

MATT MULLCAN

ABOVE AND BELOW THE THREE WORLDS

GALERIE THOMAS SCHULTE POTSDAMER STRASSE
14 FEBRUARY TO 18 APRIL 2026



Matt Mullican

Untitled (double-sided 1835), 2025 (detail)

oilstick on canvas, rubbing

2 parts

total image: 200 × 400 cm | 78 3/4 × 157 1/2 in

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Galerie Thomas Schulte presents *ABOVE AND BELOW THE THREE WORLDS*, an extensive solo exhibition of works on paper, rubbings, video, and sculptural objects by Matt Mullican. Familiar systems of organizing and representing information and knowledge, including charts, models, and bulletin boards, coalesce with idiosyncratic ones that are at the core of Mullican's practice. His use of primary colors and basic forms comes to the fore as initial legibility gives way to underlying complexity. This constellation of signs, symbols, and codes, at times recalling those found in both public and personal environments, offers a multi-layered reading of the space—a reality structured across different levels of meaning and experience.

Mullican has been developing his cosmology and system of categorizing the world since the '70s. *ABOVE AND BELOW THE THREE WORLDS* draws reference to early exhibitions of that time, which were concerned with charting the progression of the picture—from fleshed out figure to abstract sign—to consider its nature, the possibilities of its perception, and how it transfers meaning. Here, works from the '70s alongside those produced in recent years underscore continuities and an elaboration of his comprehensive visual system.

Bringing the idea of a chart into space, a single black line runs horizontally through the gallery as an organizing principle, dividing and setting relations within it. Like a horizon line drawn on a sheet of paper, it generates an orientation, structures a space, and provides a ground on which something can unfold. A horizontal line can also indicate a distance, guide a movement. Splitting the wall into two, like parallel universes, it effectively expands the space and its possible arrangements, and immerses us in it.

Three registers are opened up, mapping relationships between Mullican's works, the space, and us. Works are placed above, below—including on the floor—and on the line, in a structure that might recall a timeline in form if not content. Though the progression mapped here is of a different nature, Mullican's interest in images certainly takes on a historical dimension. This is not only reflected in the decades-spanning works presented, but also in the sheer amount of techniques and media used. These move between the world of screens that currently structure our daily realities—in video or computer graphics, for example—and the millennia-old method of image reproduction and transfer found in rubbings. Other works give form to the architectural qualities of light and color in materials from stained glass to neon.

The simplicity represented by the line extends to elementary forms and geometries throughout Mullican's work. This narrative thread, however, does not indicate a clear reading. Rather than set a limit, it acts as a connective element within a highly ordered yet open system of relations. We also see this in the volume of possible representations and slight variations on a form that unfold through its repetition and collection. The form of the circle is found here in iterations ranging from photographs of the top of a coffee cup to diagrams of celestial bodies. In a new rubbing with a red background, *Untitled (double-sided 1835)*, for example, a kind of calendar in the form of a circular chart holds an intricate web of kaleidoscopic intersections. Elsewhere, the basic form of a circle within a circle, as it sometimes appears in Mullican's mapping of his five-world cosmology, appears like a wide-open eye—perceiving and letting light in, like a symbol of knowledge.

Mullican's practice has long been centered on different ways of organizing everything from his own thoughts to different types of information—and, effectively, the world. His bulletin boards, which he began exhibiting in the late '70s, draw on a mundane, physical format found in homes and common spaces. In their non-linear, casual presentation of information and images, they form an associative logic of their own. The gridlike arrangement that these take here is echoed in other materials and media, including a wooden model, *Untitled (City Chart, Outline Model) (2001)*—a box construction divided into further boxes with horizontal and vertical lines. References to databases also come up in quasi-architectural constructions, including a standing steel structure, the five levels of which are each in a different color from Mullican's cosmology. As a structural unit of a space, a document or a body, a cell works within the parameters of a system: like the four lines that form a box, which build a frame, and so

indicate a distance, a picture, and signify a representation. Mullican's works suggest that such frameworks are permeable.

Posted to one of the bulletin boards is a text written by the artist on the subject of where he will go when he dies and where he was before he was born. These questions are engaged with in his first cosmology, the themes of which are also taken up in early drawings such as *Untitled (Death and Fate Discussing my Future) (1973-76)*, or in the symbolic notions of above and below. Like his series of photos of his morning coffee and untitled works on paper from the mid '70s that seem to offer an intimate view of a person's life and surroundings, it is a fiction within a real space of possibility.

Mullican's work continuously poses general questions about the meaning of life, as well as art—both as interconnected as reality and fiction. These are addressed with the connection and nuance demanded of fundamental conditions of human existence and the perceptions they shape, expanding from a single line to the overall picture, tracing the points where they intersect in thought and feeling.

Text by Julianne Cordray

Matt Mullican, born 1951 in Santa Monica, California, from 1974 studied with John Baldessari at the California Institute of the Arts. Together with Jack Goldstein, David Salle, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, Richard Prince, and others, he is associated to the so-called “Pictures Generation”.

Mullican has taught and lectured at Columbia University in New York, the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, the London Institute, Chelsea College of Arts, the Institute for New Media in Frankfurt am Main, and the University of Fine Arts Hamburg. He participated in documenta 7, documenta 9, and documenta 10. Since the 1970s, his work has been exhibited at museums and institutions worldwide. His works are held in numerous international public collections, including the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Tate Modern (London), the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), the Neue Nationalgalerie (Berlin), and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam).