Gladstone Gallery West 21st Street in New York through July 26, 2024. "SECONDARY: light lens parallax" by Matthew Barney is on view at Sadie Coles HQ 62 Kingly Street in London through July 27, 2024. "SECONDARY: commencement" by Matthew Barney is on view at Regen Projects in Los Angeles through August 17, 2024. "SECONDARY: object impact" by Matthew Barney is on view at Galerie Max Hetzler in Paris through July 25, 2024.

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