

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Matthew Barney's "Transexualis" is mainly made of petroleum jelly and displayed in a walk-in refrigerator. Credit Matthew Barney; David Regen/Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Twenty-five years ago, at the tender age of 24, Matthew Barney had one of the most sensational New York gallery solo debuts ever, at Barbara Gladstone's former SoHo location. "Facility of DECLINE," at Gladstone in Chelsea, reprises that exhibition. It is fascinating to peruse and would be even if Mr. Barney had not followed up on his early promise with a record of

GLADSTONE GALLERY

staggering achievements in films like “The Cremaster Cycle” and, most recently, “River of Fundament.”

The main event of the original show was a performance by the exceptionally athletic Mr. Barney in which he employed ice-climbing gear to traverse the gallery’s ceiling using fixtures attached to its surface while wearing nothing but a swim cap, socks and sneakers. The video documentation, called “Blind Perineum,” is shown on a monitor in the present show in a room also containing a bench-press apparatus mostly made of petroleum jelly (it has an invisible interior armature). Called “Transexualis,” it’s displayed in a walk-in, industrial refrigerator that keeps the jelly from melting. The exhibition’s other sculptures look as if they were designed by a demented character with a fetish for athletic and medical equipment in a sci-fi horror movie by David Cronenberg. An installation called “Repressia” consists of a pink wrestling mat over which hangs an assemblage of a long, Pyrex pole attached to a weight-lifting bar made of cast petroleum wax and jelly. It’s a surrealistic marvel of polymorphous perversity.

“Matthew Barney: OTTO Trilogy,” a hardcover book published to accompany the exhibition, includes an essay by Mr. Barney that clearly explains his ideas, references and recondite symbols. It’s a must for the Barney completist.

KEN JOHNSON