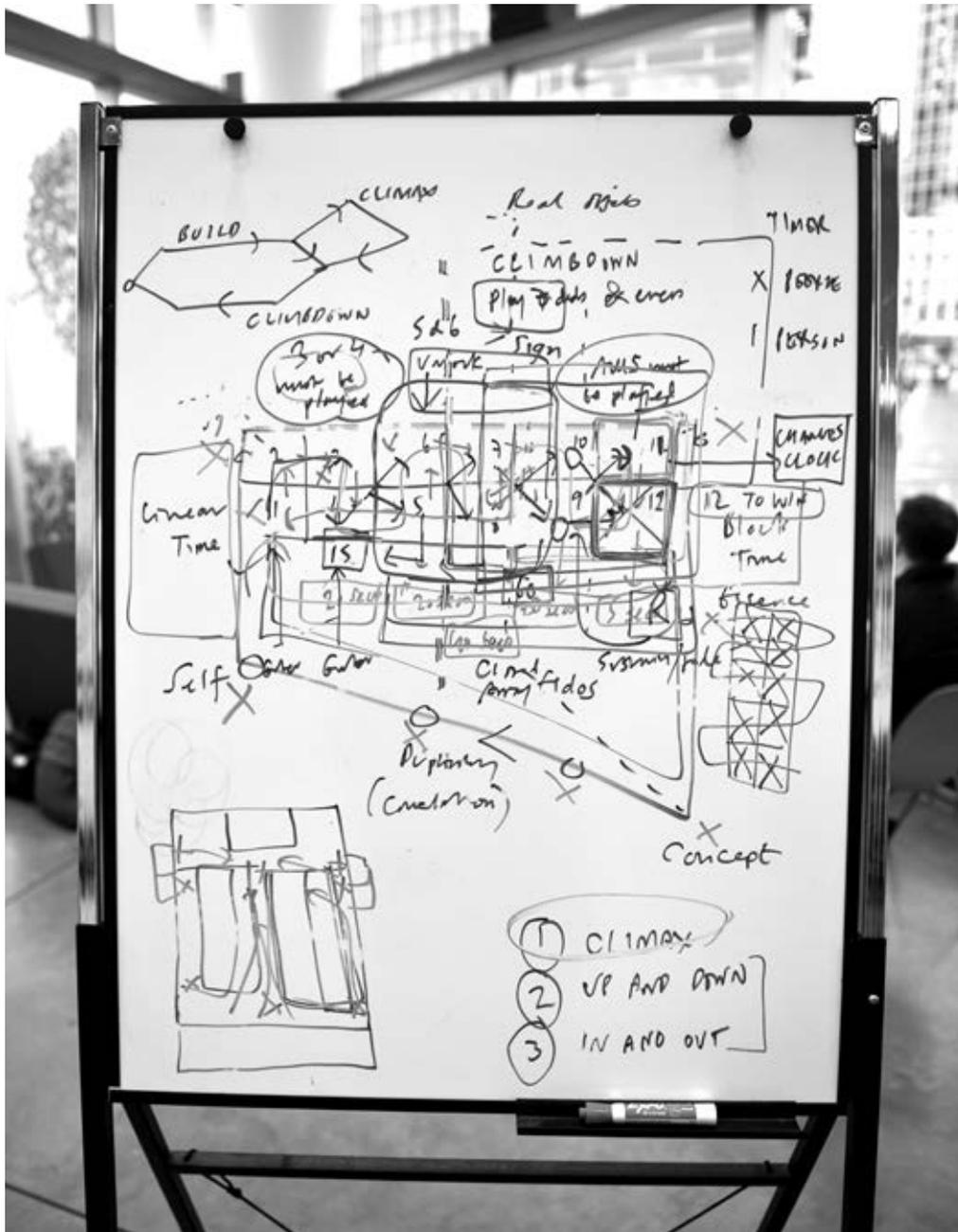


UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS



caption TK

Long interested in schematic representation, for the last few years Matthew Ritchie has endeavored to generate a diagram that maps all diagrammatic thought in art, science, and philosophy. Considering his avid enthusiasm for knowledge of all kinds—both real and fictional—it may be no surprise that this (seemingly impossible, even absurd) undertaking has had an impressive result, a sort of sketch of a unified theory, or diagram of diagrams he refers to as “The Temptation of the Diagram.” In a series of works—so far, an installation, essay, and an exhibition—the concept of the diagram is presented as a universalizing connector that allows us to move beyond categories of “art” and “not-art,” as well as to coherently relate aspects of past, present and future.

