

## GLADSTONE

MUSÉE  
VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

# MAY 30 MATTHEW BARNEY | SECONDARY

REVIEWS (/CULTURE/CATEGORY/REVIEWS)



Matthew Barney, *Secondary*, 2023, five-channel video installation with sound, [production still], running time: 1:00:00 hour.  
© Matthew Barney, Photo: Julieta Cervantes

Written by Max Wiener

Copy Edited by Kee'nan Haggan

Photo Edited by Olivia Castillo

In recent years, there has been a shift in the sporting world towards highlighting an athlete's physical and mental health in order to show a more humane side to the otherwise terse world of professional sports. American football, specifically the NFL, is praised as a 'man's game', with humongous monstrosities of men colliding with each other and bashing heads for human enjoyment; it's reminiscent of Roman gladiator fights.

Matthew Barney, an American artist whose highly-praised, multifaceted work is known to touch on deeper societal issues, tackles some of these complexities in his new exhibition entitled *SECONDARY*. Screened and performed at his Long Island

City studio, the work dives intensely into these horrific injuries and the glorification of them in contemporary society. Using both screening and live performance as his mediums, Barney creates a pseudo-world of war to show the unhinged brutality that Americans tune into on fall Sundays. The exhibition, brilliant and poignant, opened on May 23rd and is scheduled to run until June 25th.



Matthew Barney, *Secondary*, 2023, five-channel video installation with sound, [production still], running time: 1:00:00 hour.  
© Matthew Barney, Photo: Julieta Cervantes



Matthew Barney, *Secondary*, 2023, five-channel video installation with sound, [production still], running time: 1:00:00 hour.  
© Matthew Barney, Photo: Julieta Cervantes

Barney bases a large portion of the exhibition on a game from August 12, 1978, when the Oakland Raiders' defensive back Jack Tatum paralyzed New England Patriots wide receiver Darryl Stingley with an open field hit, swiftly ending his career and setting the benchmark for these "what if" moments. This game serves as a horrific reminder of the macabre capabilities of football games, but also as an inspiration for Barry's newest work. He wanted to focus on the minutiae of the game, from the pre-game rituals to the workouts, fully examining the steps and processes that deliver us to that horrific event; he wants to emphasize that it can happen again. He brings us into this potential beautifully, keeping us tense and attentive, almost as if we're watching a family member go through the ritual themselves. You are mad at the system, feeling as though marketing such an event seems maniacal and exploitative. The choice of overlaying it all was brilliant and perfectly executed. By clouding us with all the aspects of the game, it made the actual impact that much more apparent.



Matthew Barney, *Secondary*, 2023, five-channel video installation with sound, [production still], running time: 1:00:00 hour.  
© Matthew Barney, Photo: Jon O'Sullivan

Using live performance, Barney highlights the abstract beauty of the game and the artistic aspect of athletic competition. The dancers, all trained in improvisational workshops with material-based choreography, give us an avant-garde adaptation of a football game right in front of our very eyes. Their movements were precise and delicate, chess-like in their precision and emotional in their stature. They showed the beauty of the game like nothing most viewers will have seen before. They also show the broken nature of the sport and how it shows off violence for capitalistic gain, evolving from love and ending with hate. It's a wonderful expression of emotion that analyzes the sport in a fresh and necessary new perspective. Even for even the most passive fan of the sport, *SECONDARY* makes you want to dive deeper and analyze the game to its innermost detail.