

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

"Matthew Barney," *The New Yorker*, Fall 2016

## THE NEW YORKER

### **MATTHEW BARNEY**

When Barney made his *début*, in 1991, at the Gladstone gallery, the then twenty-four-year-old's subversive, subterranean universe felt *sui generis*. At its core was a performance, enacted before the show opened: Barney strapped himself in a harness and drew on the gallery's ceilings and walls. In the exhibition, through video, sculpture, and photography, the artist described the power and the limitations of male strength, male anxiety, and male self-interest—all the while examining gender fluidity. Spectators lined up around the block. What is most striking about this mini-retrospective of that early work is the elegance of Barney's line, seen in carefully executed wrestling mats, lockers, weights, and a bench press made of Vaseline (and refrigerated to retain its shape). They emphasize not only the artist's hand but, for all the theatricality, his absence, a void that allows our own thoughts about gender, and about sport as ritual, to creep into the space, too. It's an essential show not only for anyone interested in American sculpture but also for anyone reflecting on trans identity.