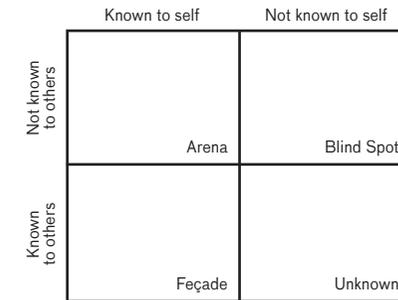
These concepts figure prominently in the two-year artist residency Ritchie began with ICA in 2013. The initial invitation included a new installation for the ICA lobby, a performance program, and workshops with our Teen Arts Council. From Ritchie’s past works, I knew to consider this list merely a beginning—his approach is nothing if not expansive—and indeed, the project soon flowered into something physically and philosophically larger: a proposal to redefine the concept of an artist residency. As we’ve progressed through the residency (at the time of writing, months remain before it concludes) we’ve done nothing less than turn the museum inside out, so to speak, and ultimately use it as a physical medium for making art.

Familiar as I am with this artist, who brings drawing and painting to

the biggest theoretical explorations, consistently collaborating with architects, musicians, physicists, engineers, and theorists, I considered the museum a paradigm awaiting his unique sensibility. Deploying the traditional elements of art—gesture, line, and color—Ritchie explores the complexity of humankind’s efforts to mimic, abstract, rationalize, fictionalize, or simply come to terms with the vastness of the universe. From his paintings to recent work in installation, landscape, architecture, performance, sound, video, and animation, Ritchie has adopted an inclusive approach to making objects, one that connects to an eccentric trajectory of artists who locate meaning through making (and vice versa). For Ritchie, this path begins in the modern era with William Blake and continues with artists as diverse as Paul Klee, Joseph Beuys, Öyvind Fahlström, Sigmar Polke, and Matt Mullican. What these artists share is a reliance on the production of objects—whether painting, film, sculpture, or drawing—to transmit their ideas and initiate social exchange. In Ritchie’s case, specifically, his objects express ideas about the unknown, using a rhetorical mode that shifts according to their material—paint, ink, or pencil. Ritchie obliges material objects (his paintings and installations) to envelop more and more meanings, which begs the question, Are things becoming information, or is information becoming things?

To explicate the residency—one organized for specific sites as well as nonspecific universal concepts—we can use one of the simplest of all the diagrams Ritchie includes in his Diagram, the Johari window. The Johari window is a tool used in psychological tests to help people better understand their relationship to self and others.¹ It is a sort of modernized descendant of Aristotle’s Four Humors (corresponding to the four elements), which have surfaced in Freud, Jung, and Lacan, and inform any number of personality tests administered by the hiring departments of major corporations.

To use the window, you begin by selecting descriptions of your own traits, while others select *their* descriptions of your traits; the results are then diagrammed on the chart. For example, the box labeled “Arena” contains features that you and your peers are both aware of: these can be called “known knowns.” “Façade” lists those characteristics known only to you, not to others—secret, undisclosed, or seldom-disclosed traits: “known unknowns.” (This category gained notoreity when former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld characterized the “known unknowns” of the

Johari Window

Afghanistan/Iraq war.) “Blind Spot” lists traits known to others but not to oneself: “unknown knowns.” Peers determine whether or not to disclose blind spots to the subject. Traits not known by either subjects or peers are listed in the box marked “Unknown”: these are “unknown unknowns” and may include characteristics that have been demonstrated but remain unidentified by self and others.

