

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Shawn Ghassemitari, "Matthew Barney Returns With a Chilling Meditation on Football," *hypebeast*. May 16, 2023.

## **HYPEBEAST**

# **Matthew Barney Returns With a Chilling Meditation on Football**

His latest five-channel installation is on view until June 25.

Roughly every 30 to 40 years, a dramatic shift begins to occur in American football. From the down and distance rule to the formation of the NFL, the implementation of passing to the start of free agency and so forth.

Throughout each period, however, the violence of football continues to pervade. While the suplexes and shattering hit of the past are mostly gone, violence is baked into the game and despite the subtle, yet impactful progression of the sport, it's an element that will be difficult to fully take out.

During the preseason of 1978, American artist Matthew Barney was watching as Oakland Raiders safety Jack "The Assassin" Tatum delivered a bone-chilling hit on wide receiver Darryl Stingley of the New England Patriots. Stingley was left paralyzed and not one flag was thrown on the play. Today, Tatum would have been suspended and there would be an outcry of concern throughout the news and social media, but like Barney who continued to play the sport, the game assuredly too would continue.

For his latest five-channel video installation, Barney revisits that traumatic memory in *Secondary*, a 60-minute film entirely shot in his Long Island

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City sculpture studio and is comprised of two narratives that are united along the concept of movement. Made in collaboration with movement director David Thomson and composer Jonathan Bepler, the ensemble features dancers, actors and musicians who reenact all of the game's rituals – from the pregame ceremony and warmup drills, to the choreography in each play all the way down to to painful conclusion of that 1978 preseason outing.



Photo: Jon O'Sullivan. © Matthew Barney.

At its core, the ensemble explores the inherent violence of football and the culture in which it reflects, while injecting the artist's personal connection to the game and the surrealist feeling that Barney is known for. Unlike the overt spectacle of football, much of the social commentary is implied: the cast is largely black, the female performers only appear as referees on the

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sideline, Jacquelyn Deshchidn, a Native American Pueblo soprano sings the national anthem, the actors are all older bodied, while the violence and football itself is also absent entirely. There's an array of commentary poignantly made here, from gender and racial inequality to the appropriation of Indigenous tribes and the short lifespan of an average player.

“There's a way that the violence in our culture has become so exposed everywhere you look...,” said Barney in a past interview with the *New York Times*. “I think my relationship to that legacy is by way of my experience on the football field. I wanted to make a piece that looks at that, in more ways than one.”

Abstract, yet suspenseful, the installation offers a chilling meditation on football, that given the concerns across each tier of the game today, is unlikely to disappear anytime soon. For those looking to witness the piece, *Secondary* will be on view at the address below until June 25 from 12pm to 8pm ET on Wednesday to Friday, and 11am to 4pm ET from Saturday to Sunday.