

# Serpentine Gallery

## Teachers' Notes

## Matthew Barney

20 September – 11 November 2007



*DRAWING RESTRAINT 9 2005*  
Production Still  
Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York  
© 2005 Matthew Barney  
Photograph: Chris Winget

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These notes are designed to support your visit to the Serpentine Gallery, including planning prior to your visit and suggestions for discussion and activities back at school when you return. They are aimed primarily at Key Stage 3 but include activities that can relate to all key stages, enabling you to develop them to suit your needs and inspire discussion and practical work.

## Contents

	Page
• <b>Background information</b>	1
<b>Matthew Barney – The artist</b>	
<b><i>Matthew Barney: DRAWING RESTRAINT</i></b>	
• <b>Themes, ideas and questions to explore</b>	2- 6
• <b>Further reading and website links</b>	6
• <b>Planning a visit to the Serpentine Gallery</b>	7

## Background Information

**Matthew Barney** is one of the most celebrated artists of his generation. Born in San Francisco in 1967, Barney studied Fine Art at Yale University in the late 1980s. His practice encompasses a diverse array of media including drawing, sculpture, performance, photography, film and installation.

Barney is perhaps best known for the *CREMASTER* cycle, a series of five feature-length films, produced from 1994-2002. He creates a parallel mythological world rich and complex in its symbolism using spectacular locations, props and costumes. Both before and since the completion of *CREMASTER* has developed a project of connected works entitled *DRAWING RESTRAINT* that investigate the act of drawing as a physical challenge and explore the parallels between artistic and athletic bodies working at the threshold of physical limitations.

### ***Matthew Barney: DRAWING RESTRAINT*** **20 September – 11 November 2007**

Matthew Barney's *DRAWING RESTRAINT* series of work is the focus of the exhibition and consists of performance, a feature film, video, drawings, sculptures and photographs from throughout the series, numbers 1 to 16.

## Themes, ideas and questions to explore

### Multimedia art practice



*Holographic Entry Point* 2005 (detail)

High-density polyethylene, polycaprolactone thermoplastic, shrimp shells, shells, cement, wood, steel, stainless steel, expanded polystyrene, vivac, pigment, acrylic paint, acrylic medium, sand, aquaplast and PVC

Installation view: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan

© 2005 Matthew Barney

Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York

Photograph: Keizo Kioku

### Keywords and cross-curricular links

**Performance – sculpture – drawing – installation – film – video – photography – traditional – unconventional – form – the body – medical – plastic – systems**

### Classroom discussion and activities

- Matthew Barney creates art in many different ways. He often appears in his own work, becoming an artist, athlete, performer, and film director at the same time. Can you make a new piece of artwork about an imaginary character combining three of the above keywords as a starting point?
- How many ways can you think of to tell a story using different art materials?

### Visiting the exhibition

Matthew Barney uses a diverse variety of traditional and unconventional materials to create new and innovative works. All the large-scale sculptures on display are linked to the film *DRAWING RESTRAINT 9* along with some of the photographs and drawings. Set on a famous Japanese whaling ship, named Nisshin Maru, the film tells the love story of two 'Occidental Guests' played by Barney and Icelandic singer Björk and documents the construction and collapse of a huge petroleum jelly sculpture named the 'Field'.

- What are the materials Barney has chosen to create the sculptures in the gallery? Are they unusual?
- What qualities does the work share with more traditional forms of sculpture?

- The sculptures are reinterpretations of the films themes in a gallery context. How does sculpture/performance function differently in film than in a gallery space?

## Drawing as a physical challenge



*Drawing Restraint 2* 1988  
Documentation Still  
© 1988 Matthew Barney  
Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York  
Photograph: Michael Rees

### Keywords and cross-curricular links

**Restrictions – obstacles – barriers – struggle – conflicting forces – resistance – movement – action – athlete – experiment – surface – mark making – device – limitation – transcendence – will power**

The ongoing *DRAWING RESTRAINT* project began in 1987 when Barney was a student. He carried out a series of studio experiments, where he attempted to draw while restrained by different physical devices. These included long heavy tools, ramps, shelves, hockey skates, harnesses attached to the floor or ceiling and a trampoline. As a teenager Barney played football on his high school team. He used his knowledge of human anatomy and athletic training in his art making.

### Classroom discussion and activities

- Discuss Matthew Barney's idea 'The Athlete is the Artist'. How does the act of drawing compare to a sport you play at school?
- In small groups, can you devise an unusual way to draw with a different part of your body?
- In pairs can you devise an unusual drawing tool or machine using recycled materials and everyday objects?

### Visiting the exhibition

- What props and rules does Matthew Barney use to make his drawing process a physical challenge?
- How does the way he makes drawings link to sport? How is the process similar?
- How does the work link to his interest in the famous escape artist Harry Houdini?

### Metamorphosis and transformation



*Occidental Restraint* 2005  
Petroleum jelly and self-lubricating plastic  
Installation view: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, USA  
© 2005 Matthew Barney  
Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York  
Photograph: David Regen

### Keywords and cross-curricular links

**Artist – athlete – alchemist – transform – process – evolution – creation – invention – energy – experiment – biological development**

### Classroom discussion and activities

- Unconventional materials can have new meanings and remind you of different things as they change into different states e.g. snow, ice, water and clouds. Can you make a sculpture or image that dramatically changes its form over a week?
- In his work, Barney often transforms himself into different characters. Using words and images create three views of yourself: as you are, as a historical figure, and as a mythological character.