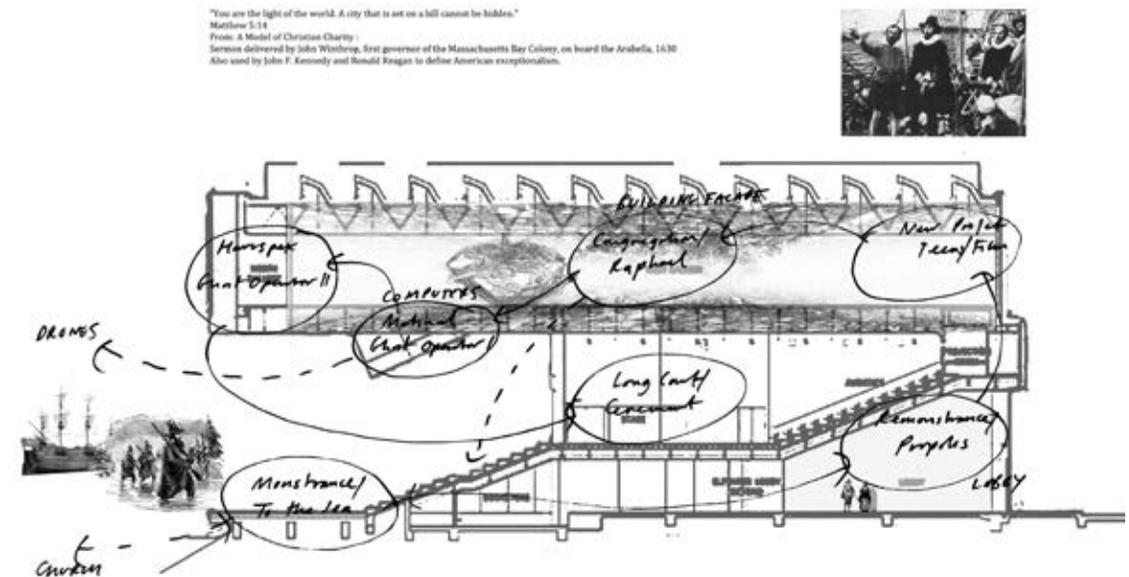
To begin, the idea of an “Arena,” or public space, could be represented in one of Ritchie’s simpler residency planning diagrams: the drawing below maps the physical locations of the residency project using a scaling system. Critically, Ritchie’s sketch—drawn during one of the many planning meetings we conducted—can be read either left to right or right to left, yet visitors will typically encounter the individual project components in the prescribed order. From left to right: *The Salt Pit*, a large painting installed in the ICA’s fourth-floor galleries; a diagrammatic painting in the stairwell that purports to code the project; Our Lady of Good Voyage, a nearby seamen’s chapel;

Matthew Diagram

the lobby installation; and a mural in downtown Boston. Ritchie's residency project is primarily sited at the ICA, a venue associated with creative activities for the public that take place inside and outside the building—visual art, performance, scholarship, lectures, music, children's programs, fundraising, and festivities—but the arena here extends into the city as well.

This diagram also demonstrates the ways Ritchie combines image and site—as the reader will soon understand—“like a collection of stories that, much like a pack of cards, can be re-dealt and retold, an endless telescope of works.”² In this mode, scale becomes a gesture, as Ritchie forces information through particular visual protocols—such as cropping, scaling, and modeling—moving, for example, from drawing to computer animation to monumental mural. This mode of facture pushes at an inquiry into gesture as carrier of meaning, and with regard to the residency, asks if gestural meaning can exist at the scale of a painting, a museum, and a city street. The largest work in Ritchie's scaling diagram is a 70-by-70-foot mural in Dewey Square in downtown Boston. Dewey Square is one section of the Rose F. Kennedy Greenway, a median strip of parks that replaced a raised highway that for forty years divided Boston from its seaport.³ The Greenway organization and the ICA have recently partnered to present public art on a façade that anchors the square near the terminus of the Greenway.⁴ Ritchie's monochromatic mural, titled *Remanence: Salt and Light*, depicts an information ecology where ideas (represented as atoms) rise and fall between a “sea” of undifferentiated lines.⁵ The title evokes both science and scripture, and recognizes Boston's past and its present: “remanence” is a term for the trace memory left in magnetic materials, and here functions as a neologism evoking memory, remnant, and resonance.

In a second project diagram (opposite), showing the project mapped on to the ICA building, we see the phrase “salt and light,” which refers to John Winthrop, first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who, on the deck of the vessel *Arabella*, quoted the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13–16) to arriving settlers. Winthrop called for Boston to become a “City on a Hill.” Often quoted by politicians, most notably John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, this famous expression has itself become a “remanence” of an idea, typically misinterpreted as a fable of American exceptionalism. More accurately, the sermon not only exhorts us to live up to the moral obligations



of being “the city on the hill,” visible to all as an example, but to constantly work to retain the “salt,” or complex flavor of life. Remanence links the entire project, as ideas about art, science, and history crisscross temporalities of experience as well as the local topography.

