Wallpaper*
*DESIGN INTERIORS FASHION ART LIFESTYLE

The Morning Line sonic temple, Istanbul

ARCHITECTURE

By Chris Sullivan

As I stood in Eminönü Square, Istanbul, experiencing what might only be described as an experiment in sound, art and architecture, I was approached by a rather trepidacious Turkish teenager. “What’s going on?” he enquired. “It’s a sound installation,” I replied. “I don’t know what that is,” he answered, obviously puzzled. “But it’s not love is it?” And certainly for that moment in time it was not as, sitting behind a MacBook, was Aphex Twin collaborator and eminent sonic artist Russell Haswell, playing a sound poem by Yasunao Tone, entitled Paramedia, that sounded like a million arcade computer games at war.

INFORMATION

The Morning Line is in Eminönü Square, Istanbul, until September 19th

Photography by Jakob Polacsek / T-B A21 2010

Website
http://www.tba21.org

The occasion was the launch of a sonic temple christened The Morning Line that was created by artist Matthew Ritchie, in collaboration with award winning architect, Ben Aranda, and Arup AGU. The launch was held over five days and featured a series of exciting new works by some of the world's greatest sonic artists. A formidable, almost foreboding Gothic-like construction, The Morning Line is basically an eight-metre high, 20m long, perforated coated aluminium modular tent weighing in at 17 tons, that can be dismntled and transported over borders and re-assembled in a variety of new shapes - almost like a box of Lego.

No ordinary construction, the structure comprises 40 speakers within its confines and uses an interactive ambi-sonic sound system (made by the Music Research Centre Of York University) that serves to broadcast said 'music' in the shadow of the Yeni Cami Mosque, next to the Spice Bazaar and overlooking the Bosphorous.

The whole shooting match has been put together and sponsored by, Francesca von Habsburg, international patron of the arts, heir to the Thyssen Bornemisza Collection and founder of TBA 21 contemporary arts foundation, along with Turkey's Vehbi Koç Foundation.

A rather spectacular event, its curated by Haswell, who chose the 16 individual works to be broadcast on an irregular basis in between prayers until September 19th. Amongst the works are a soothing electronic classical opus, Bridges from Somewhere, by Peter Zinovieff (who in the 1960s invented the VCS3 synthesizer so popular amongst the likes of Kraftwerk, Pink Floyd and David Bowie) and composer Carl Michael von Hausswolff's, No Rest Even for the Static Matter, that employs sine waves voiced into 40 different compositions - one for each speaker - all to be played simultaneously.

A quite dazzling array of talent, amongst the other works are: Maelstrom by Lee Ranaldo - co-founder of Sonic Youth; Cannibal in Tuxedo, by Icelandic duo, Ghostigital (Einar Örn of The Sugarcubes and Curver the Sigur Ros remixer); Timeless Wave by Erdem Helvacıoğlu; and Snaefellsnes by Cabaret Voltaire founder Chris Wilson.

Indeed, the event fields the full disparity of modern sonic art - some pieces almost lull one to sleep, others create an inner turmoil - but all are created to provoke an emotional effect and all within the confines of a rather radical piece of architectural art that sits in a very important heritage site.

"The location of these pavilions are as important as the pavilions themselves and here we are with this very contemporary construction and concept in the middle of this very historical square casting a calligraphic shadow over the Bosphorous."

explains Francesca von Habsburg.

“This was a chance to do something on a large scale and experiment with the relationship between sound and architecture. I hate compromise and this was the opportunity not to do so.”

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30 July 2010 | Architecure

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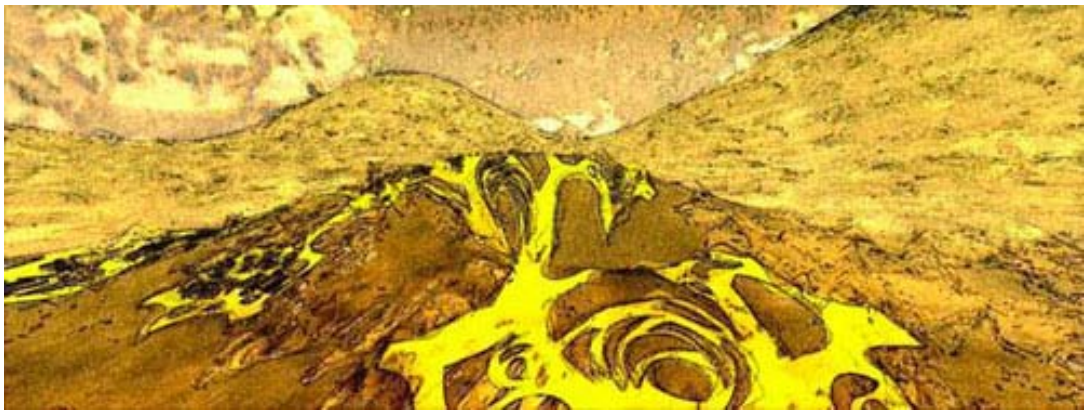
http://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/the-morning-line-sonic-temple-istanbul/4747

THE HUFFINGTON POST

MARCH 9, 2010

Matthew Ritchie
Artist
Posted: March 9, 2010 01:58 PM

A Perilous Intellectual High Wire Act



Last Saturday evening I sat in the silver-painted Lower East Side studio of clothing designers Three As Four, listening to Gabi Asfour cryptically explain how their 2006 season was based on the E8 fractal group. I came here looking for a costume for an opera singer, playing a physicist about to enter higher dimensional space. I've clearly found the right designer for this project. I arrived with only one criteria, the costume should not be black. When I leave, I will have not a 'costume' but an 'aura' for the singer. It's beautiful. And it's black.

This Thursday, March 11, the noted physicist Lisa Randall, the composer Hector Parra and myself are going to try and perform one of the most perilous intellectual high wire acts possible; the simultaneous presentation and interaction of art, music and science. Unlike *Einstein on the Beach*, or *Doctor Atomic*, this collaboration doesn't just present the history of science; it references a contemporary and highly advanced theory of extra dimensional space. Not only that, we're going to do it in the Guggenheim Museum, built as the big top for abstract ideas, home base for the higher dimensional aspirations of Wassily Kandinsky and Hilla Rebay.

The key to this project is balancing Hector Parra's music, which took its formal cues from the ideas in Lisa's book *Warped Passages* and her libretto, which is a kind of science-romance and giving both a visual form that helps the audience to follow the concepts. In Paris we performed this piece at the Pompidou Center with subtitles, two singers articulating the story, an orchestra and a four-part stage divided between the world and the higher dimensional space. At the Guggenheim there will be one singer, whose voice will be completely distorted by the nautiloid curves of the museum and a PA system, so I'm going to have to break down the visual vocabulary of abstraction and directly connect it to the forces and geometry described in the Randall/Sundrum model.

Why are we doing it? For a hundred thousand years, humanity has wrestled with two urges; to both understand the universe and to narrate it. It is not enough to simply describe the universe; we have to make sense of it, to share what we learn by telling stories. The real story of the real universe is just too strange and interesting to allow the fantasists, denialists and know-nothings to tell a fake story instead.

PART 2

On Sunday I was in Dallas for the formal opening of the Dallas Cowboys Art Collection. Just about the time this project got started I began to try and imagine a cultural space where narrative and science could overlap, and where animated abstraction could offer a coherent visual space for these complex but fundamental ideas. I made this piece for Dallas during the same period. What, you might ask, can football and physics possibly have to do with each other?

Well, both involve the consequences of things hitting each other very hard. And both are representations of hierarchical rule based systems involving transitions through carefully divided spaces, much like myths. In some significant ways, complex ideas of multi-dimensional space have subtly supported every representation of the universe since human culture began. From the abyssal deeps of Mesopotamia to the void of El , with their sun-pulling chariots, rainbow bridges and crystal spheres, every culture has sought to describe a cosmic infrastructure, a hierarchy of spaces and agencies that contain and harness the fundamental forces of light, matter and entropy. The falls of Icarus and Seven Macaw are not just about pride, they are about gravity too. And in all these stories, movement through the secret forces and spaces of the universe defines the narratives. No matter their details or their various and peculiar heavens and hells, myths evolved to try and explain why things move around each other, why the Evenstar, whether you called her Astarte or Lucifer, rose at dawn and returned at dusk, to summon the night of the world. No wonder all mythology often seems like one vast overlapping story.

PART 3

Bringing science into the larger culture is not for the timid. Lisa Randall and I first met at an Einstein centennial conference in Berlin. I was filled with a mixture of traumatized pride and ecstatic dread at being the only artist invited to speak to the gathered Nobel laureates as they put forward the implications of Einstein's theories for the 21st century. In an audience of intellectual giants, Lisa stood out by virtue of her kindness and curiosity. She was about to publish her game-changing book that introduced a logical and plausible argument for the existence of a new, fifth, dimension, occupied by gravity. It turns out that space isn't the final frontier. In passing, in a kind and curious way, she expressed an interest in visual art along with her belief that an inaccurate image was worse than a thousand words. Her book had almost no pictures.

Despite this, we kept in touch and a few years later, I met with her and the composer Hector Parra in the gardens of the university in Barcelona to discuss their idea of presenting elements of what had become widely known as the Randall/Sundrum model, or five-dimensional warped geometry, as an opera. A warped space-time opera.

PART 4

Lisa's point about inaccurate images was perfectly reasonable. Can these kinds of advanced ideas really be visualized? Pure abstraction, as everyone who saw the Kandinsky show at the Guggenheim knows, began as a modern attempt to visualize similar higher orders of reality. But along the way, most artists became deeply confused about the difference between inner and outer orders of reality, possibly because the mathematics grew too hard. The journal of the theosophists was called *Lucifer* after all, not "Einstein." As high abstraction grappled with the counter-culture, it fatally mixed process with content, and confused the idea of a journey with a trip. Ironically this all happened just as the groundwork was being laid in physics for a new understanding of real higher dimensional orders. The language to describe a new form of physical reality amazing was developed prematurely and exiled in its youth.

But I'm convinced it's just waiting to be properly used, map and vessel both, ready for the real voyage. Not the journey towards some mythic self, beloved of Jung, Campbell and George Lucas. Not the trip into the body delivered by chemicals and Terence McKenna but the real final frontier. Not some transcendental mumbo-jumbo but the operating system of reality itself. Despite their complexity, easily distorted by new-age philosophy and episodes of *Lost*, these theories are potentially real. They are being subjected to real experiments at real places like CERN. Depending on what we find out, the whole idea of what the universe really is--and how human thought is part of it--may change profoundly in our lifetimes. Trying to tell the story of this moment, to grasp how we are dealing with the changing ideas of the universe, seems to me one of the most wonderful ways I, as a non-scientist, can enter the greatest story of human culture, at one of its greatest moments. Politically too, this is a vital moment for science. At a time when everything, from warfare to farming, is defined by whose information is the most believable, we must seize the opportunity to present science and experimental thinking as both challenge and inspiration.

I'm not sure if we'll be able to do all that on March 11, but we can try. At least the costumes will be great!

Hypermusic: Ascension will be presented by Works & Process at the Guggenheim on Thursday, March 11, 2010, at 6:30pm and 8:30pm. For tickets and more information please visit www.worksandprocess.org.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

MARCH 9, 2010

Matthew Ritchie

Get Matthew Ritchie's RSS Feed

Matthew Ritchie's installations of painting, wall drawings, light boxes, sculpture, and projections are investigations of the idea of information; explored through science, architecture, history and the dynamics of culture, defined equally by their range and their lyrical visual language. In 2001, *Time* magazine listed Ritchie as one of 100 innovators for the new millennium, for exploring "the unthinkable or the not-yet-thought." More omnivorous than omnipotent, encompassing everything from cutting-edge physics, ancient myth, neo-noir short stories and medieval alchemy to climate change, contemporary politics and economic theory, his installations fuse unique narrative forms with our constantly changing factual understanding of our universe. His most recent exhibitions in New York and London; 'Universal Adversary' and 'Ghost Operator', incorporated architectural interventions and chance based interactive digital projections to explore an alternate history of time.

His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions worldwide including the Whitney Biennial, the Sao Paulo Bienal and the Sydney Biennial. Solo shows include the Dallas Museum of Art; the Miami Museum of Contemporary Art; the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Portikus, Frankfurt and The Fabric Workshop and Museum. His work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art and numerous other institutions worldwide; including a permanent large-scale installation at MIT. An award winning permanent installation opened in December 2006 in a new Federal Courthouse in Eugene, Oregon. In 2009 Ritchie collaborated with Aaron and Bryce Dessner on a performance work at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. For more information please visit www.matthewritchie.com.

Headshot by Nancy Palmieri.

What opera and physics may have in common, more than anything else, is their tendency to make most people cringe or fall asleep. Can an avant-garde opera that compares self-exploration to the physics of multiple dimensions invigorate audiences? The creators of *Hypermusic Prologue, A Projective Opera in Seven Planes* seem to think so.

Baritone James Bobby and soprano Charlotte Ellett explore their relationship in extra dimensions.

Hector Parra learned about physics from his father and studied it until he was 18, when, as he says, "The piano took all of my energy." Now a composer, Parra has an unmistakable passion for opera's grand expression of human emotion. Yet he also rebels against traditional styles of composition. His latest work, called *Hypermusic Prologue, A Projective Opera in Seven Planes*, is so different from classical opera in subject matter and musical style that Parra says, "I don't know if it's an opera. It's an experience."

Hypermusic Prologue is about the physics of extra dimensions. It was inspired by the book *Warped Passages* by Lisa Randall, a professor of theoretical physics at Harvard University. Parra was so moved by the book that he asked Randall to write the libretto—something she had never done before. But she hopped on board and wrote a love story sprinkled with ideas from her physics research. Based on that story, Parra composed music that expresses frustration, desire, passion, and the experience of traveling into the fifth dimension.

The two characters, a soprano and a baritone, live on the same stage and interact day to day. But the soprano is searching for change and depth, and longs to explore higher dimensions. The baritone is satisfied with a static world, where he remains while his companion finally breaks through. To save the relationship, he must also make the leap and follow her.

At times, Parra's score is a collection of disjointed noises. It is rarely melodic, and segments often stop before any kind of recognizable song structure develops. The percussionist uses odd instruments such as broken glass in a crystal container, wood scratching on a chalkboard, and a makeshift instrument that sounds like a furiously scribbling pen. Yet this style works well to illustrate the characters' inner turmoil and rocky relationship.

The baritone's half of the stage, a static world of concrete objects and pale colors, is ruled by classical physics. On the other half, the soprano journeys through vibrant colors, warping shapes, and twisting scenery. Both sometimes express themselves in physics terms:

Text by Calla Cofield
Photography by Aymeric Warmé-Janville

Soprano: *The forces change*
[She moves across the stage. Different colors converge.]