### Visiting the exhibition

- Discuss Barney's idea 'The Artist is the Alchemist' How does the process of making art compare to alchemy?
- Why might Barney choose to make artwork that will change in response to environmental conditions?
- In his work, Barney suggests change cannot happen without struggle or challenges. How does this idea relate to your own personal experiences?

## Symbolism and cultural traditions



*DRAWING RESTRAINT 9*  
2005  
Production Still  
© 2005 Matthew Barney  
Courtesy of Gladstone  
Gallery, New York  
Photograph: Chris Winget

### Keywords and cross-curricular links

Signs – codes – design – abstraction – meaning – story – history – Field  
Emblem – ceremony – ritual – mythology

### Classroom discussion and activities

- Barney creates narratives in which the characters and environment are interchangeable and can symbolise the same feeling or meaning. Think about a place that has influenced you. It might be a place important event occurred that shaped your identity either positively or negatively. Invent a character that symbolises how that place looks, smells, feels as well as the sounds you associate with it.
- What cultural traditions, ceremonies or emblems are important to you?

### Visiting the exhibition

- Barney chooses his materials, actions and characters very carefully. How do the materials, actions and characters he has chosen symbolise notions of resistance and struggle?
- In *DRAWING RESTRAINT 9* Barney uses the famous Nisshin Maru Japanese whaling boat as the setting for his film. What do you think this represents?
- The 'Occidental Guests' wear elaborate Shinto-inspired costumes and perform a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Shinto does not split the universe into a natural physical world and a supernatural transcendent world. It regards everything as part of a single unified creation. How does this relate to Barney's ideas and processes?

## Further Reading

MATTHEW BARNEY: DRAWING RESTRAINT Vol I, 1987-2002  
Edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist  
Fiction by Francis McKee  
Interview with Matthew Barney and Hans Ulrich Obrist  
Published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005  
ISBN 3-88375-843-4

MATTHEW BARNEY: DRAWING RESTRAINT Vol II  
Texts by Yuko Hasegawa, Luc Steels  
and Shinichi Nakazawa  
Published by Takashi Asai, UPLINK Co., Tokyo 2005  
ISBN 4-90072-813-6

MATTHEW BARNEY: DRAWING RESTRAINT 7  
Text by Klaus Kertess  
Editor: Cristina Bechtler  
(In English and German. Out of print)  
Published by Cantz Verlag 1995  
ISBN 3-89322-792-X

## Web links

DRAWING RESTRAINT  
[www.drawingrestraint.net](http://www.drawingrestraint.net)  
[www.sfmoma.org/barney/feature.html](http://www.sfmoma.org/barney/feature.html)  
[www.kanazawa21.jp/en/index.html](http://www.kanazawa21.jp/en/index.html)  
[www.bjork.com](http://www.bjork.com) (music)  
[www.atlanticwesteffects.com](http://www.atlanticwesteffects.com) (special effects)

The CREMASTER Cycle  
[www.cremaster.net](http://www.cremaster.net)  
[www.pbs.org/art21/artists/barney/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/barney/index.html)

# Planning a Visit to the Serpentine Gallery

## Contact Details

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[www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org)

## Transport

The nearest tube stations are South Kensington (1.25 km walk), Knightsbridge (1.25 km walk) or Lancaster Gate (1 km walk)  
Bus routes 9, 10, 52, 94 and 148 stop near the Gallery

## Group Visit Guidelines

To make your visit as enjoyable as possible, please read the following:

### Before your Visit:

- Adult supervision of students under 16 is required at all times, including in the shop. An adult student ratio of 1:5 for under 5's, 1:10 for 5 - 11 year olds, 1:15 for 11 - 16 year olds and 1:20 for 16 - 18 year olds is required.
- We recommend a preliminary planning visit, as for some exhibitions there may be works that you consider unsuitable for your group.

### During your Visit:

- Teachers/group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for their group's behaviour whilst at the Serpentine Gallery.
- Please make sure your group is aware of the following Gallery guidelines:
  - No running
  - No touching
  - No leaning against walls or plinths
  - No shouting
  - No photography
- Many contemporary artworks are fragile and damage easily. Please make sure that your group understands that this is why they are not allowed to touch the art.
- Lecturing: If your group is larger than 30 please split them into smaller groups in the exhibition space and do not lecture in rooms where talks are already in progress.
- Drawing: If you would like to do some drawing please check with the gallery what materials you will be able to use in the exhibition

## Education and Family Events

Education is at the core of the Serpentine Gallery's activities. Through practical, artist led workshops and discussion, talks, events and projects the Education Programme offers a diverse range of innovative ways to engage with modern and contemporary art and architecture for all ages.

Please refer to the Serpentine Gallery Diary or [www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org) for information on events and activities taking place as part of the Education Programme during the exhibition *Matthew Barney: DRAWING RESTRAINT*