In the Johari window, the “Façade” contains secrets hidden behind the screen we erect to face others. But in the case of the ICA, a building almost entirely clad in glass, the façade is transparent. A beacon on the harbor, light floods through it, and at night, emanates from it. By opening the museum (inside and out) to Ritchie, we offered up this transparency for scrutiny. Among the many paradigm shifts the ICA has instigated and/or encountered in the last several years, the neighborhood is one of the most critical. In 2006, the ICA opened along a stretch of Boston harbor known as the Seaport, and in doing so transformed itself from a modest 70-year-old *kunsthalle* (located for the last thirty-odd years in Back Bay) to a thriving center for contemporary art that anchors a rapidly developing neighborhood. One of the first buildings erected in a multi-decade city master plan, it was until very recently surrounded by a desert of parking lots, all of which are slated for high-rises—which are rapidly

appearing. The neighborhood is temporarily dominated by trucks, cranes, scaffolding, excavation, and noise. This particular situation is one among the many ideas that inform the works Ritchie made during the residency, and resulted in his scheme for an art wall that would extend onto the adjacent glass façade to screen from view the construction directly behind the ICA.

Ritchie's installation on the lobby's Sandra and Gerald Fineberg Art Wall is an immersive environment titled *Remanence: Remonstrance*. It consists of digitally printed opaque and transparent vinyl films applied to the surfaces of the windows and the diagonally ascending art wall, and vinyl numerals affixed to the floor. Ritchie applied acrylic paint to the vinyl as line, fill, and particulate spray—and even a few “bloody” handprints—which adds materiality and an additional layer of information: touch registers time, and time is information. Though the installation is apparently two-dimensional, volume is gained through the imagery, the materials, and a new use of the museum's public space; all three axes (wall, window, floor) of the space are activated. Here, painting and drawing escape the conventional confines of material and space as they move across surfaces that are opaque (wall) and transparent (glass façade).

Deploying his signature visual lexicon—which should be considered less personal expression than a quasi-universal mapping of idea, system, and site—Ritchie in the lobby project concretizes ephemeral and intangible theories of information and time. Using traditions of “universal” abstraction whose practitioners range from Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman to Walt Disney and Darren Aronofsky, Ritchie's work depicts atoms, primordial life, buildings, diagrams of space-time, neural networks, written language, and unmanned drones. These collide and overlap, creating a densely layered ecosystem of ideas and themes. On the glass façade's upper right corner is a gray super-atom that generates a field of information; atoms float up from a red sea; rebar rises from the depths and becomes scaffolding, a foreshadowing of (or even a future shadow cast by) the real building rising across the street. The black, curving diagonals that span window and wall reference one of the earliest iterations of Einstein's space-time diagram. In Ritchie's expressive formation, the shape recalls ocean vessels and the artist's longstanding interest in the sea as a metaphor for infinity. Scrawled across the lower portion of the windows is the German word *Weltlinie* (world line), used by Einstein to

describe the path of our movement through time and space. On the left side of the wall, a floating seed, a symbol of life, moves toward the windows. A black shape—a highly abstracted “predator” drone—points to the drawn sea on the wall and the (actual) sea just beyond the ICA's walls. Backgrounding all of this imagery is a network of thin gray lines: Ritchie's massive “diagram of diagrams.” Here, though the categories are absent, one can find reference to them in a wall painting in the stairwell, which serves as a key to both the artwork in the lobby and the entire project. In this diagram, the four corners of Ritchie's quadratic space are labeled “theory,” “object,” “society,” and “light,” with lines defining axes of time and space that refer to Graham Harman's Quadruple Object (another touchstone diagram for Ritchie).⁶

The space enclosed within the volume implied by the wall and window extends into time, the fourth dimension, via an interactive sound component conceived by Ritchie and executed in collaboration with composers Bryce Dessner, David Sheppard, and Evan Ziporyn. For Ritchie, collaboration unlocks hidden correlations among disciplines—in Johari window terms, the Blind Spot. Visitors are encouraged to activate the sound piece by stepping on stickers affixed to the floor, numbered 1 through 12, which trigger sonic forms that grow increasingly complex as participants move through the numerical sequence.⁷ The amplified sounds are reconstitutions of elements in a longer work, “Propolis,” a microcanon in which notes overlap, ascend, and descend in a mathematically prescribed way.⁸ The sound installation, like the glass wall, masks the buzz of construction directly outside ICA's façade.

Ritchie's incorporation of sound indirectly connects drawing to the geometrical principles on which music, and the universe, is built. Like drawing, musical notation records time and implies the space of performance; they differ in that music, infinitely repeatable, transcends time whereas drawing takes place during a fixed segment of time. Ritchie's collaborative works evolve from such correspondences between ideas and mediums. Merging the visual with the aural, his works range in scale from animations viewed on handheld devices to performances experienced in theaters over multiple nights. At the ICA, the sound work generates an immaterial pavilion, a space within a space—but a space entirely absent unless activated by viewers who, in moving through the sequence, trace patterns in space.⁹ Ritchie considers the lobby installation an enormous drawing to be completed by the viewer, and as such it points to his



desire to extend painting and drawing into the media of time, science, music, and the public: “I’m interested in gesturing toward the completely unknown, while bearing in mind that we all bring to the unknown our own stories—and we need these stories to make meaning of the unknown.”

Ritchie’s collaborations often feature multimedia music performances, and it was in part due to the ICA’s performance program that the residency formed as it did. Ritchie imagined two different performance programs for the ICA. The first, in March 2014, was an evening of music with two performances in two venues: a live performance of “Propolis” in front of the art wall and of “Monstrance”—a work only once previously performed, on Venice Beach in California—at Our Lady of Good Voyage.¹⁰ Between the two performances, the audience processed from the ICA to the church across the street—from one kind of reverential arena to another (for more, see text by John Andress in this volume). The second performance program will derive from *The Long Count*, a cosmological song cycle Ritchie authored and directed. With music by Aaron and Bryce Dessner, this major collaborative undertaking fuses Mesoamerican myth with baseball, experimental rock with classical music. *The Long Count* was first performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2009 and has subsequently toured in distinctive iterations. At the ICA, plans proceed to site the work in both the theater and the galleries.

Ritchie states that making drawings is like making time appear before your eyes, and his ICA residency demonstrates this complex notion in many ways. Encompassing as it does a wide range of works and locales, the project asks viewers to consider time in relation to experience and simultaneity. For example, we look at the art wall while activating the sound work with our physical movements (we don’t often move in front of an artwork in such a way) and we hold in the mind the imagery encountered at Dewey Square as we view that at the ICA. We also experience time-based works such as the performances, which exist in real time and cannot be revisited like a static object, such as a painting. For Ritchie, this kind of temporality is akin to knowledge: some parts of the universe are accessible to us, and most are not.

Yet another type of temporality is represented by animated videos built from the artist’s drawings, with music by Bryce Dessner. The videos take form at all scales, from mural-like projections in the performances to playback on handheld mobile devices. The latter expands static works when accessed with a

QR code at project locales: the mural at Dewey Square, the art wall, and in the ICA galleries, where *The Salt Pit* is on view.¹¹ The painting's title references the first disclosed CIA "black," or "known unknown," detention site in Afghanistan. Its imagery (atoms, a fallen tower) and facture (paint particles and varying types of mark making) link it to the murals in the lobby and in downtown Boston, as well as the visuals experienced during the performances and online.

For Ritchie, "the key issue raised by the Johari window and all universalizing systems—no matter how comprehensive, accepted, real, or unreal to us or others (The Bible, quantum mechanics, climate change, Wikipedia, consciousness)—is not whether it is humanly possible to define all levels of reality, but whether it is possible to represent the absence of what we do not yet know, the 'unknown unknowns,' as spaces of potential meaning." Though institutions typically prefer the "known knowns," the museum is historically a site of creation and exchange, as well as a generator of information, experience, and meaning. Considering such exchanges in contrast to the practice of relational aesthetics that has defined a generation of artistic production, Ritchie explains that he "repeatedly reverses the polarity between audience and artist, creating a kind of alternating current between the unknown and the experienced. Whether indulging a desire for novelty, or pure experience, or restating the clichéd inaccessibility of art, the project aims to place the viewer on a gradient of potentials, with the possibility of increased access to multiple meanings becoming available at every energy level within the terms of art. From arena to façade, from narrative to performance, from architecture to music, from painting to installation, categories are shuffled and boundaries redrawn."

With such goals in mind, Ritchie has created an intensely collaborative residency that asks: What is a museum for the twenty-first century? How does one make meaning within this paradigm? What is public engagement? Viewer experience? What is an artist? What can one artist's project accomplish in the form of answers to such questions? These are just some of the questions and ideas that inform the sea of information that has served as the basis for art making. Ritchie's creations for the ICA residency—murals, installations, paintings, sound works, live performances, and teen, staff, and public engagement—provide specific experiences within a vast arena of knowledge.

Notes

1. The Johari window was created in 1955 by American psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes by Matthew Ritchie are from conversations with the author, June 2012–June 2014.
3. A plaque on the remaining column, which identifies it as "Dewey Square Pylon," describes the John F. Fitzgerald Expressway as a massive urban development scheme built between 1951 and 1959. By 1990, the expressway was transporting 200,000 vehicles through Boston and, with them, traffic snarls, grime, and pollution. From 1990 to 2007, the "Big Dig" buried the Expressway under the city. The column remains as a memorial to the elevated expressway.
4. The inaugural mural was executed by Os Gemeos in conjunction with their eponymous 2012 ICA exhibition.
5. The mural is entirely composed in gray (fittingly, Benjamin Moore Paint's Harbor Fog and Pilgrim Haze), creating a kind of shadowy realm that contrasts with Ritchie's colorful interventions at the ICA.
6. A diagram created by Graham Harman which has four poles labeled "real objects," "real qualities," "sensual objects," and "sensual qualities." Among these poles are ten possible links that explicate a metaphysical movement called "object-oriented ontology." It's very complicated. Please see Wikipedia.
7. The sound piece uses motion-activated cameras and a computer program to capture visitor movement across a field of space. The composition plays as visitors step within these numbered fields, denoted by numbers affixed to the floor. Different parts of the composition are assigned numerically, with accumulated complexity as one moves through the sequence. For example, when you trigger numbers 1 to 3 single note sounds play but eventually stop after a short time if there is no more movement. The game is that you need to trigger 2 to keep 1 going, 3 to keep 2 going, and when number 4 is triggered, everything loops. The sound ceases if you stop at 4. Triggering 5 through 12 activates additional segments. The big moment is 12, which unlocks part two of the composition, a four-minute sequence. You can "turn off" the piece by reversing the sequence of numbers (but only after you trigger 12).
8. "Propolis" was commissioned for and performed live in the outdoor installation *The Morning Line*. Created in collaboration with architects Aranda/Lasch, the Arup Advanced Geometry Unit, and the Music Research Centre of York University, the installation has been exhibited in public spaces in Seville (2008) Istanbul (2010), and Vienna (2011).
9. The space is immaterial in comparison with that of *The Morning Line*, a scalable, interactive structure fitted with multiple speakers that can broadcast sound as well as host performances.
10. "Monstrance" is another Ritchie/Dessner collaboration, with lyrics by Ritchie adapted from Milton. A masked angel representing Uriel, angel of the sun, performs a series of eight choreographed gestures.
11. *The Salt Pit* was shown in Ritchie's 2008 exhibition *Ghost Operator*, one of the first exhibitions for which Aaron and Bryce Dessner performed. In terms of Ritchie's generous donation of *The Salt Pit* to the ICA collection, there is a long story that involves not only the war on terror, but also

Hurricane Sandy, art restoration, insurance policies, a generous artist, forthright curators, and the vision of the residency.

U

E. Gtr. $c \times t$

E. Gtr. $ds^2 = dx^2 + dy^2 + dz^2 - c^2 dt^2$

E. Gtr. Flat metric $d = \text{dimension}$

S. D. $x, y, z = 1, 2, 3$ dimensions

Tom-t. $c = \text{light}$

B. D. $t = \text{time}$

Harm.

Fl. $ds^2 = e^{2\phi/r} (dx^2 + dy^2 + dz^2 - c^2 dt^2) + dr^2$

B. Cl. $e = \text{energy}$

Bsn. $r = 5^{\text{th}}$ dimension

Hrn. DM $K = \text{Boltzmann constant}$

C Tpt.

Tbn.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Ve.