

On the occasion of its first collaboration with Barry X Ball, Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present Matthew Barney / Barry X Ball Dual-Dual Portrait, a new installation by this American artist, in its Parisian gallery space.

After the critical success of his exhibition at Ca'Rezzonico in Venice last summer, the artist will be showing a composition of great technical virtuosity: a Janus-like double portrait of himself and fellow artist Matthew Barney.

In the spirit of his most emblematic pieces, Barry X Ball thus continues his work on a contemporary reinterpretation of historical sculpture, taking as his models art-world personalities, in an effort to offer a total sensory experience, getting the viewer to oscillate between the tension of the sublime and the possibility of the grotesque.

Matthew Barney / Barry X Ball Dual-Dual Portrait is the sixth and last piece in a series of installations dedicated to the famous American artist, initiated in June 2000, when Matthew Barney was invited by Barry X Ball to pose for him. Although all of Ball's heads have been carved from stone, his portrait project has gone through many formal and conceptual changes, since its inception: the completed works vary greatly in form, scale, and materials. The Matthew Barney installations are the largest, most-complex portrait sculptures Barry X Ball has realized.

« I have chosen to work primarily stone because it's a déclassé material », explains Barry X Ball, « because of its proven permanence, because of its glorious history as a sculpture material, because it resists my every effort to control it, because its timeless nature contrasts with the of-the-moment high-tech means I utilize to shape it, because it is a challenge to make something of it more beautiful than it is in its natural state. »

While remaining true to his formal approach, with Matthew Barney / Barry X Ball Dual-Dual Portrait, Barry X Ball pushes back the limits of his practice by creating a striking sculpted piece in two tones. There is an extreme tension between the intimacy of the conversation and the repulsion and terror inspired by the javelin tearing the flesh of the truncated busts: between the bulk of the marble and the precise refinement of the delicately chiselled flesh of the two men, inspired by Italian Mannerist ceremonial armour. Matthew Barney / Barry X Ball Dual-Dual Portrait, 2000-2009 Italian Portoro Marble, Portuguese Gold Marble, stainless steel, various other metals stone. stone / shaft assemblies: each 139.7 x 13.3 x 20.3 cm, stone figures: each 55.9 x 13.3 x 20.3 cm.

The artist, who composes titles for his works in the form of prose poems, shaping his sentences as

he models his sculptural portraits, offers the viewer a description - sometimes clinical, sometimes poetic - of his installation :

This work is the most recent example of the exotic-stone portraits that have occupied me for the last 15 years. It was realized through a complex technical process incorporating photography, life-casting, Forton-plaster and clay hand-modeling, 3-dimensional digitization (laser-scanning), digital modeling, computer-controlled stone milling, and hundreds of hours of hand stone carving / polishing. The resultant sculpture pays reverent homage to its historical antecedents. I hope it is also completely new.

The installation incorporates paired exotic marble figures, stainless steel impalement shafts, delicate web-like rigging, and specific lighting. With the figures' violently-penetrated labial / vulval appendages hovering above a floor-shadow rosette, a subtle bi-sexual interplay is established. The interpenetrating radiating cable funnels of the twin martyrs ("Saints Barry and Matthew [Ball and Barney] in Ecstasy") are modeled on both Gothic pendentive vaulting and the Brooklyn Bridge suspension system. While projecting a singular, excruciating intensity, a surreal stillness, verging on the sinister, suffuses the hyper-detailed doubled double figures. Their effusive bas-relief shrink-wrapped scarification, composed of fanciful decorative elements, animal forms, religious symbols (Islamic, Jewish, and Christian), escutcheons, and dome-like rivets, reflects a world of influences and lends a bi-millennial retrospective sweep to the work, intended as a conceptual / technical tour de force. The work's complexity is echoed in its expansive, clinically-poetic title.

Barry X Ball, February 2012.

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