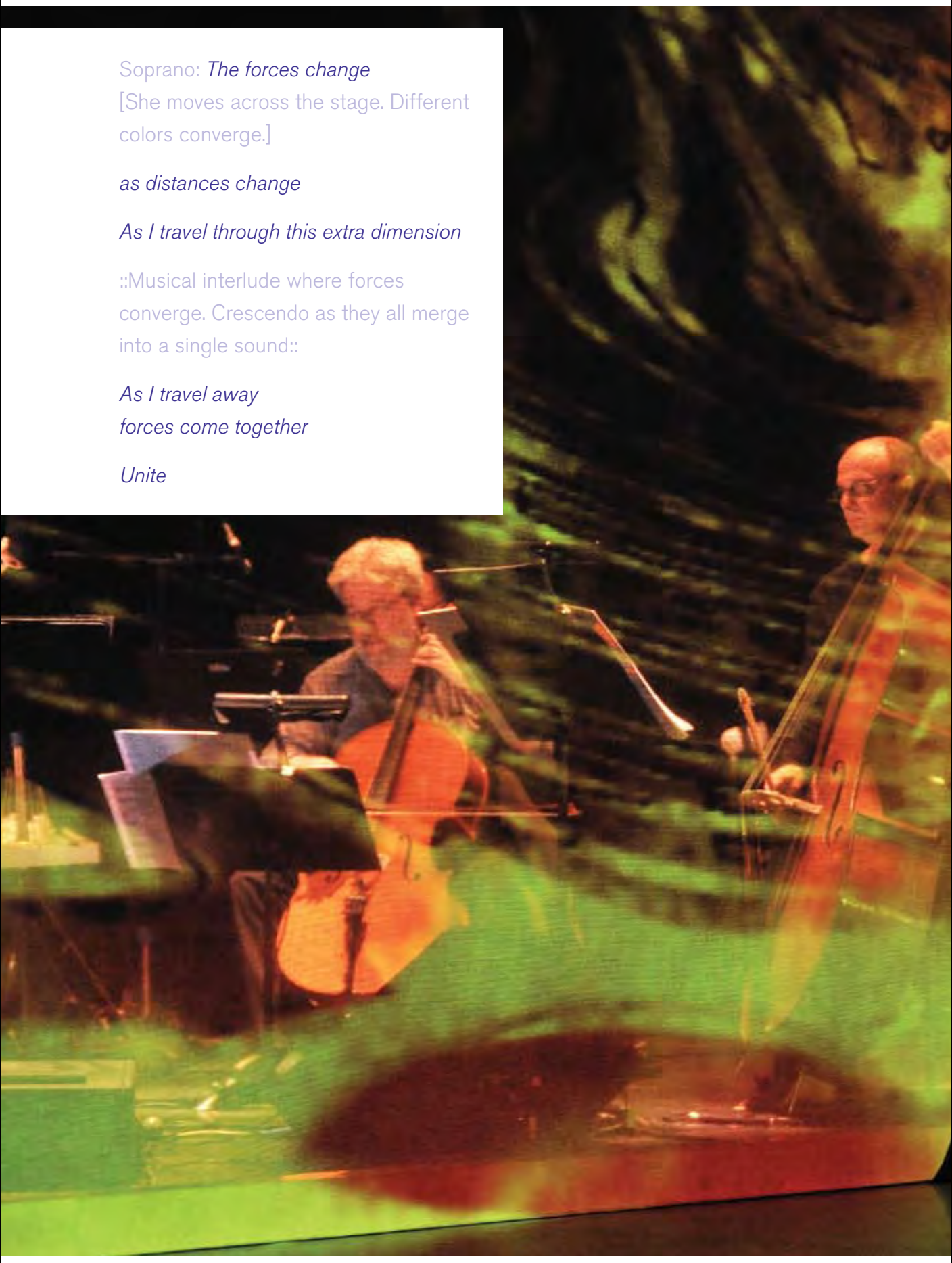
as distances change

As I travel through this extra dimension

::Musical interlude where forces converge. Crescendo as they all merge into a single sound::

As I travel away
forces come together

Unite



Rather than concealing the orchestra in a pit, set designer Matthew Ritchie put it on stage behind a screen that becomes translucent when the lighting is right.

Each of the two singers occupies half of the stage. The baritone lives in the static, concrete world of classical physics. The soprano's colorful, vibrant world reflects her longing for change and depth.

The set was designed by artist Matthew Ritchie, who is based in New York City and knew Randall from previous ventures into artistic representation of science. While the set incorporates physics ideas—distortion of the fabric of space-time, for instance, is reflected in spiraling images and tie-dye swirls of color—he says the visuals were not meant to be direct translations of those ideas. "I want to tread carefully because it's not science," Ritchie says. "It's a kind of emblem."

To create the illusion of traveling through a different dimension, Ritchie projected video onto a gray stage. This allowed rapid background changes and intricate, morphing color schemes. While the orchestras for most opera performances are concealed in a pit in front of the stage, the musicians in *Hypermusic* sit onstage behind a screen that becomes translucent when the lighting is right, so they appear in the same space as the singers.

With three creative minds completing most of the work for the opera from different locations—Parra in France, Randall in Massachusetts, and Ritchie in New York—*Hypermusic Prologue* could have been a train wreck of ideas; instead it manages to be harmonious, engaging, and adventurous.

The production debuted in Europe in the summer of 2009 and continues to tour. Excerpts from the opera are scheduled for performance January 11th and 12th at the Guggenheim Museum's Spiral Hall in New York City. Parra says he hopes to bring the full production to the United States in 2011.

The New York Times

November 13, 2009

MATTHEW RITCHIE

'Line Shot'

Andrea Rosen Gallery

525 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Nov. 21

Rorschach-like symmetry: "Weep in Light" (2009), a work by Matthew Ritchie, at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in Chelsea.

It is hard to know if Matthew Ritchie is a genuine polymath or a painter with too many ideas for his own good. The canvases in his latest New York gallery show are some of the best of his career. They have lost the small mythological figures, scribbled equations and sky-chart compositions that once signaled obscure narratives. Instead their cosmic implications inhabit semi-abstract forms and light-rinsed colors, suggesting wheeling planets, meteors, toxic atmospheres and sun showers. "Weep in Light" and "Initial Series" take things a little further with fantastical Rorschach compositions that could be elegantly monstrous heads or crystal formations.

Mr. Ritchie's narrative lives on in large-scale multimedia musical works like "The Long Count," which was part of the New Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music last month. Synthesizing various American creation myths, it was written and directed by Mr. Ritchie with wonderful music by Aaron and Bryce Dessner. Mr. Ritchie also provided a three-screen video whose images suggest rushing landscapes and aerial views that form the work's highly effective backdrop.

A related video accompanied by music and text dominates one corner at Rosen. It is surrounded and bisected by lattice-like tangles of line drawn directly on the wall, so the rushing seems to be viewed through fancy goggles. Some of the ink-and-pencil drawings in a second gallery also have Rorschach-like symmetry, and despite the long text keeping them company are most interesting as studies for future paintings. When all is said and done it is still painting that would most benefit from Mr. Ritchie's undivided attention.

The least appealing element in this show is three-dimensional: the lattice motif recurs on perforated polygonal sculptures that pile up unpleasantly at the entrance and sprawl about the gallery. Made of cast aluminum covered with black epoxy, they look like nothing so much as hip wrought-iron garden furniture. **ROBERTA SMITH**

Matthew Ritchie

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY
525 West 24th Street
October 23–December 2

ARTFORUM

View of "Matthew Ritchie," 2009. From left: Augur, 2008; Line Shot, 2009; Itself Surprised, 2009.

In this exhibition, Matthew Ritchie gives new meaning to William Blake's "eternity in an hour." Line Shot, 2009, the show's titular focus, is an animated opus that guides viewers on a dreamlike tour of space and time, meandering from creation to apocalypse, submicroscopic realms to infinite vastness (think Powers of Ten on acid)—in just more than sixty minutes.

Projected into the gallery's corner, with the image split across two walls, the video is matched by an oscillating, out-of-sync score by Aaron and Bryce Dessner of the National (who performed live with Ritchie's video work October 28–31 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music). Evading consistent rhythms and aligned harmonies, the sound track also uses overdubbed voices that reference topics as disparate as ancient creation myths and twin-brother baseball players. Though the latter seems a non sequitur alone, the lilting delivery of all the ideas in succession sets a unified, stream-of-consciousness tone within an overall theme of broken symmetry.

Digitally compiled but based on actual drawings, the swirling imagery in Line Shot maintains just enough of the artist's gesture to save it from slipping into too-slick territory. The sculptures on view, however—a sprawling modular piece titled The Dawn Line (Sun Dog Variant), 2009, part of a larger, structural music and film installation, The Morning Line, which was made with architects Aranda\Lasch and global engineering firm Arup AGU and premiered in Seville's 2008 biennial; plus a ceiling-suspended bronze cast resembling a meteorite or the head of an astronaut lost in space—do not grasp any such handholds in this gallery setting and recall instead props from a sci-fi movie set.

A series of large paintings provide the sense of multidimensionality (formally and metaphorically) that the sculptures lack. These are composed of peculiar forms—huge gothic architectures of the future, perhaps, or curled, subatomic dimensions—where splattered swaths of bright paint stream like light beams. Brushstrokes are visible, and splatters clearly come from the flick of the artist's wrist, revealing a dynamic human involvement in what could otherwise be construed as aloof, scientific speculation. Works such as these, which evince Ritchie's aesthetic alongside his zeal for the more mind-boggling concepts of physics, elegantly bridge a rift in the art-science continuum.

— Emily Weiner

SPIN

The National and Breeders Perform Together

Hero twins is the theme of a powerful performance of a Mayan creation myth from twin Dessners and Deals in Brooklyn.

By John S.W. MacDonald 10.29.09 10:21 AM

Thursday night, six indie-rock luminaries—including two sets of twins—debuted their unique collaboration with renowned visual artist Matthew Ritchie at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The Long Count, a 70-minute multi-media piece, featured the guitar work of Bryce and Aaron Dessner (both from The National), and the vocal talents of Kim and Kelley Deal, of Pixies and Breeders fame, My Brightest Diamond's Shara Worden, and Matt Berninger, also of The National -- along with a 12-piece orchestra.

The Long Count is inspired by Popol Vuh, the Mayan creation myth featuring "hero twins," and, improbably, the Cincinnati Reds—specifically the team, known as "The Big Red Machine," that won back-to-back World Series in '75 and '76. (The Dessner brothers, both from Cincinnati, are big fans.)

The Dessners and Deals were BAM's hero twins last night: Bryce and Aaron wrote the music for The Long Count, while Kim and Kelley provided the lyrics and most of the vocals. Ritchie set the scene with a riot of hallucinatory digital video projected on to three giant screens that enveloped the musicians on stage.

The Dessners, sitting at opposite ends of the stage, were also the evening's de facto conductors—though instead of batons, they wielded guitars. The orchestra answered to the brothers every pluck and strum.

Sometimes the music seemed perfectly recognizable: The brooding pop of "Tests" (The Long Count consisted of 13 songs strung seamlessly together), which featured Berninger behind the mic, would fit easily on the next National record. Other times, when the string section wailed away and the Dessners savaged their guitars, the brutal apocalyptica of Godspeed You! Black Emperor seemed the best comparison.

Amid such otherworldly (or rather pre-worldly) surroundings, it was nice to hear Kim and Kelley's familiar voices—each distorted, "Cannonball"-style—cut through the madness.

But it may have been Shara Worden singing that stole the show. Breathy, ethereal, unpredictable, Worden's voice was the perfect fit for Ritchie's mad tale of creation and resurrection. On the haunting "Ninth," Worden took on the guise of Venus as she welcomed the dawning of the new world: "Simple words brought it forth like mist," she sang, while overhead, Ritchie's projections seemed to form whole trees out of roots and earth. And later, dressed as the evil deity Macaw, Worden declared: "I am the sun and the moon for those who are born."

At least as far as their wide-eyed audience was concerned, Worden and the rest of Ritchie's crew certainly deserved their night of worship.

SEED

A NEW BREED OF ARCHITECTURAL OBJECTS, INSPIRED BY THEORETICAL SCIENCE, IS CHANGING HOW WE THINK ABOUT BUILDING AND WHAT COUNTS AS ART

Building Without Walls
Artifacts / by **Elizabeth Cline** / July 9, 2009

Matthew Ritchie, Aranda/Lasch and Daniel Bosia (Arup AGU) An assembly of modules from a previous installation, "The Evening Line, 2008," made of aluminium alloy and black epoxy with aggregate coating; 300 x 600 x 320 cm (118 x 236 x 126 in)

"Transitory Objects," the latest exhibit at Vienna's influential Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary gallery, features some of the most innovative and splendidly unconventional forms coming out of the architectural world today, including works from Matthew Ritchie, Neri Oxman, Alisa Andrasek, François Roche, Greg Lynn, and Hernan Diaz Alonso. To have these mesmerizing structures together in one exhibit is remarkable in itself, but to have them positioned alongside works of contemporary art, as this exhibit has done, raises a provocative point about how boundaries have collapsed between architectural objects, conceptual art, and theoretical science. The exhibit aims to look at those architectural works that "have achieved an appearance of being autonomous forms," says curator Daniela Zyman, suggesting that these works are meaningful outside of a specific context or place.

Ritchie, Oxman, Roche, and their colleagues split deeply from the finite, permanent, and utilitarian tradition of architecture. Not to say their end products are not useful or habitable. In fact, their structures are arguably better suited to the constantly morphing, impermanent, and aesthetically driven needs and desires of modern society. Rather than working with an end product or useful context in mind, they focus on the process of producing a structure that follows certain laws or principles. These resulting objects rise from computational models and algorithms whose inputs are being drawn from or at least inspired by some of the most boundary-pushing and abstract ideas in science, like quantum physics or the multiverse theory.

"Transitory Objects" includes two elegant models from Alisa Andrasek/BIOTHING that are part of a design project called "Mesonic Emission," a reference to mesons, subatomic particles composed of quarks. These designs are made from an algorithm that is based on behaviors of electro-magnetic fields and is sophisticated enough to respond to the shape of the environment and to "grow" around obstructing objects. [For details about the algorithm, click here].

Matthew Ritchie's two pieces in the exhibit are based on cosmologists Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok's cyclic universe theory. Speaking about his modular architecture at Seed's Design Series last year, Ritchie told the audience, "I want to make a physicalized model of everything in the universe…. [I]t will be a superposed structure in the sense that it has multiple options contained within it at any given time and that it can be rebuilt." The resulting black-aluminum modules are assembled using the logic of language and form a web-like tangle that can be reassembled in an infinite number of ways. For "Transitory Objects" close to 100 of the pieces have been assembled for an entirely unique 10' x 20' x 10' structure.

R&Sie(n)/François Roche, Stéphanie Lavaux, and their design team's coral-like work "'I've heard about,' a flat, fat, growing urban experiment" is displayed as a 3D print model of random and contingent secretions of fusing deposition modeling. It appears, like most of the architectural pieces featured in the exhibit, permanently unfinished, a reference to letting go of determinist ideas of structural planning—suggesting that a city's infrastructure should always be adapting. Neri Oxman's [Watch the Revolutionary Minds video] design group Materialecology studies the physics of building materials and offers designs that correspond with and react to their environment. Here, she has provided a scale reproduction of "Raycounting," the ethereal vase-like structure displayed in MOMA's "Design and the Elastic Mind" exhibit last year. The algorithm behind the 3D double-curvature design registers the intensity and orientation of light rays and assigns them to geometric principles.

This new culture of architecture, which Thyssen-Bornemisza has boldly funded and fostered since opening in 2002, creates structures that are intentionally fragmented and incomplete with no clear end point. "The architect has to decide at which point the algorithm stops," Zyman says. "At which point does the artist/architect decide this is the fundamental moment of maturation, this is the moment where the form becomes the outcome of my vision." The architectural objects in "Transitory Forms" are like quanta or subatomic particles popping in and out of existence or a universe being born again and again. They are open, flexible systems that can be moved or modified with changes in a society's needs or in the environment, and in that sense they are ecological, systems-based, and socially responsible. What's more, these architectural objects are art in ways that architecture perhaps has never been before—if we accept that art is partly defined as an object able to stand alone and whose meaning or purpose is open to infinite interpretation.

SEED

IN HYPERMUSIC PROLOGUE, PHYSICIST LISA RANDALL RE-IMAGINES HER EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL THEORIES OF THE UNIVERSE AS OPERA

Opera in the Fifth Dimension
Artifacts / by **Elizabeth Cline** / August 10, 2009

Since writing a bestselling book on her fascinating and complex extra-dimensional theory of the universe, Harvard physicist Lisa Randall has been busy re-imagining it as an appropriately cerebral art form—opera. After three years of development, Hypermusic Prologue: A Projective Opera in Seven Planes premiered at Paris's prestigious Centre Pompidou in June and, like Randall's book Warped Passages: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe's Hidden Dimensions [Buy], it manages to translate the impenetrable world of theoretical physics into something that not only appeals to scientists, but to anyone willing to look beyond the obvious for clues about the nature of reality.

Spanish composer Hèctor Parra, 33, first saw artistic potential in Randall's ideas after reading Warped Passages, which uses plain language to describe how hidden dimensions may explain some of physics' greatest quandaries—such as why the gravitational force is so weak. When the book was released in Europe in 2006, Parra met up with Randall in Berlin to ask her to write a libretto based on her work. Randall admits she was "a little uncomfortable focusing so much on the physics," she says, because she didn't want to alienate the audience. "But I did see that the exploration of an extra dimension could be very nice as a metaphor. It seemed exciting."

The soprano questions the nature of reality, and the baritone (James Bobby) engages in a fast and sharp argument with her about a universe that "lies outside our perceptions."Audio courtesy of Hèctor Parra Photographs © Aymeric Warme-Janville

As its title suggests, Hypermusic Prologue doesn't simply make art out of hard-to-grasp scientific theory, it inverts and renovates the genre of opera with an experimental score, a two-person cast, and minimalist and abstract stage design. Randall asked artist Matthew Ritchie [Video], whose sculptures often reference inflationary universe theory, to design the sets. Ritchie also developed a series of video projections for the performance: The industrial imagery projected behind baritone James Bobby represents the lower four-dimensional universe while the soprano, Charlotte Ellett, is often surrounded by projections of wildly colored celestial shapes, suggesting the expanded reality of a fifth dimension.

Parra, who composed the score, is the son of a physicist and his prior works have been influenced by particle physics. For Hypermusic Prologue, he uses an array of intricately thought-out sounds and instrumentations to communicate warped spacetime, as well as to signal changes in energy, mass, time, and gravity. As the soprano approaches a gravitationally strong part of the of the universe, for example, her voice is electronically treated to make her phrases shorter in mathematically precise increments and the orchestra matches this shorter phrasing. As she enters a hidden fifth dimension, her voice gets louder and the music gets sonically richer, while Bobby's voice—stuck in the lower-dimensional universe—remains digitally untreated and becomes softer and thinner.

As for Randall's libretto, it does not shy away from referencing how spacetime or gravity is altered in these hidden dimensions, but her ideas always manage to operate metaphorically. When the soprano sings, "The scale of my experience is altered," this is partly a literal reference to the way physical scaling changes in Randall's hidden dimensions. But Ellet is singing to her close-minded partner, baritone James Bobby, who keeps arguing the value of Newtonian physics until he finally has his own brief encounter with her unseen world. In this way, he becomes more open-minded and his perspective is altered.

Over the course of an hour, the soprano and baritone both experience a paradigm shift, and talk excitedly of "another view" that's "hidden yet true." In the final scenes, they are imbued with the sense of fearless exploration that drives both scientists and artists, amidst swirling hexagons of colors, digitally altered sounds, and ascending jittery strings. "It has a little bit to do with why I do science and about why I think there's more out there," Randall says of Hypermusic Prologue. "I've met a lot of other people in creative fields, and it is interesting to see how the same things drive them: The sense that there's something missing, that there's more to be done, that there's more to be known."

Hypermusic Prologue will move to Barcelona in November and from there will move to Luxembourg and Brussels. In January, New York's Guggenheim museum will host a special adaptation of of the opera as the finale of their "Universe Resounds: Art & Synesthesia" symposium.

New York ENTERTAINMENT

HIGHBROW

Stephanie Seymour gets **$270,000 a month in alimony** to maintain her "lifestyle," which is about the same amount her ex, Peter Brant, pays a month to **maintain a farm for his polo ponies**.

Accused Ponzi schemer Allen Stanford has his knighthood **revoked by Antigua**. Too little, too late, Antigua.

An American wins the NYC marathon!

Complaints that the American marathon winner **isn't American enough** because he wasn't born here. Isn't that the point of America?

A **statue of Bill Clinton** is unveiled in Kosovo by grateful Koso ... Kosovite ... Kosovars.

Sotheby's of London sells a collection of **racy letters written by Lord Byron**.

Daylight savings ends: It's now **suicide-inducingly dark** at 3 p.m. because of, like, something about farming, or wartime rationing, or ... can we just scrap this thing?

The **brothers from the National and the sisters from the Breeders** put on a song cycle about longing, wheat, headdresses, and baseball at BAM.

One of the producers of *The Matrix* wants to make a $150 million biopic, sure to be historically accurate and sensitive, **about the Prophet Muhammad**.

David Gregory's transparent attempts to demonstrate that he's tough on liberals by inanely hectoring Geithner et al. on *Meet the Press*.

Kate Winslet **wins a settlement** against the *Daily Mail* for having suggested she works out more than she claims.

Look Both Ways, Debbie Millman's book of illustrated essays on design.

DESPICABLE

Blackface crops up in French *Vogue*, *V*, and on *America's Next Top Model*.

T-Mobile is trying to promote a trend called **"metrotextuality,"** and it actually got the *Times* to write about it.

Hyperlocal-news provider **DNAinfo.com**.

Tracy Morgan's emotional appearance on "Fresh Air" with Terry Gross.

BRILLIANT

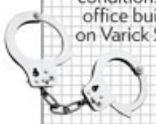
City Council candidate Joe Nardiello distributed **fliers that look like parking tickets**.

Our Front Pages, by *The Onion*, a selection of their best covers going back to 1988.

U2, Mick Jagger, and—really!—Fergie nail **"Gimme Shelter"** at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame concert.

Fox News "reporter" **John Stossel** speaks against health-care reform at a conservative rally.

At least 80 illegal immigrants are awaiting deportation in shocking conditions in an office building on Varick Street.



Manipulative Sony execs extend what was allegedly going to be a limited, two-week run of the Michael Jackson doc *This Is It*.

Toronto punk-rockers **Fucked Up** play their entire awesome 2008 album *The Chemistry of Common Life* at Brooklyn Masonic Temple with a hand from Andrew W.K. and Vivian Girls.

Southland gets a **second lease on life** on TNT.

Julianna Margulies's gets-better-every-week performance in *The Good Wife*

A Chicago judge commuted a community-service sentence **in exchange for jerk chicken**. (The judge says it was a joke.)

Five-hour-long lines for the Tavern on the Green Halloween party.

Swine-flu panic causes its first case of actual violence (hair-pulling catfight) on the subway.

Jessica Simpson blasts *Melrose Place* for "crap" writing.

Mexican chain Zengo plans to invade New York with **500 brands of tequila**, topping Dos Caminos's 300.

The **light-up cow's head** on top of Diner in Williamsburg.

The Big Apple Circus's Picasso Jr. can **juggle Ping-Pong balls with his tongue**: Hey, ladies!

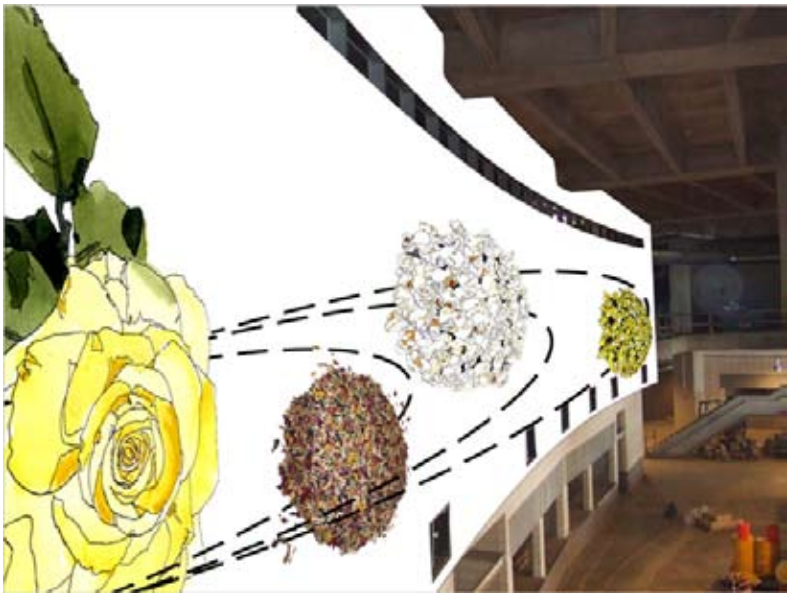
LOWBROW

The New York Times

INSIDE ART

Art Makes a Play Off the Gridiron

By CAROL VOGEL
Published: August 6, 2009



Art and football may not be obvious bedfellows, but all those sports fans on their way to grab a beer at the new $1.15 billion Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Tex., will get an unexpected eyeful: at the top of a staircase is a monumental painting that spells “WIN” in giant letters; a panel above a concession stand depicts a solar system in which the planets take the form of balls of popcorn, clovers and leaves orbiting around a yellow rose.

These are just two of 14 site-specific works created by big-name artists — like Olafur Eliasson, Franz Ackermann, Mel Bochner, Daniel Buren, Matthew Ritchie, Dave Muller and Lawrence Weiner — that are being installed throughout the stadium. The team’s owner, Jerry Jones, and his wife, Gene, say it is perhaps a first for any sports arena in the United States.

The Dallas Cowboys Art Program is not a one-shot initiative, but is to continue with more installations and commissions. The first works are being installed this week in locations with the highest pedestrian traffic, including four of the entrances, two staircases and two pedestrian ramps as well as the main concession areas.

“This is a fabulous cutting-edge building, and we thought it needed art,” Ms. Jones said. Although not a collector, she is an art lover who, along with her husband; their daughter, Charlotte Anderson; and a niece, Melissa Meeks, became involved in the project. But not being art professionals, they turned to a group of people who are. Michael Auping, chief curator of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Charles Wylie, the contemporary art curator at the Dallas Museum of Art; and two Texas collectors, Howard Rachofsky and Gayle Stoffel, make up an art council overseeing the program. The Joneses also brought in Mary Zlot, a San Francisco art adviser.

“There wasn’t a great demand for a 65-year-old quarterback,” Mr. Rachofsky said when asked why he agreed to become involved with the art program. He said that when he was first approached by the Jones family, he quickly realized that “for artists to have work seen by millions of people a year is pretty exciting.”

ARTnews
OCTOBER 2008

reviews: international

Matthew Ritchie

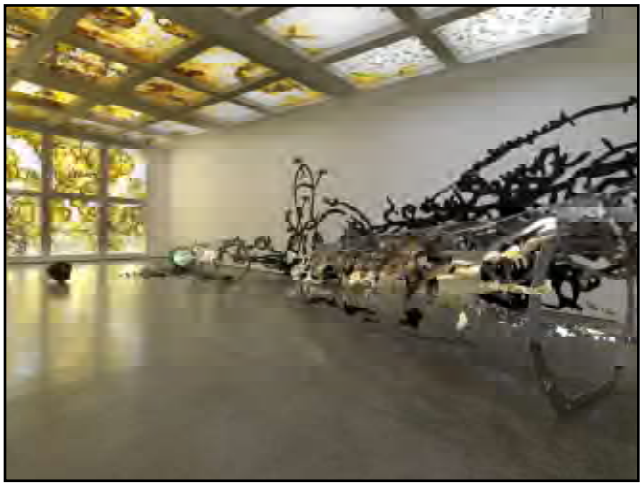
White Cube
London

Matthew Ritchie specializes in proliferation, setting medium against medium and deploying one idea to catch another. Filling the gallery with a variety of means and ends, he established a sense of laboratory conditions. His aim, he says, is "opening things up in an array of connecting things," an aspiration that manifested itself here in film, painting, drawing, defacement, and sculptural sprawl as well as in a giant light box that covered one wall and ceiling. In the end, however, his "continuum of ideas" may be stronger on effort than on credibility.

The disparate features served well enough individually. There were elements of sea and sky looming overhead and, underneath, squirming across the floor, a wrecked set of metallic parts named *The Holstein Manifesto* (2008). If that smacks of Matthew Barney blarney or Polke graphic initiatives, it is probably intentional, for Ritchie obviously thrives on quotation from the archives. In the upper gallery was a scattering of black plastic tarot cards that visitors could feed into a scorched wooden head in order to elicit news of their fate. Drawings were also provided, giving the viewer inklings as to what the artist had in mind.

Primarily Ritchie is an assembler of projections. His intention is to lay on a wealth of stimuli with a millennial entropic tinge. Given five weeks to refashion the blank interior of White Cube, the artist cast himself as a latter-day Pros-day Prospero, conjuring up images of breakdown and drowning and viral rapacity. Forget global: this is the stuff of cosmic speculation.

But such elaboration can only thrive in places of architect-designed seclusion from the outside world. Ritchie's voluminous bits and pieces amounted to a random trip through random parts, with matching musical accompaniment.
- William Feaver



Matthew Ritchie, The Holstein Manifesto, 2008, polished aluminum, tar, anodized brass, spent bullet shells, tarot cards, digital animation, Perspex, mirrored Perspex, and vinyl, dimensions variable. White Cube

VISIONARIES

the shape-shifter
matthew ritchie

remember the old joke about what the Zen Buddhist said to the hot dog vendor? if you answered, "Make me one with everything," you've already captured the thinking behind Matthew Ritchie's newest project, which is modeled after nothing les than the laws of the universe and realized by a motley mix of collaborators-theoretical physicists, tech-whiz engineers and expiramental musicians. "It has hubris written all over it, doesn't it?" the 44 year old artist says with a disarming, self effacing chuckle as he describes the dimension-blasting structure , The Morning Line, opening in October at the Seville Biennial.

The London-born Ritchie knows a thing or two about lines. As a painter showing regularly since 1995 in ew York (where he lives with his wife and young son), he became known for applying sinewy ropes of color that slink their way across gallery walls and coil like sleeping cobras on floors. In The Morning Line, Ritchie goes well beyond the 2-D world of painting. Commissioned to create a pavilion for the Seville show by Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary in Vienna, Ritchie enlisted the design team of Aranda/ Lasch (see our June/July 2008 issue) and engineers from the firm Arup, who are known for mining computational models and molecular structure. Walking through the open-ended aluminum structure-"part monument, part ruin," in Ritchie's words-you become aware of a mutating soundtrack (provided by the likes of Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo and wunderkind composer ico Muhly) and the constantly changing dimensions of what you're seeing: "What appear to be volumes become lines. I imagine it's what it's like to walk into a drawing: It's not quite clear if something's real or not." You might find the math and science fuzzy (Heisenberg uncertainty principle, anyone?), but you don't have to be Stephen Hawking to relish the result.

-ERIC BANKS

OFF THE WALL

Ritchie, whose new three-dimensional project brings together design, engineering, and music, in his New York Studio with his son, Isen.

Read Ritchie's responses to our Visionaries Questionnaire at **mensvogue.com/go/visionaries**

MODERN PAINTERS
The International Contemporary Art Magazine
MAY 2008

MATTHEW RITCHIE

WHITE CUBE, LONDON

This London-born, New York-based artist is interested in our burgeoning systems and structures of information, and his works in various media delineate them in weblike forms that swoop and swirl, suggesting universes of ever-expanding proportions. Later this summer, his newest public work-"anti-pavilion"-will be unveiled in London's Hoxton Square. In the meantime, his apocalyptic solo, titled "Ghost Operator," will recast White Cube as a ruined metroplis, submerged under water. Three new large-scale paintings, a decal wall drawing, and a spectral light-box installation will contribute to this conceit, as will two fortune-telling machines that interpret Tarot cards covering the floor to spell out philosophical prophecies-inherently dark visions, one supposes-for gallery visitors who are game.

MAY 21-JUN. 21, 2008, WHITECUBE.COM

MATTHEW RITCHIE, FORGE, 2007. Oil and marker on linen, 83 3/16 x 99 1/16 in. Courtesy Jay JOpling/White Cube, Londn, and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York ©the artist

It's easy to see why Matthew Ritchie ended up on the list of artists commissioned to create works for "In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis," the inaugural exhibit at the new Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM). The show's jumping-off point—the biblical story of creation—inhabits territory the artist has long explored in his installations, which incorporate painting, wall drawings, projections and intricate, room-sized structures based on computer models. (The fact that the Manhattan-based artist, 44, was included in Time magazine's 2001 list of 100 innovators of the new millennium and exhibited in the Whitney, Sydney and São Paolo biennales couldn't have hurt either.) His piece at the CJM, aptly titled "Day One," features digital animation equipped with sound that changes in response to the viewer's movement, and is structured to be a boundary-free exploration of the nature of information itself. If that makes your head hurt, fear not: He's happy to break it down for you.

CJM asks for a piece exploring Genesis. Where do you start?

You can't just make something up, like, "Here's a cardboard box full of rocks," and say, "Here—this is Genesis." I wanted to engage properly. The museum sent us to meet with some rabbis at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a biblical scholar there said, "There are only two ideas in the Bible: cosmos and covenants." And I said, "Great, because I only have two ideas too." My work describes the related ideas of creation and information. [In Genesis,] God appears as a kind of information—there's a very natural overlap there.

How does your art relate to the show's more traditional works?

The medium may change, but the essential stories remain. The great flood turns into Waterworld, the great plague turns into I Am Legend. These are the stories of our civilization. They speak to some very profound need in us, and have for 5,000 years.

How do you take on a theme as broad as information and the way it's processed?

There's all this information about every single thing, from movie stars' driver's licenses to poison in drinking water; there is more information in one copy of The New York Times than an educated medieval person knew in his lifetime. Information becomes a currency. It's as vital to us as water and air, and as controlling of our lives. Processing all this is like trying to read the library every day, so you need a point of view; you have to build yourself a model of the universe that prioritizes information and turns it back into something legible. You have to conceive of yourself as a little ecosystem of information.

Do people call your work "meta"?

I'm not sure what that word even means. I know it was a popular word several years ago. Interestingly, Metatron was the angel of the book, the recording angel who keeps track of everything—like Santa Claus's rather unpleasant older brother, something larger than everything else. He was always aware that any story, no matter how big, is only part of the next story.

art on paper

January/February 2007 VOL. 11 NO, 3

AN AESTHETICS OF PHYSICS

Talking with Matthew Ritchie about drawing and the inversion of consciousness

by Bridget Goodbody

Matthew Ritchie is an artist who thinks like a physicist. You're just as likely to get him talking about quantum mechanics as, say, Jackson Pollock, an artist with whom he is sometimes compared. The conversation is infinitely more complex when physics dominates, as Ritchie's artistic goal is to chart new territories of representation-which can be as difficult to conceptualize as outer space itself-in order to develop what could be called an aesthetics of physics.

Ritchie began his artistic investigation of the cosmos in the mid-1990s. On a gridded piece of paper, he listed all the tools he had at his disposal to understand the world among them science, sex, and solitude. This two-dimensional map quickly transformed into a creation story that charted the origin and history of the universe from the big bang to the present and soon thereafter morphed into large and often interactive, site-specific installations. One of his most recent works covers the roof and upper hallways of a federal courthouse in Oregon designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning architect Thom Mayne.

Physicists have long struggled, to little avail, to visually represent their theories in an accessible, transparent manner. How, for example, to represent quantum physics' concept of the space-time continuum-the idea that everything can be everywhere at any time? Or the tenets of string theory physics' latest, yet unproven, concept about the origin and evolution of the universe, which asserts that the cosmos consists of invisible loops of energy? For Ritchie, who sees the whole universe as one big experiment, art presents an equally strange and abstract space of

Installation view: "The Universal Adversary," Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, 2006. All images ©Matthew Ritchie, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery

investigation.

Bridget: I'm here to ask you about drawing, but it seems like a strange question to ask an artist whose goal is to explode traditional categories of art.

Matthew: Like Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Rauschenberg, I'm interested in creating my own self-generated meaning system. To me, a drawing is a small version of a painting, which is a small version of an installation, which is a small version of everything else. My work is explicitly involved with the notion that all drawing, all painting, and all sculpture are about lots of things.

Well, there certainly are a lot of things happening in your work, and you've got a big story behind it, which is not so easily perceived by viewers not intimately familiar with it.

Trying to make my artistic investigation legible from a mark or a drip strikes me as irrelevant. Which is more important: the fact that we can understand a wave particle or the momentum of light or whether or not we see the world? When I make a line with a frictional edge that looks kind

of like a butter, I'm trying to slow down the viewer's eye. The speedy marks, usually drawn with a marker pen, are intended to generate faster speeds of looking at things. Neither is about traditional modes of representation. For me, making art is a way to examine the limits of perception.

How so?

I find it really interesting that all architecture starts as a blueprint; in order for a building to be understood as three dimensional, it has to first be flattened into a colorless, linear framework. But where is the stuff behind the walls? We know it's there, but we can't see it! What I'm really interested in is the invisible things that hold everything together.

Whenever I walk through your installations, I'm struck by how my eye is constantly creating imaginary, invisible lines to make sense of the overall space. Do you try to create this kind of experience intentionally?

Well, I'm not trying to choreograph people's experience. My hope, rather, is that my work represents an idea of total freedom, that it's a place where viewers " recognize that they can occupy any space at any time.

Well, speaking of being in at least two places at once, you've been experimenting with parallels between physical and virtual space by using computer programs to make drawings. What's that like?

The computer is a funny drawing tool. It talks back to you. It creates statements that you could never ever come up with in a planar space because its programs exist in a coded space, which is composed of hundreds of millions of numbers. You can also use the computer to lay the tenth frame of an animation sequence over the first one, so what starts as evolutionary ends up revealing the past and present simultaneously.

You're describing a brave new world.

Our era is totally unique. It is the first time in history that an external agency, our machines, can evaluate the physical properties of reality and record them. Information is everywhere. What we're experiencing is a complete inversion of consciousness.

HIDDEN FORTRESS: MATTHEW RITCHIE

British-born New Yorker Matthew Ritchie opens Andrea Rosen's redesigned gallery space with his first solo exhibition in the city in four years. This work spans everything from painting and drawing to sculpture and projections, but in recent years he has been working on an architectural scale, collaborating with designers such as self-confessed LA 'bad boy' Thom Mayne and that most ubiquitous artchitecture practitioner David Adjaye to produce environments that are simultaneously spatial constructions and forms of information.

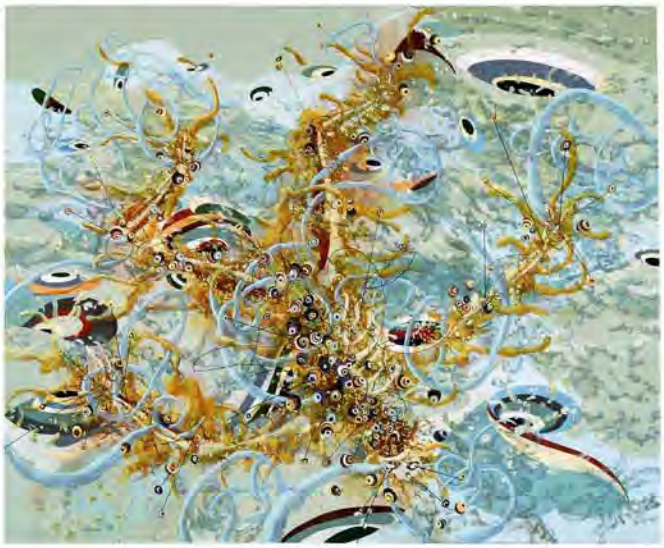
At Rosen, Ritchie will show a 30-foot-long folded black latticework sky, which will split the space into a viewing platform and what the gallery mysteriously describes as 'a dense netherworld filled with new paintings'. These works centre around the notion of a shady character called the Universal Adversary – the collective term used by the US government for the 15 scenarios it classified as major threats to the US population in 2005 – and promise to be an apocalyptic clash of fact, fiction and metaphors for the unknowable (the Holographic Principle, Ezekiel's visions and Dark Matter). It sounds like Samuel Beckett, but it's classic Ritchie territory; when he was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 innovators for the new millennium, his listing described him as exploring 'the unthinkable or the not-yet-thought'. Ritchie's also working with New York publisher Rizzoli to prepare a three-dimensional artist's book. There's no denying that he occasionally comes across as somewhat science-fictional, but this show will be very much an opportunity to confront your present nightmares.

Mark Rappolt

Matthew Ritchie:
The Universal Adversary
Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York
15 September–
13 October
andrearosen.com

Matthew Ritchie, installation view of *The Measures Series*, 2005, at *Remote Viewing: Invented Worlds in Recent Paintings and Drawing*, The Whitney, New York. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. © Matthew Ritchie

contemporary
issue 78 2006



NEW YORK: WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

REMOTE VIEWING (INVENTED WORLDS IN RECENT PAINTING AND SCULPTURE)
2 June – 9 October 2005
www.whitney.org

The essential premise behind this exhibition is the surrealist doctrine: a window into the artist's subconscious that accesses a fantastic landscape, which in this case has been developed organically through abstract painterly prophases. But this is where the exhibition splinters from tradition: it is not so much the semiotics of an individual's psyche, as the mass acceptance of the idea of a science-fiction terrain described by astrophysics, and of biological and astronomical sights unseen by the naked eye. We have universally adopted a predicted or imagined alternate dimension that is as real to secular society today as were once all the gods of Olympus.

The floor plan of the exhibition is laid out with Mathew Ritchie's sculpture, *The Universal Cell* (2004) at the epicentre – his vision of creation spilling from large colourful, painterly canvases onto four walls via black, hard-edged, swooping patterns, also echoed in the 3-D work – the other seven artists' cubicles circle the periphery.

On entering we are greeted by a wall text by Ben Marcus and scratchy technical drawings that describe some sort of 'inspiration machine'. Proceeding clockwise we first encounter Caroll Dunham's worlds – a few suites of small abstracts on paper and several large paintings with a green or yellow or pink globe splotched in the centre of a white canvas with cartoon imagery cheerfully lurking. Steve DiBenedetto's acidhead paintings are next – he spaces out on octopi and helicopters. Although his technique doesn't quite keep abreast of his head, he has some extraordinary visionary moments. Franz Ackerman's canvases are a bit too retro psychedelic, but several of the small gouaches on paper exquisitely exemplify recent extraterrestrial aesthetics. Julie Mehretu exactingly dashes off mural-scale architectural descriptions of perspective with Kandinsky-esque glee, and Alexander Ross's topographic, camouflage chiaroscuro cannily depicts appealing globs of protomatter. Terry Winters's inclusion, however, is a bit off-key. Despite several gorgeous drawings, he is an abstract expressionist, pure and simple, and the basic fact that form plus colour equals pictorial depth does not excuse the fact that several other current abstract surrealists – Gary Stephan comes to mind – are more specifically interested in describing imagined realities. The imaging of synthetic environments is, of late, largely monopolised by digital manipulations, so there is a very satisfying tactile immediacy involved with physical media – the flesh and bone of picture making.

CHRISTOPHER CHAMBERS

NEW YORK
September 25, 2006

Long After the Flood

The postapocalypse hits Chelsea. *by Karen Rosenburg*

Matthew Ritchie's first New York solo show in four years, opening September 21 at the newly renovated Andrea Rosen Gallery, uses painting, sculpture, and animations to evoke a post-catastrophic urban landscape—one with an uncanny resemblance to the West Side. The artist, whose previous work used the language of abstract art to explore even more abstract theories of physics, took a break from installation to tell Karen Rosenberg about the inspiration for his new project.

The show opens with a quote from the prophet Ezekiel. It's a visionary rant; he talks about the destruction of Israel, Lebanon, and Egypt. He's writing it from Babylon, which is actually Baghdad. There's an eerie echo— you realize the politics of our time have been going on for thousands of years. One of the funny things about Ezekiel's prophecy is that you can't really follow if he's talking about the past or the future.

You come into the gallery and you're underneath this three-ton sculpture, which seems to be floating from the ceiling. It looks very heavy from some angles, but from others it's almost ethereal. It's cantilevered over a 40-foot-wide light box. Behind that there's a concealed staircase. You can walk out on the catwalk into the middle of the piece, where there's an interactive film that projects a tour of an imaginary, flooded city. I live right on he Hudson River, and it feels very much like the old abandoned piers around 59th Street—that huge old pier that's a big mass of twisted iron.

The show is called "The Universal Adversary," which is what the U.S. government decided to call every bad thing. They have this list of fifteen scenarios that includes floods and biohazard, nuclear war … Everyone's always interested in the big explosion at the end of the movie. This is about what it's like after that. It's about looking at the near future from the even more distant future—about creating a kind of distance from our immediate fear.

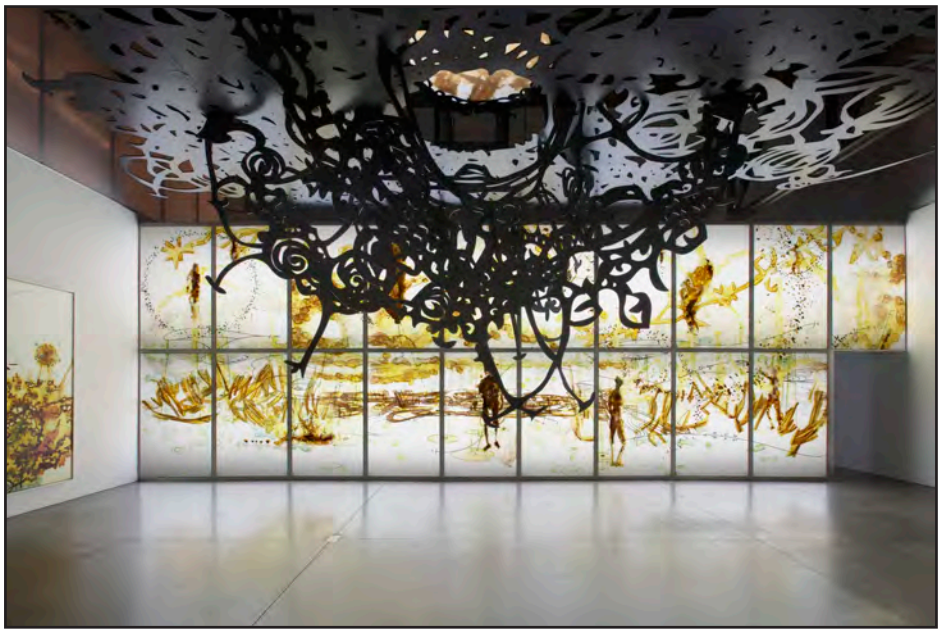
The New York Sun

APOCALYPSE NOW

September 28, 2006

If the international situation has you fretting about Armaggedon, cheer up: It turns out the apocalypse is going to be great fun, after all. At least that's the vision according to art installations on view in Chelsea.

(His) art is as photogenic as the glossies frequently prove the young art stars themselves to be — for all the portentousness of their subject matter, neither prophet is a grizzly old man with a beard. Cheerful palette, sprightly mark-making, sumptuous overload, and dexterous skill are the pervasive qualities of (the) exhibitions. These are the masters of doomsday décor.



Matthew Ritchie, *The Universal Adversary*, 2006.

Mr. Ritchie, by his own confession, is a data junkie. His art digests (or doesn't) sources as disparate as physics, alchemy, social theory, theology, and neo-noir fiction. It, in turn, overloads the viewer with a correspondingly dense accumulation of visual incidence. The current installation incorporates framed paintings in oil and marker on linen; animated projections; a sculpture, and a bank of lightbox lenticular panels with backlit photographic prints.

The vast overhanging sculpture, "The Universal Adversary" (2006), made of powder-coated aluminum and stainless steel, in turn incorporates audio-visual display to be experienced high in the gallery's rafters after ascending a spiral staircase. A resonant male voice reads a medley from the artist's notebooks and from government speeches on military preparedness.

This artist is a lover of layers, both literal and conceptual. His art goes back and forth between computer generation and hand execution: Imagery is drawn, scanned, projected, traced, scanned again, and printed and animated in myriad ways. His cool, impersonal hand is essentially cartographic: outline drawing is the principal means of expression across mediums, including the cutout metal sculpture which started life as a drawing, scanned in "infinite resolution," then sent to the mill to be burnt into metal, and retains its flatness and linearity. The large framed canvases build up layers of different types of marks: stains, drips, loops, and squiggles that constantly play off the macroand microcosmic. "Mad professor" strings of equation accent various surfaces.

In this show Mr. Ritchie has shed the trademark cutout vinyl with which he habitually covers walls and floors, but there is plenty to keep the eye busy. The lightbox display, "Something Like Day" (2004) — behind which you mount the spiral stair — uses a fancy technology to holograph-like effect; tip your head side to side and naked figures metamorphize into skeletons. The figuration in this show is more overt than usual; it has a dashed-off bravura familiar to a kind of illustration that in turn looks to old master drawing: It directly recalls reminds me of the popular mid-century Polish-born muralist Feliks Topolski, who was active in Mr. Ritchie's native Britain.

In both detail and totality alike, there is no question that Mr. Ritchie is blessed with a deft touch. He creates fun, lively environments, and thanks to a relentless fuss and fiddle, an impressive sense of texture. But once you get used to the optical overload and the impressive range of mediums and formats, it becomes clear that his technology is ahead of his technique. The layering and cleverness, the array of references and arts and crafts wizardry, fail to camouflage an underlying inadequacy: There is nothing, really, for all these marks and gestures to do except mark and gesture. His art really demonstrates the distinction between complication and complexity. He has lots of the former, and not much of the latter. But then, if you accept the notion that the medium is the message, that might be his profound insight.

-David Cohen

THE Listings SEPT. 22-SEPT.28

'MATTHEW RITCHIE: THE UNIVERSAL ADVERSAYRY' Chaos meets chaos at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, where British-born artist Matthew Ritchie presents his version of a prophecy of world destruction precipitated by a shadowy entity referred to only as the Universal Adversary. The narrative is oblique, mostly gestured at through a theatrical display of kaleidoscopic paintings, a hanging black aluminum lattice-work sky, a video piece and a 40-foot-long box of illuminated lenticular images. (Above, Mr. Ritchie's "God of Catastrophe.") It took rigging and installation crews almost two weeks to set up the show. The artist's vision of doomsday is shaped less by any impending environmental or political crisis than by science fiction, mysticism and myth, with the cover of the exhibition invitation quoting from the biblical book of Ezekiel. (The author was a sixth century B.C. Jewish priest who prophesized God's judgement on a nation of lapsed worshipers.) True believers and the brave can ascend to the top of the latticework sky courtesy of a rickety spiral staircase, where there is a suspended viewing leading to an oculus, on which is a projection of a parallel world with different digital views of an imaginary city set to the sound of a voice (God's?) reading from religious books and the artist's writings. The precise meaning of all this stuff is not easy to grasp, but somehow or another together it feels agonizingly pertinent. ("Matthew Ritchie: The Universal Adversary," Andrea Rosen Gallery, 525 West 24th Street, Chelsea, 212-627-6000, andrearosengallery.com, through Oct. 28.)

BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Time Out New York
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Matthew Ritchie


"The Universal Adversary"

★★★★½

Andrea Rosen Gallery, through Sat 28

Matthew Ritchie opens his show with a big bang. Posting a quote from the book of Ezekiel on the facade of the gallery, he sums up his omnifarious approach: their appearance and their work was as if a wheel within a wheel. In Ritchie's polymath practice—which spans painting, digital animation and sculpture as drawing-in-space—religion joins string theory, noir fiction, neuroscience, gambling, alchemy and politics as fodder for art. Cézanne had apples; Ritchie has too much information.

The show's title, "The Universal Adversary," is lifted from a Homeland Security list of the top 15 national threats (the phrase also dovetails neatly with Ritchie's interest in game theory). The work follows somber suit. A 30-foot, black-steel lattice looms overhead like a cloud-darkened sky. Climb a circular staircase and you'll loom over it, viewing a round video animation encased in the steel. (Seen from below, it looks like a giant eye). Back on earth (read: downstairs) there's a 42-foot lightbox and four giant paintings of gaunt figures in celadon waters dwarfed by roiling skies. They're marked with hand-scrawled equations and cryptic phrases like ghost operator. Gone are the veiny blues and corpuscular reds of previous paintings, replaced by a Polke-like palette of ochre and rust.

This is the most ambitious, cohesive and controlled show New Yorkers have seen from the artist, but also, paradoxically, the most subdued. Ritchie's commanding grasp of materials and mythos could stand to be loosened, upping the ante on his already high-stakes game.

Andrea K. Scott

"Information, Cells & Evil"

RT:21: Can you explain the overall concept for "The Universal Cell?"

RITCHIE: "The Universal Cell" is part of "The Lytic Circus." The São Paulo Bienal asked me to do a piece, and this was really the only thing I wanted to make. I was wrapping up this project that I've been working on for seven or eight years—a kind of narrative that, collectively, is an encyclopedia of information, a manual of how to deal with information (all the information you could possibly take on). And as I worked through it (I dealt with physics, gambling, religion, thermodynamics), I kept postponing dealing with evil.

One of the things that became really clear to me was that as a culture we've defined evil in one particular way which is why we build structures to contain it. No matter what bad thing you've done, you go to jail. Every crime has the same punishment. And I was thinking about that and then, in a larger sense, how the context of information defines everything. So in a way each of us is in our own prison. You bring it with you—the prison of your biology, your social structure, your life. And that is both a challenge and an opportunity. So I wanted to build a structure that felt like a cell, your cell in the whole universe. If the universe is a prison, this is your cell—this is where you're standing and you drag it with you wherever you go.

"...I draw out all these different motifs, and then I lay them on top of each other...Out of that, you can pull this form that turns into the sculpture or the painting. It's literally like pulling the narrative out..."

ART:21: Talk about your drawing process.

RITCHIE: I start with a collection of ideas...and I draw out all these different motifs, and then I lay them on top of each other. So I have piles of semi-transparent drawings all layered on top of each other in my studio and they form a kind of tunnel of information. Out of that, you can pull this form that turns into the sculpture or the painting. It's literally like pulling the narrative out of overlaying all of the structures. That's how I end up with this structure. It's derived from a series of drawings that I scan into the computer and refine through various processes...and send to the sheet-metal shop down the road where it's cut out of metal and assembled into larger structures which are too big for my studio.

So I was thinking about the idea of the cell. In biology, it's the sacred unit of measurement; the whole body's built out of the cell. And the thing that ruptures the cell is a virus that escapes. The name of that process is lysis (thus, 'lytic' in the work's title). So when a cell is ruptured by a virus building up inside it's burst open. And I kept thinking of this as a kind of a prison escape....And then there was another motif that I'd been working with for a long time—structures derived from ceremonial magic—ritual mechanisms (originally designed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to allow people to get out of their bodies for astral projection) that ended up being incorporated to some extent into voodoo, another interest of mine.

And there was this idea again! How do you escape the pattern that's imposed on you by the physical order of the universe? How do you make the imaginative leap?

ART:21: Explain the role of the prison as a model for this project.

RITCHIE: There's the great Shakespeare quote, "I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space..." I was in Alcatraz a while ago with a friend of mine. We were both struck by how incredibly perfect the cells were. It was almost like you wanted one for yourself because it was so pure. Of course you would want it for a day. (LAUGHS)

Robert Hooke discovered and named the cell around 1780. He was really thinking about it as a chamber. He looked into the body, saw all these little rooms, and imagined that these animalcules living inside had this whole civilization. So I'm very interested in questions of scale, how big or small does something have to be to feel confining? And on what level this cell will be put inside another cell—a larger room which has a window that continues the drawing out into the larger world around it. It's like Sao Paulo's just another little cell inside a larger cell—the earth that's inside the solar system. Each of these things are nested inside each other, but that doesn't necessarily mean there's a limit. The limit is how you choose to perceive your agency inside of that.

The United States has the most people in prison of any country in the world. For the series of drawings that I did for São Paulo I researched these prison layouts—everything from the Colorado Florence super max prison, to the very first prison built in the United States. I was thinking in terms of larger, universal ideas. They're very geometric, they're very pure, like platonic solids. People who build prisons are very interested in this idea of geometry, which has nothing to do with the crimes. From space you would see all these perfect triangles, circles, heptagons, and hexagons—like a secret writing placed over the surface of the earth—trying to control evil by the imposition of this rational geometry. It's like, we'll make the walls really beautiful and straight and somehow the evil will be kept inside because it's a hexagon.

ART:21: Can the viewer intuit these things in the work?

"I think the question that everyone faces is, how do you deal with this endless torrent of information, especially when it can be repeated ad nauseam?"

RITCHIE: My work deals very explicitly with the idea of information being on the surface. And in a way, information is the subject of my work. So for people who are accustomed to thinking about visual art as purely visual...this is a source of friction. You can always analyze visual art in terms of content or appearance. It's a game to separate them; they're indissolubly linked. Everything in the material world around us has a narrative. To classify visual art as the one medium that shouldn't require effort to understand—to just be able to look at it as pure sensation and walk away—relegates it to the level of a rollercoaster ride. I'm saying, "Open your eyes and enjoy the ride!" Because it's much more exciting if you are thinking and questioning and you don't know what it is—and it's full of questions and statements that you can't possibly grasp. That is a truer reflection of just how extraordinary reality is than something that neatly ties it up in a bow, like, "Look at that, be at peace, go home." I'm more interested in something that leaves you asking questions.

ART:21: Is this a radical change in making art?

RITCHIE: I don't think so, but I would say it's a given that you need the visual language to understand anything, even the most purely spectacular art. You need to have some kind of context or it just appears like a random object. If you're from a different culture and you come to the west and look at a Jeff Koons, it's going to look like something from a street fair maybe. I mean that's an argument made by a lot of people smarter than me—that all art requires a context.

art:21

It’s sad that the art world feels obliged to defend its depth, intelligence, and enormous history of creating provocative and rich cultural objects. It’s sad that we should even sit around worrying about the mythical viewer—who by the way has never actually shown up at any of my shows. I tend to get people just showing up and saying, “Oh it’s great, I love all the angels and all that.” People have such a desire to come to visual art. This strange fear that we’ve all been worried about—not getting it—I see that as such a marginal question being produced by a very specific subgroup of the art audience, mostly the right wing.

ART:21: How do you think art making is different now than it was several years ago?

RITCHIE: I think in my lifetime I was the last generation in school to be taught how to use a slide rule. The kids after me all got to use calculators. There was a culture preceding my generation of people who, I guess, came out of an entirely different world. The children of computers have unleashed this tide in an obvious way—through mass media they’ve really unleashed it—they’ve changed everything in my lifetime. And a project like this is impossible without computers. I think the question that everyone faces is, how do you deal with this endless torrent of information, especially when it can be repeated ad nauseam? Why is "The Matrix" interesting but "The Sistine Chapel" difficult? How are people making these kinds of discriminations and distinctions that they’re using to judge contemporary art? How do you make an art form that deals with all that and presents it in such a way that it can be understood as a unifying aesthetic experience rather than just a big pile of stuff?

When I was in art school in the ’80s there was a generation of artists who had specialized in dismantling what was called “the master narrative of the west.” They took it all apart told everyone how brilliant they were. People like David Salle, Julian Schnabel—they were really the last artists of the master narrative. This was a great moment because it set everyone after that free. I feel like my generation of artists were like “Wow, that means we’re not under this obligation to perpetuate or dismantle, we can just go off and start to build new structures.” And for me the theme of my new structure was information, how do you deal with it? As a person is it possible for you to grasp everything and see everything? You’re presented with everything and all through your life you’re trying to filter it out, you’re really just trying to control that flow.

The way my work works is I’ve tried to build a model that can incorporate as much as it possibly can. It’s like this constantly expanding information structure that can just keep theoretically soaking up everything—but inside a way of seeing so it doesn’t just become this barrage. There are trillions of particles being discarded and bombarding our bodies right now, everything in this space has a meaning, a history, a story. We have to bank it all down, but I’m interested in, okay we’ve banked it all down but now can we bring it up a little, can we turn the volume up just a little more? Can we listen to everything a bit more loudly at the same time rather than selecting parts of the pattern? Can you tolerate, just for a few minutes, not just the physical information but the cultural information, the theological information, everything coming up together? I’m interested in describing a kind of armature for that.

This interview can be found at
http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/ritchie/index.html#

art:21

“Proposition Player”

ART:21: What sorts of science journals do you read?

***RITCHIE*:** I read "Nature Magazine," this weekly journal of science. It’s so technical, just published raw data. You can glean enough of it to understand that there’s a huge gap between what people understand is going on in contemporary science and what is really going on. Like the gap between the actual frontier of research and how it’s then filtered back to everybody else, it’s vast. Sadly, out of that comes ignorance and fear because the explanations are less informative and persuasive than the original experiments, which are much less conclusive and didactic.

Some people who are trying to put a popular spin on science end up simplifying it into either the Frankenstein argument—it’s going to be bad for you—or the utopian argument—it’s going to be amazing and there’ll be a flying car and a robot in your kitchen. So you get these two poles, neither of which are remotely true.

In fact it’s just science figuring out—question by question by question—what’s really going on. When you go back to the original material, you get what it’s really about—human beings just doing work, trying to figure stuff out. There’s no point of view, there’s no agenda. And that’s what’s amazing. You go back into history and that’s the common thread that links every kind of investigation—whether it’s aesthetic or scientific or theological—everybody’s just trying to figure it out.

ART:21: Talk about a scientific versus artistic process.

RITCHIE: You’re really not supposed to talk about this. One of the curators at the Museum of Modern Art said the three big no-no’s were sex, science, and spirituality. So I really have to go off-the-record to talk about any of them. These are the big three questions of our existence has human beings. My work is at least as much about science as it is about the other two, but science is an easier handle for some people to grasp.

In the contemporary climate we’re all very wary—and I think rightfully so—about spiritual investigations. It’s all become this sort of corrupt miasma of claim and counterclaim, evangelical versus neo-Buddhist. Again, one of these absurd polarities has developed. Science has become the battleground for society to discuss its spiritual questions. It’s no accident that the real theological debate is about stem cell research. It’s a scientific discussion, it really has nothing to do with a theological point of view. But because people can’t articulate their theological disagreements in any meaningful way, they’ve sort of hopped onto science.

The premise of science is that it represents order. By its nature it therefore excludes an essentially theological interpretation of the universe. To come up with a theological counterpart as heavyweight as science, you would have to come up with a science of theology that was based on an ordered understanding of the theological relationships of the universe—which some people have actually tried to do in the past. It’s even more abstract, specific, and meticulous than science itself. It reverts back to the utopian versus the Frankenstein again. This kind of balance kind of pops up because these are the great archetypes—will it be good for us, will it be bad for us? That’s what we want to know so we cook it all down to these essential arguments. But I’m more interested in science as a way of having a conversation that’s based on an idea of looking at things than I am in the rhetoric around science.

My installations, they don’t like laboratories. Other artists are interested in, in claiming the territory and the appearance of the laboratory, but the appearance of science has nothing really to do with what it actually is. If you look at a physicist’s journal it’s just a bunch of scribbled marks because they’re doing work, they’re not particularly interested in large chrome table tops—that’s just a byproduct.

ART:21: How does that tie in with your work?

RITCHIE:I’ve been working for a long time on this series of linked projects that deals with a group of properties, 49 properties or

characteristics. Each of the properties or characteristics represents a function of the universe. "Proposition Player" (2003) at MASS MoCA was a gathering of a large group of those characteristics, fusing them into one project. But it left some of them out, and the ones that got left out were in "The Lytic Circus" at the São Paulo Bienal. "Proposition Player" is all about gambling and quantum mechanics, the elements of chance and risk, and how those things build into an entire continuum of meaning. "The Lytic Circus" is about what happens to the unacceptable elements of risk, the ones that you want to exclude to keep the bad out.

ART:21: How do the two projects relate to one another?

RITCHIE: The slogan of "Proposition Player" was "You may already be a winner!" It's about the idea that in the moment between placing your bet and the result of the bet there is a kind of infinite freedom because all the possibilities are there. "You may already be a winner!" It's fantastic—you're like a god! Everything opens up. "The Lytic Circus" is really about the opposite—a kind of prison of life where no risk is ever really rewarded. You're trapped in a set of circumstances that are biological, temporal, physical, mental—locked in to a point of view. It's about the idea that you may already be a loser—just as true as the statement that you may already be a winner....So the illusion of risk, of gambling, is all that you have. But in fact it's just a circus. So "Proposition Player" and "The Lytic Circus" are like counterbalances—the utopian versus the dystopian—it's always sunny, or it's always raining. In fact, you know most likely every day's going to have a little bit of both.

ART:21: Explain how the playing cards function in "Proposition Player."

RITCHIE:
When you go into "Proposition Player" you are given a card by one of the guards. The idea of that is twofold. One is to make it a tangible gesture from me to the person visiting the show: here's a piece of the show for you, you get to take it home. And the other gesture that it's making is: this is not strange to you, this is not foreign, you know what a playing card is, it's a tool for playing a game.

The title of the show says it all. "Proposition Player"—you're being propositioned, you're being asked to engage in this game which has a very limited downside.
The technology of the playing card is such a beautiful thing. It's been around for a long, long time. No one mistakes it for some kind of art related activity—it's a playing card. You know you can throw it away. You can stick it in your pocket. Or you can go buy that whole pack of cards at the gift shop and play. It's perfectly useable as a deck of cards, it has all the traditional suits.

But it's also a key to the characteristics that I mentioned earlier. I've been working for years with these 49 characteristics and I was thinking about this show and how I wanted to do a pack of cards because it was a way in. It takes the idea of a fixed set of relationships which I've worked with for a long time and turns it into something that's completely shuffle-able. You can mix it up. There is no story in a pack of cards, but you can tell any story you want to tell.

The most important cards are the four aces—they represent the four fundamental forces in the universe: weak force, strong force, gravity, and light. There are only four forces in the universe, conveniently enough for me. They underlie everything, tie everything together. So in this room, everything in my show, everything in your life, everything is held together by the four forces. And the four aces generate the four units of measurement, which are progressively: time, mass, length, and temperature.

To make it into a proper pack of cards, of course I had to introduce a joker, which is time—absolute time rather than linear time, which is the totality of time. The kind of known time that we all live inside, that we measure off as the hours and the minutes in the days. And then there's all of time. Then there are these characters called the gamblers who start off with the four kings and proceed into all of the face cards. And they represent the quantum forces that devolve from the four aces. So you have the plank limit, you have photons coming out of light. You've got black holes coming out of gravity. And you've got duality coming out of the weak force. So these three sets set the route. The rest of the pack builds out from that—moves through the forces and the structures of thermodynamics, chemistry, the periodic table.

So you've got a card, you take it in, you give to a guard, and he'll let you play the game of chance—the dice game—which is also called "Proposition Player." The game builds up into all of the elements in the paintings, which take you through this narrative that

describes the evolution of the entire universe. You've started out as the smallest element, and gradually you see how essential that particle is to everything else. This is literally a little way of representing you in a giant game. You know, "Come in. Put your card on the table and play." It's really just taking the traditional aspect of confronting large complex ideas about the universe—which is one of awe—and inverting it to one of play. You already own this—your body is already filled and saturated with every single thing going on in the universe...so you may as well enjoy it. You don't need to live in fear and shame about your relationship to this larger structure. It should be about joyous participation!

ART:21: How do people participate in art today?

RITCHIE: I've never understood any of the debates about modern art as some sort of form of alienated practice. Modern art is a gift, take it or leave it. Nobody's forcing it down your throat, but once you're there at the museum, you may as well relax and have a good time. All anyone is trying to do is try out some new ideas—something different. And I think there's something enormously ambitious about that idea, that we are all trying to advance or at least question what's going on. I just think that's great. It's really cool the idea of a total freedom that it gives, like you're not bound by any particular loyalty or reverence, you can just move forward in any direction you want. It seems like a gift. It's certainly a gift to me as a practitioner.

ART:21: In a way, aren't you inventing the universe in your work?

RITCHIE: I look at it more like, there's the real universe. We know through our scientific practices, or we have estimated that we can perceive about 5% of the real universe. So that's 95%, gone. Dark matter, dark energy—it's a very strange and complicated place. On any given day, you or I might be able to find out about 5% in our entire lifetime of all human knowledge. Now can we use that knowledge all the time? No, it would be amazing, but we can't. We can probably use oh, 5% of that in our lives. And then when it comes down to it, you probably make a decision based on about 5% of the 5% of the 5% of the 5% of the universe. And you're pretty confident that that decision is a really good decision. You say, "That's what I'm going to do today with my life or in this relationship or with this financial decision." And you're basing that on .00625% of the universe. And you're totally confident that you're somehow connected, because you are. You are connected to that 100%.

I'm interested in reconstructing that chain of evidence that leads you from the one thing to the other, because there's the real universe, then there's what we see which is really just a metaphor. It's already a metaphor for the real universe. We can't see 100%, we see 5%. Then we represent that as another little diminished 5% to ourselves and then we put ourselves in that 5%. So we're already playing the game that I'm playing every day. This is in a way of sort of building back out and saying, okay, I've got this much, but I just kind of want to see just a little bit more, maybe 5% more. And that'll push me out to the next level of possibilities and kind of open it up.

This interview can be found at
http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/ritchie/index.html#

The Boston Globe

Sunday, April 11, 2004 *Arts & Entertainment*

Mr. Universe

Matthew Ritchie sets up a show at Mass MoCA that's out of this world

by Joseph P. Kahn

NEW YORK -- Matthew Ritchie is obsessed with information. "You used to go find information in a book," the artist says. He grabs a notebook out of a reporter's hands and fills a page with earnest doodlings that resemble margin notes from an astrophysics textbook. "Now it drenches us constantly. So how do you deal with that? Not through some logical system whereby you first learn A, then B, then C. Instead, you need a way that's at least partly based on chance, because we live in a chance environment. We all have to accept that we're never going to get the full pic ture about anything."

Ritchie is seated at a long worktable in his TriBeCa studio. With movie-star looks -- he has been described at least once as a "Hugh Grant look-alike" -- and a relaxed, ready grin, he seems far less intense in person than the canvases he fills with such frenetic energy. What it all comes down to, Ritchie continues, are big questions about why we're here and where we'll end up. "The beauty of games of chance," he says, "is they're little lives into which all this stuff is collapsed. You get a few random cards. You play 'em. You're dead. You start again."

"Matthew Ritchie: Proposition Player," the mind- bending installation that opens at MASS MoCA this weekend for a yearlong run, fulfills a long standing goal of Ritchie's: to construct a body of work around the idea that with so much informa tion bombarding us, either we find a way to filter out what's useful -- to "play inside the grid," in his words -- or risk being overwhelmed.

"The fundamental description of how the universe works has changed three or four times in the past 15 years alone," he says, "which just shows you how open those questions are. It's a game. And that's really what my work is about, creating a model of how I'm thinking at the moment."

"Proposition Player" -- the term refers to a hired casino operative who encourages patrons to play alongside him -- pulls together much of what Ritchie has been exploring for the past decade: It's a visual representation of the universe's creation and evolution from Big Bang to present day, from the subatomic to the intergalactic. Within the multilayered narrative he has constructed are 49 characters with distinctive physical and metaphysical attributes, woven into a complex cosmology that draws liberally from mythology, thermodynamics, cartography, mathematics, quantum physics, dice games, voodoo, cartoons, and other sources, highbrow and low.

A `world builder' Grand in scale -- one wall drawing in the show is more than 200 feet long -- and intellectually supercharged, Ritchie's work has made him an important figure in the contemporary art world. MASS MoCA curator Laura Steward Heon places him within a group of cosmologically minded artists, or "world builders" (sculptor-filmmaker Matthew Barney is another) who create objects based

on complex information systems of their own design.

What makes Ritchie's pieces so distinctive, says Heon, who curated the 2001 MASS MoCA exhibit "Game Show," is their beauty.

Ritchie makes it very clear that "he uses the cosmology as a way to organize lines, shapes, and colors, which are ultimately most important," says Heon. "The emphasis is always on the objects."

At Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum, where "Proposition Player" was first mounted in December, the installation included paintings, drawings, light boxes, murals, a massive floor sculpture (topped with tiny humanoid heads), and a digitally animated craps table. The North Adams show will include most of these, plus a few site-specific additions and a rentable audio guide to Ritchie's sprawling cast of characters. At MASS MoCA, as in Houston, each viewer will also receive a card from a deck specially designed by Ritchie. The card is used as an entry point to the exhibit's interactive elements.

The characters represented in Ritchie's deck include Beelzebub (a.k.a. The Gambler), Raphael (The Day Watch), Belphegor (The Dead), and Abraxas (The Fast Set). The cards in turn are linked in poker-hand fashion to individual paintings in the show, not only by numbers and suits but by characters' attributes as well. A wall chart spells out the rules and levels of Ritchie's game-within-a-game, which include groupings such as units of measurements (mass, temperature, etc.) and elements of atomic reactions (gluons, photons).

In person, Ritchie, 40, is refreshingly down-to-earth, joking about the daunting amount of information he throws at viewers yet dispelling any notion that a PhD is necessary to understand the work. Or even that he knows much more about game theory than, say, the average "World Series of Poker" ESPN viewer or Dungeons & Dragons nut.

"The first reaction you hope for is people going, `Whoa, that's great,'" he says, with traces of an English accent. "Forget the rules. It's like when you see a really good game. You don't know what the rules are. You just think it looks cool and want to play."

To those who reject the idea that "art holds any information at all" or that looking below a piece's surface can be rewarding, he says, that's

a shame. "To me, information is a kind of surface, a beauty all its own," asserts Ritchie. "And with this show, you get the surface and a little bit below it, too. A little X-ray vision."

At the same time, he concedes that only a thin line separates wallowing in big ideas like these and "gluing cardboard boxes to parking meters, talking about string theory," as he jokingly puts it.

"Propostion Player", installed at Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston

One man's trash . . . As Ritchie tells the story, he left his native England in the late 1980s and landed in New York. Never terribly keen on academics -- he earned a BFA from a London art school after spending a semester at Boston University in 1982 -- and with no clear career path ahead, by chance (that word again) he got a job as a building superintendent. Living near New York University, he rummaged through trash bins looking for discarded textbooks. Time on his hands ("You mostly wait around for things to leak") allowed him to read extensively in arcane fields such as medieval history and philosophy of science.

A kind of alchemy took place, according to Ritchie. Up until then, he explains, "I was pretty skeptical about this idea of being an artist, or that the world needed any new things. There's a huge difference between being an artist and just making art. And I was only occasionally making art."

Change -- and chance -- intervened, though. He began writing pieces for Flash Art magazine, giving him an excuse to visit artists' studios and discuss their work in detail. Meanwhile, the Manhattan art world was suffering through a severe recession, which turned out to be a positive development for Ritchie, who between 1993 and 1995 managed to secure his first studio and land his first one-man show.

"The whole '80s thing with the coke and limos was gone," he recalls. "Things were really quiet, so artists had time to think about what they were doing. I started putting all this stuff together and inviting people to my studio to talk about it. And they said, `Well, this is all really fascinating. But no one will ever care.' So I decided to make a chart listing everything I was interested in -- a shopping list, really -- and go from there."

Where he went was to cramming everything from Judeo-Christian mythology to high-temperature physics into a medium -- painting -- primed to absorb whatever he could throw at it. He wrote stories about his growing cast of characters.

On the map In 1997, his work was selected for the Whitney Biennial, a pivotal moment that put Ritchie prominently on the art-world map. Five years later, he mounted his first large-scale installation, a three-part piece titled "Games of Chance and Skill," which remains on display at MIT's Zesiger Sports and Fitness Center in Cambridge.

Jane Farver, director of MIT's List Visual Arts Center, says campus response has been overwhelmingly positive, whether from student athletes or maintenance people or Nobel laureates. "Professors tell me constantly they take people to see it," says Farver. "It's remarkable how Matthew visualized the space, lighting, and traffic patterns and made eveything work so beautifully."

As Ritchie continued to work out his own highly personalized language of information, the original laundry list morphed into a series of maps, which in turn were incorporated into a 49-character story, which was ultimately folded inside an elaborate game of chance -- with Ritchie as house dealer.

Asked if he's spent time in real casinos, or otherwise considers himself a gambler, Ritchie grins.

"I love it, but I can't afford it," he says, laughing at the memory of an unlucky day, or two, at the dog track. "You can only really gamble if it's not about winning." He pauses. "There's this moment between placing the bet and the race itself, or the rolling of the dice," he says, "when all possibilities are open. That's the real buzz, not walking home a winner. The end is kind of depressing either way."

According to Ritchie, younger viewers tend to be less intimidated by "Proposition Player" than older ones. At the Houston opening, he says, a group of teenagers dressed up as characters from Ritchie's work (they had followed the stories on a website) and frolicked about, while the 8-year-old son of the show's curator, who traded Yu-Gi-Oh cards with Ritchie, pronounced his game to be "cool, but pretty easy."

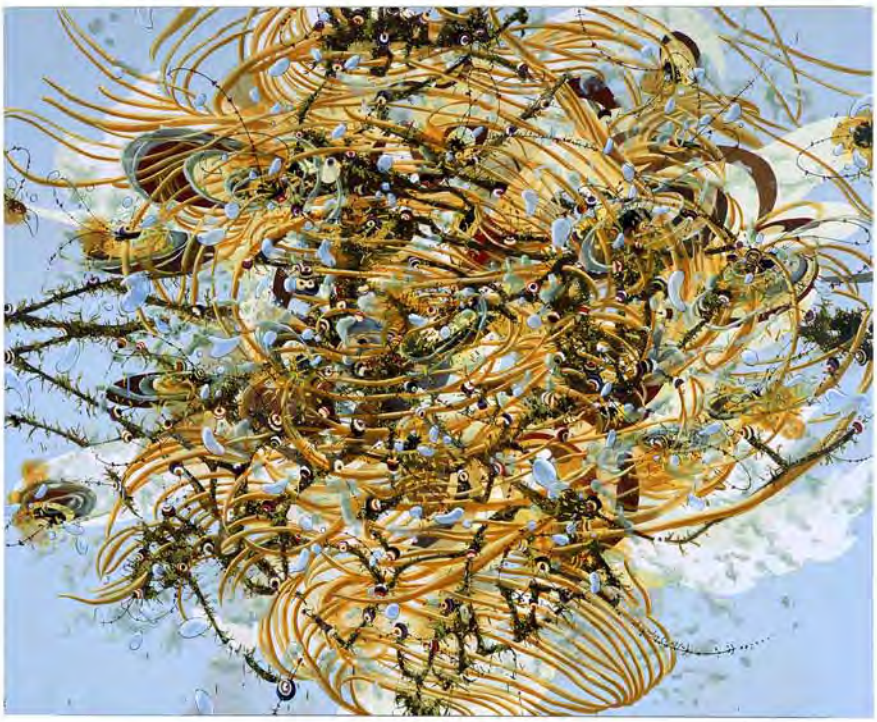
Says Ritchie, "Then you have the 50-year-olds who say, `Oh, this is so difficult!' So I'm either doing something very right or very wrong. Generationally, though, I'm right in the middle."

His next large-scale project, an installation for a new federal courthouse being built in Eugene, Ore., will confront more big ideas such as good and evil, justice and retribution. While that project is a couple of years away, other aspects in Ritchie's life are more immediately in flux. He and his wife, Garland Hunter, an actress, are expecting their first child this month.

"Talk about radical change," says Ritchie. "All you can do is set up the parameters, I guess. And then, the dice will roll."

ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2003



Matthew Ritchie

CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM

Had it with parallel worlds that demand extensive research and hairsplitting exegesis? Tough. Ritchie, the Matthew Barney of painting, is having his first museum survey, put on by CAM curator Lynn Herbert. (Herbert joins Mass MOCA's Laura Heon in the catalogue, which also features Ritchie's own writings.) With his own cosmology informing and expanding from painting and drawing into sculpture and animated films, Richie aspires to the frosh epistemological wow and scale of the other Matthew. Still, without the reading material, in the gallery it boils down to basically cheerful, lively hard-edge abstraction. Look for four new works created for the Houston space (the latest museum must-have, halfway between site-specific sculpture and monogrammed shirt). *Dec. 13–Mar. 14; Mass MOCA, North Adams, MA, Apr. 10, 2004–Mar. 2005.* —*KS*

Matthew Ritchie, After Lives, *2002, oil and marker on canvas, 88 x 154." Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery*

Notes from the Dawn of Time

Matthew Ritchie at Andrea Rosen

by Christopher Chambers

Something unusual happened at the opening reception for Matthew Ritchie's exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery. All around the crowded room people actually looked at the paintings. They stood around in groups of three or four, attempting to decipher and unravel the works. One fellow just stood and grinned in front of a painting, staring at it for a good twenty minutes. There were five large canvases and a wall installation with color spilling out onto the floor. The wall painting extended around a corner and onto another wall behind a few of the canvases, in a net-like, zigzagging graphic configuration over a pale, yellow house painting covering the entire wall. The wall and floor installation was made up of cut out bits of painted canvas and colored vinyl, with three-foot long arrows that had sculptural chunks resembling little meteors or interstellar debris stuck into the wall at specific junctures.

The paintings were created in three basic layers with some embellishments. Initially, Ritchie trowels a rudimentary background landscape over taped edges, an overall background tone of sky blue or pale greenish grey. Next, whiz-bang, loosely-handled cosmic smoke, explosions, and churning nuclei, were dashed off with painterly enthusiasm. Jotted on top of this in black magic marker, were scientific demarcations charting the universal atomic equation of creation in gestural sweeps and hasty notations of pseudo-physics. What you've got is a peculiarly American rendition of the primordial stew—an ambiguously secular churning from the gaseous dawn of time.

The New York Times

The show at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, above, is called ''Proposition Player'' and is by Matthew Ritchie, below

An Art Show From Before the Big Bang;

All of Cosmology Takes a Trip From SoHo to a Houston Museum

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

HOUSTON, Jan. 19 — You don't have to know that Astoreth is a hermaphrodite and the lover of Stanley, a one-eyed card sharp also known as Satan-El, and that both are members of the Gamblers, who occupy a party suite at the Brockton Holiday Inn just outside Boston on Route 24 the moment before the Big Bang.

You don't have to know but it helps. Sort of.

It's only the beginning of the cosmology embracing all knowledge that spills over the walls and floor of the

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, where Matthew Ritchie, a mixed-media artist and Manhattan building superintendent, is having his first major show.

Lining the walls of the 8,000-square-foot Brown Foundation Gallery are enigmatic murals that look like ancient maps, intricate paintings of plant and anthropomorphic forms and fanciful sketches of 49 characters like Astoreth and Stanley. Filling the floor is a sculpture called ''The Fine Constant,'' a suspended riverlike aluminum webwork spiked with poles sprouting small humanoid heads designed by grade schoolers, and beneath it, ''The God Impersonator,'' a rubber floor mosaic like a walkway

into the piece.

There’s also a computerized craps table where visitors throw dice for the fate of the universe and see the results in shifting digital animations to the sounds of distant thunder and electromagnetic bleeps.

‘’I call it The Story,' " Mr. Ritchie said. He doesn't like to explain his work. "Put simply, it's all sorts of things thrown into the soup, and you hope it'll turn into something."

"This is the statement," he said gesturing around. "Anything I'm saying is just sounding off." So what is it exactly? "I could begin if I had a couple hours and a couple shots of whiskey," said Mr. Ritchie, 39, a Hugh Grant look-alike from England who celebrated the show's opening on Dec. 13 by skydiving from 14,000 feet. "A lot of things that are bad for you, you can do in Texas," he said.

The exhibition runs through March 14, after which a modified version will move to the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams. It has been drawing enthusiastic if at times perplexed crowds to the stainless steel building of the 56-year-old Contemporary Arts Museum.

"It all makes sense," said Virginia Mohlere, a medical copy editor attending the show. "It's a combination of alchemy and mythology that can only be done in art." She said people shouldn't get too hung up on the content. "Even if it doesn't stand up to linear knowledge," she said, "it makes great art."

Critics mostly have agreed. Writing in The New York Times in 2000, Holland Cotter called Mr. Ritchie's earlier creations "engaging, even peppy to look at, densely coded and encyclopedic in content" and said, "The results smack equally of medieval scholasticism and molecular science, with an air of epic-poetic grandeur keeping the whole thing afloat."

In a review in The Houston Chronicle, Patricia C. Johnson said Mr. Ritchie's show transformed the museum "into a fun house of graffiti." In the new work, she wrote, "Ritchie is very persuasive in illustrating the idea of a universe in which everything happens at once in a seamless continuum of space and time."

The exhibition is called "Proposition Player," for the independent contractor in the gaming industry who is paid by the house to start games. In Mr. Ritchie's words, "He's the stranger who comes up to you in the casino and says, 'Fancy a friendly game of cards?' "

Here, that's Mr. Ritchie. In his name, arriving visitors are given a card from his deck representing any of his 49 characters, including Be-elzebub, also known as Bubba, who is eviscerated by his fellow Gambler Lucifer, known as Lucky, who is in turn decapitated in an evil deed exemplifying the deterioration of everything.

It gets worse, or better, according to Lynne Herbert, senior curator at the museum, who masterminded the show and chronicles the epic: "Purson (the Timekeeper and the seventh gambler) shows up and carries away Lucifer's head. This action represents the integration of energy, light, material and time (E=mc2), or as Ritchie states, the basic conditions necessary for art making."‘

Goaded by Mr. Ritchie, visitors throw dice (cast from the ankle bones of prehistoric elk), progressing though the card deck, and in the process affecting the fate of the universe as projected in constantly shifting computer animations.

As the exhibit says, "You may already be a winner."

Because, as Mr. Ritchie sees it, 95 percent of the universe remains unseen and unknown, he includes plenty of negative space in his work. He invited 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds from the Wharton Elementary School in Houston to model the clay heads that top his sculpture and retained the forms while erasing 95 per cent of their features. On the other hand, as he said, "in the last three years more information has been exchanged than in all the history of the human race," so his work resonates with complexity, in the manner of Matthew Barney, a fellow myth-making artist who also acknowledges a desire "to include everything."

"Everyone has gotten afraid of complexity," Mr. Ritchie said. He is not one of them. "More is more," he said. Then again, he said, "maybe it's entirely possible that I've got the wrong idea."

An indifferent student at St. Paul's in London where the alumni include John Milton, another avid cosmologist, Mr. Ritchie won a scholarship to study art at Boston University. He traveled cross country by bus and landed a job as a building super at 107 Mercer Street in SoHo.

"The great thing about being a super, you get to read a lot," Mr. Ritchie said. He read discarded science textbooks left behind by New York University students and wrote hallucinatory tales that read like Alfred Döblin on LSD.

Besides managing the eight-apartment building on Mercer Street, Mr. Ritchie opened a studio in SoHo in the mid-1990's, sharing space for a time with Damien Hirst. Mr. Ritchie and other artists later bought a building at 16 Desbrosses Street, where he now has his studio. He had several shows, one at Basilico Fine Arts on Wooster Street, where he met Garland Hunter, an actress whom he later married. They are expecting their first child in April.

In 2001 he created a permanent installation called "Games of Chance and Skill" at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and he has a commission to do a large mixed-media piece for a new federal courthouse in Eugene, Ore.

He began creating "Proposition Player" three years ago and began putting it together in a contractor's barn barn in New Jersey a year and a half ago. He said he was surprised when it came together. "I usually expect a lot of things to fail," he said.

ARTFORUM
JANUARY2001 INTERNATIONAL

MATTHEW RITCHIE

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Don't think of Matthew Ritchie's work a painting, exactly. It's more a collection of grandiose narrative schemata and possibly crackpot notions involving science, theology, information theory, and who knows what else. Sure, painted canvases play a conspicuous role, and these are both striking and intricate, with their puzzlelike aggregations of colored shapes, nervous draftsmanship, and annotations in black marker. They are mostly nonrepresentational, it would seem, though there is a bit of recognizable imagery, too: For instance one of several works titled (like the show as a whole) *Parents and Children* (all works 2000) appears to show a male figure with skulls floating above his head ascending a rocky crag crowned by a bare tree.

But for all their visual hyperactivity, Ritchie's paintings seem unconcerned with visually embodying the meanings they conceptually encode. They are essentially abstract illustrations.

The compositions are pretty much Expressionism 101: lots of tumultuous swirls related by dynamic diagonals to the rectangle. They're filled with what Sheldon Cheney, whose book *Expressionism in Art* is said to have been a bible in the studios of the '50s, praised in El Greco as a "counterplay of fluctuating planes and flame-like undulations." But Ritchie's execution is counter-Expressionist in its tightness and linearity. The result of this mix is, to my eye, an odd sort of tinniness: Like the diagrammatic notations that accompany them on the surrounding walls, the paintings give the impression of being blowups, perhaps meant to reveal all those finicky little details that would have been too hard to see at their true scale.

What makes Ritchie's work interesting is that the text being "illustrated" is accessible only to the artist. Not that it's "private" in either the Wittgensteinian or the everyday sense. As I discovered in conversation with him at one of his previous shows, Ritchie is happy to explain what he had in mind while making his pictures. In fact, the adventures of the forty-nine characters that interact in his allegorical scheme are woven together out of so many strands that making the paintings may be the only way to keep track of them. In other words, the art seems to serve as a mnemonic device for something outside itself. Ritchie's work is close in method to that of a number of contemporaries who use hermetic narrative constructs and self-made mythographies to sustain ongoing bodies of work on a heroic scale—most obviously Matthew Barney and Bonnie Collura.

Matthew Ritchie, *Parents and Children*, 2000, acrylic, marker, enamel, metal and sintra, dimensions variable. Installation view.

An uninitiated viewer might not suspect any of this, seeing only an idiosyncratic abstract style, but the work's thematic ambitions are clear enough, if only from the inscriptions both in the paintings and on the wall: "folded space-time continuum," "absolute complexity," "you may already be a winner," "amino acids." The paintings themselves (and a large light-box transparency at the gallery entrance) are big, complicated, and so overflowing with energy that the imagery literally spills off them into the room, not only onto the walls but also onto the floor, in a brightly colored structure that moves out from a huge wall painting. Perhaps this is simply a roundabout way of getting at modernist autonomy and self-referentiality—a form of abstraction that works not by reducing but by overloading content. It certainly gives Ritchie's work an opacity that seems quite specific to itself. And yet all the furious movement seems to be going nowhere fast.

—*Barry Schwabsky*

frieze
CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE • ISSUE 58 • UK £4.50

Matthew Ritchie

Andrea Rosen, New York

For the time being, the idea of possibility may be the best way to approach Matthew Ritchie's work. His ambition is grand, but, as with most able storytellers, his narrative is fairly direct, with only the occasional dangerous diversion to provide cliffhangers. His aim is to time-travel: to tell two stories simultaneously from two points in time and from a perspective only he understands. In the end, it takes a leap of faith to believe Ritchie when he says 'It's all made up. Except for all the parts that are true.' What *is* true is that you can understand his earlier work more clearly once you have seen his more recent paintings. Looking at them is a learning game which unfolds in stages, creating causalities along the way. After all, the press release for this installation *Parents and Children* (2000) declared 'Forget everything you know'.

Ritchie describes legends about the universe that unfold before our very eyes. It's a path well trod, but the difference with Ritchie is that his story aligns itself with the morphology of video games. To appreciate that these narrative levels exist in parallel dimensions helps you get your bearings.

Now, I have not set to memory the 49 characters that inhabit Ritchie's universe but it is clear that part of his legend is a love story built around the inevitability of a metaphysical tragedy: an astronaut, in love with an actress pregnant with his child, who is also loved by a golem, is secretly sent into space. When the astronaut's space capsule is recovered it is empty, and so the actress ends up with the golem. All of this has taken place by the time you walk though the gallery doors. Ritchie blackmails us into researching his past story while simultaneously looking forward to what might happen in it. You could see in *Parents and Children* – which was a majestic installation – how a hectic red sphere has come to represent time, that red snakes symbolise entropy, and that, taken together, they signal the loss of energy over time. In other words, you have to become familiar with Ritchie's iconography to play his game.

The epic scale of his almost operatic project gives him the last word, so to speak. You can only invest yourself in his art once you have the patience to do so. Ritchie demands we all become archaeologists, and saddles us with the decision about whether or not to keep digging. As the artist wrote in the catalogue of a previous exhibition: 'The Fast Set: The lives of saints and madmen lie on this fault-line of absolute belief, absolute desire.' Whatever else he may have accomplished in the short term, Ritchie has so twisted the values and anticipation we have for an artist that normal expectations fall into swift atrophy. Repeat: forget everything you know.

With enigmas pending, Ritchie turns critics into punters, or more likely odds-makers, and I will take his bait and speculate for a moment. If you shake the cover off the catalogue of 'The Fast Set', you will find hidden clues in the form of photographic details: the pregnant actress, a space monkey all suited up, and mysteriously altered diagrams of the launch and recovery of a Mercury spacecraft. I can only speculate whether the actress has become a parent or if the monkey reaching out for an adult hand could be her child. And then I began looking closely at *Parents and Children* and realised that, for the time being, to marvel is the only response to the bulk of Ritchie's art – there are no complete answers in it. And these days that is not a bad return on desire. Leaving this exhibition, I reflected on what a terrible shame it would have been had we decided to give up on Carroll or Duchamp at the moment they became complex. We should rise up as far as we can to glimpse Ritchie's atlas of the universe, knowing we can only rise so far for now. I took comfort in a passage from Duchamp's *White Notes* (1958), *A l'Infinitif* where, under the heading 'Dictionary and Atlases', he wrote: 'There is also "geological landscapism": different formations, different colours – a mine of information!'

Ronald Jones

Matthew Ritchie's narrative is fairly direct, with only the occasional dangerous diversion to provide cliffhangers.

Matthew Ritchie
Parents and Children (detail)
2000
Acrylic paint and marker pen on wall, enamel on Sintra
Dimensions variable

ART / ARCHITECTURE

An Adventurer's Map to a World of Information

BY JEFFREY KASTNER

Matthew Ritchie, a maker of conceptual paintings, drawings and installations, in his Manhattan studio with the works "M Theory", left, and "Parents and Children",

IT'S all made up," Matthew Ritchie says with a characteristically inscrutable grin as he settles into a chair in his Chelsea studio. "Except for all the parts that are true."

It's a late summer afternoon, and Mr. Ritchie is taking a break from preparations for his forthcoming show at the nearby Andrea Rosen Gallery, helping a visitor unravel fact from fiction in his sprawling artistic program. At first glance, Mr. Ritchie's ambitious paintings, drawings and installations seem to illustrate an impenetrable personal cosmology. Yet they're built on a rigorous system of real-world information, ranging from theoretical physics and molecular biology to medieval alchemy and classical philosophy. According to the artist, it's just the beginning of a continuing project designed to function as nothing less than "a map of everything."

Mr. Ritchie first introduced his scheme in a 1995 show, "Working Model," which centered on a color-coded chart that proposed a virtually inexhaustible range of potential interactions between 49 characters. Collectively, this gang of comic book-style superheroes symbolized the artist's view of the multiplicitous connections between art, religion, politics and science; individually, they embodied everything from the speed of light to the human limbic system to the biological classification protista (simple organisms like protozoa and algae).

"Basically, I wanted to say, 'Here's a map, now let's go on a journey," says the 36-year-old Mr. Ritchie, whose voice still bears traces of his native England. "It was meant to be a generative structure, designed to produce adventures inside itself, adventures in information."

Each of his subsequent major exhibitions has focused on such an adventure, presented in the form of an unconventional story elaborated through paintings, drawings, installations and writing. In a 1996 show, "The Hard Way," Mr. Ritchie drew on the legend of the Watchers, the fallen angels described in the Old Testament book of Enoch, to evoke the emergence of human consciousness. In "The Gamblers," the artist imagined the Big Bang as a noirish casino night involving seven entities representing the quantum mechanical forces, gathered in a Holiday Inn outside Boston. For "The Fast Set," mounted earlier this year at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami, he explored the laws of thermodynamics through a tragic love triangle involving the Golem, a movie star and an astronaut about to depart on a fictional seventh Mercury space mission.

"Parents and Children," the show opening at Andrea Rosen on Saturday, is a continuation of the story, begun in Miami, focusing on what the artist describes as "the transformation of energy into matter." (The last part will be shown at the Dallas Museum of Art in January.)

Although Mr. Ritchie considers himself a painter, he's equally adept in each of the mediums he uses to tell his tales. His colorful, large-scale works on canvas and wall drawings incorporate figurative and abstract elements. Highly detailed in oil and marker pen, they include quasi-organic abstract shapes whose forms and colors refer back to the characters and attributes of his original scheme. Mr. Ritchie uses a flat vinyl material called Sintra for his sculptural wall and floor pieces; these are formal echoes of the paintings, says the artist, designed to allow viewers "to walk inside the pictures." Most of the major exhibitions have also included stories, either in the catalog or displayed directly on the walls, written in a style that recalls hard-boiled fiction. "I spent way too much time thinking about this," Mr. Ritchie says with a trademark touch of self-deprecation, referring to his dauntingly complex conceptual program.

Born and reared in suburban London, he was an indifferent student through his years at the city's Camberwell School of Art. Following graduation, he left England and arrived in New York in 1988 with what he recalls as "no sense of direction whatsoever." Without working papers or job prospects, Mr. Ritchie remembers being "literally down to my last quarter" when an acquaintance from art school, whom he bumped into one day on a street in SoHo, helped him find work painting buildings.

Back on his feet financially, he began making art again. He converted a basement room into a studio in the Mercer Street building where his friend lived -- the same building where he eventually found work as a superintendent and met his wife, the actress Garland Hunter, and where the couple still lives today. It was also there that he began to develop the theoretical concepts on which he has built his career.

"I wouldn't call myself a scholar," Mr. Ritchie says, "but I did as much research as an ordinary person who's a building superintendent can manage in his spare time -- into the history of color, into competing religious systems in the West and their relationship to philosophical and political structures, how those in turn were related to the evolution of early scientific practices and how that evolved into contemporary scientific practice. I looked at things like high-temperature physics and biology and the relationships between them that, collectively, form what we would like to believe is an objective truth about the nature of our lives. All that was cook-

"An Adventurer's Map to a World of Information"....*continued*

ing away in my brain and then, bizarrely enough, I decided to try and force it into the brightly colored waistcoat of contemporary painting."

ALTHOUGH his work is considered among the most "difficult" in all of contemporary art, Mr. Ritchie disputes the notion that it is intentionally cryptic. "I'm trying to create a landscape where different kinds of information can coexist," he says. "I haven't generated that information to be obscure -- that information actually exists, and when you overlap it, it produces new intersections of information. Basically, I dreamed the whole thing up as a way to express just how much fun you can have thinking, to convey my personal sense of how incredibly rich and complicated the world is.

"I have real resistance to the idea of art being difficult because there is some sort of integrity in being difficult," he continues. "It's more that the world is difficult, it is complicated. Quantum mechanics is difficult, but it's also real." As for the idea that many people don't "get" it, Mr. Ritchie laughs and says, "You know, you don't really 'get' a tree either."

As Mr. Ritchie continues to explore the potential of his cosmological system, his decision to work within such a particularized framework has proved to be energizing rather than limiting, he says. "This is a machine designed to produce insights for me," he explains, "but also to produce for people the exhilaration of connecting with knowledge. What's liberating about the idea of paintings being full of information is that it helps you remember that everything is full of information." The challenge, he says, is finding the right balance between form and content. "I'm trying to say you can have both. You can have something that's both beautiful and meaningful -- and that the meaning enhances the beauty and the beauty enhances the meaning."

Art in America July 1995

Matthew Ritchie: *Prelapse*, 1995, oil and marker on canvas, 90 by 84 inches; at Basilico Fine Arts.

Matthew Ritchie at Basilico Fine Arts

There's always been something appealing to me about system-based art. Its ostensible desire is to make sense of things, to throw a quantifying web over the chaos of possibility. However, the best systemic art does something else. It seems to run parallel to comprehensibility, to be a metaphor for it, while, under the cover of objectivity and impersonality, the system itself manages to encourage quirkiness and personal vision (Alfred Jensen being a prime case).

Matthew Ritchie's debut solo show in New York presented systemic art with a scientific bent, and there was nothing modest about it. The show, titled "working model," consisted of paintings, wall drawings and brightly colored lathe-turned sculptures—all elaborating a permutable sign system, a visual language for the arcana of Ritchie's worldview. In these works the artist grapples with the creation, disintegration and reformation of the entire universe. In the process, religion, science, alchemy and esthetics are stirred together in a mix that's half comprehensible, half maddeningly opaque.

The paintings at first glance appear to be nicely surfaced gray canvases arrayed with flat, hard-edged modular shapes in tangy modern design colors. These shapes are deployed around the canvas or, as in *The Generation of Monsters*, set atop one another vertically, like sophisticated building blocks or a stack of Noguchi lamps. They are surrounded by quickly done Magic Marker drawings of angels, demons and gargoylelike figures, along with mathematical jottings, geometric diagrams and assorted labelings. Everything is linked together by networks of arcs, lines and arrows.

The result is pleasing to the eye: a nice mix of black and white and color, shape and line, the abstract and the figurative, the formal and the casual. But visual satisfaction is only part of what Ritchie's after. A carefully worked out wall chart, also in the show, reveals that there are seven shapes and seven colors, which, when combined, yield 49 variations, each in turn associated with three semantic correlatives. These 49 permutations all appear in the work, representing (as per the chart) everything from the Angel Gabriel to Lucifer to mitosis, copper, astronomy, legislation, free will, fever and female force. There are systems within systems, hierarchies within hierarchies.

At times the work feels reasonably clear, as in *Prelapse*, where the expanded yellow box of the immediately post-Big Bang universe is overturned and a whole tribe of discombobulated beings spills out. But often the complexity of the system (apparently still evolving in the artist's mind) is overwhelming, so that I found myself turning away from the cosmic implications and back to a purely visual read.

It is said that good science is beautiful, though the reverse is not necessarily true. Ritchie seems to be suggesting that the unified field theory long sought by science may be possible only in art, where assertion and conviction are perfectly acceptable stand-ins for proof.

—*Richard Kalina*

Flash Art
Summer 1995 p.129

MATTHEW RITCHIE
BASILICO FINE ARTS

In a series of paintings, wall drawings and sculptures, Matthew Ritchie has brought together historically and ideologically different belief systems in an attempt to show their common thread. The categories are science, alchemy, religion, and aesthetics which, traditionally, would be divided in two groups: modernist (science, aesthetics) and pre-modernist (alchemy, religion) modes of representation. What both modern forms promise is a greater codification of experience resulting in a dividend of verifiability and self-sufficiency. Comfort is supposed to come from the proven truths of scientific law and the tangibility and circular nature (i.e. from man, to man) of the aesthetic experience. Unfortunately, neither handles the really "Big Questions" very well. Also, this division of categories is dubious because it disregards the endless cross-referencing possible between all these forms (e.g. the fascination with the transformation of physical materials found in both modernist aesthetics and alchemy). Needless to say, it is this cross referencing that serves as the bread and butter of Ritchie's practice.

By creating a vocabulary out of these seemingly, though deceptively, dissimilar categories, Ritchie is able to, somewhat confusedly, tell the story of the origin and subsequent history of the Universe. For the West of course, this always means the rise and fall, and it is at this point where all the categories decisively meet. From Adam and Eve, to the Big Bang, to Clement Greenberg, all these tales tell the determinist story of a perfect moment, a period of great decline, and our present journey back toward that elusive and brief crystalline period. The title, *Working Model*, is obviously meant to be somewhat ironic, poking fun at these flawed systems while questioning their premise of, and desire for, perfection. But ultimately the work suggests a fascination with these narratives that betrays its attempt to fully undermine them. What we have in Ritchie's amalgam is a testament to the impossibility (and perhaps lack of desirability) of the *Working Model*, coupled with a residual desire to construct one anyway. Metaphorically, this work is a speculation on the possibility of culture and knowledge, and perhaps that is why it translates so well into cultural objects. Whether we call the synthetic production of these objects alchemic, or use a more contemporary term like fusion, is of course, an open question.

Owen Drolet

MATTHEW RITCHIE, THE GOD GAME, 1995. ENAMEL, WOOD AND STEEL, 53 X 30 X 18". PHOTO DESCHENES.