

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Blake Gopnik, "Matthew Barney's Early Work Is Messed Up, and It Rivals Cezanne," *Artnet News*, October 13, 2016

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Matthew Barney's Early Work is Messed Up, and It Rivals Cezanne



THE DAILY PIC (#1654): I can't pretend to be a fan of Matthew Barney's films. My reviews of those have been as caustic as anything I've written. But the current Gladstone Gallery show of early objects and performance "props", recreating Barney's first show at Gladstone in 1991, makes clear to me why there was such excitement about him when he first appeared on the scene.

Where his films beg for (but don't repay) an elaborate effort to decode his symbol-slinging, his objects and performances have a more modest, almost quotidian strangeness that keeps them resonant in their obscurity. The films trumpet themselves as allegorical extravaganzas – Edmund Spencer on acid, with Hollywood backers – whereas the objects might almost have real, everyday functions in some industry or culture that we happen not to know. The videos of his early performances might almost be instructional or ethnographic records of that industry or culture. The slight dinginess that some of his surfaces have acquired with time helps along the effect, making his objects seem less arty and more like strange stuff left over from a past whose details are lost to us.

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I almost hate to admit it, but Barney's current Gladstone show may have achieved what I call the Cézanne Effect: A coherent complexity that exceeds our ability to explain it in words, and that will always defy paraphrasing.