

Art in America

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Barry X Ball: (*Matthew Barney*), 2000-03, mixed mediums; at Mario Diacono at Ars Libri.

on the crusty surface of the Great Salt Desert (this time, reenacting an evolutionary journey). In the third segment, a salt-covered Joo sits in a meadow, allowing a 10-point bull elk to use him as a human salt lick. Besides the elk and caribou in the videos, there are two related wall-mounted works, *Improved Rack #1 (Moose)*, 1999, a large moose antler cut in segments and extended with metal rods, and *Hunt (Balance for Left and Right Lobes)*, 1993-94, a resin cast of elk antlers filled with toxically reac-

Still from Michael Joo's *Circannual Rhythm (pibloktok)*, 2003, three synchronized DVD projections, 25 minutes; at the List Visual Arts Center.



tive chemicals. Joo's shamanistic use of cervine creatures seems a wry homage to Beuys.

One elaborate installation reconfigures two slightly earlier pieces. *God II*, 2003 (a reworking of *God*, 2002), recalls the video's seizure victim with a creepy, life-size mannequin wearing a fur-trimmed parka and sprawled atop a frost-covered cube. The face is made of clear plastic, like a medical model, revealing the skull beneath. Wall text asserts that viewers' breath condensing near the refrigeration unit/pedestal will eventually accumulate to cover the figure with ice: morbid curiosity, in theory, will thwart itself. Surrounding the sculpture is *Unpack*, 2002 (similar to *Pack*, 2002), a number of variously posed, life-size coyotes modeled in resin and urethane.

Like wilderness itself, the piece is puzzling and evocative, compelling and unnerving. While Joo's undergraduate background as a premed major and his polymath pursuits sometimes push his art toward the absurd and arcane, wisdom also lurks in his mad-scientist methods. [*The exhibition is on view at the Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art through June 6.*]

—Ann Wilson Lloyd

BOSTON

Barry X Ball at Mario Diacono at Ars Libri

(*Matthew Barney*), 2000-03, an installation shown in isolation, is the latest example of Barry X Ball's evolving series of sculptural portrait heads, which so far are drawn primarily from the art world. Here he literally skewers Matthew Barney's stone likeness on a golden spike.

For each of his personally selected (noncommissioned) subjects, Ball starts with a plaster life cast. In an artist's statement, he says that Barney "generously agreed to pose for me in early 2000. . . . Since that time, I have had no contact with Matthew." In a months-long process, Ball manipulated the resulting plaster mold into his most elaborate portrait head to date—an elongated

image strange enough to have come from Barney's own chimerical cast of characters, but rendered in materials as exquisitely polished and finished as a fine decorative object.

Through subtractions from and additions to the original likeness, followed by prolonged tinkering via three-dimensional digital laser scanning and painstakingly slow computer-controlled milling and carving machines, the head took form in a veined and pitted translucent piece of white Mexican onyx. In this figurative object, the stone's natural oxblood-colored markings are transformed into wounds and slashes that call to mind Barney's own invasive performance-based body transformations. Ball added a swag of draping, flayed skin for Barney's neck and modeled a ballisticlike eruption at the top of the head for the spike. The spike, 69 inches long, was similarly computer-designed and -machined, in stainless steel plated with 24-karat gold.

Above this beautifully crafted but grotesquely impaled figure was more decorative excess. The sculpture was suspended, via thin stainless-steel cables fastened with custom-fabricated turnbuckles, from a radiating circle of 25 cast-polyurethane decorative ceiling medallions—the kind that restorers of elegant 19th-century homes use to replace missing plaster embellishments. The central disk, the largest, features cherubs that look down upon Barney's head. Graduated smaller disks form eight spokes that surround the cherubs, creating a little plastic cloud of manufactured heaven.

It's hard to say whether Ball is "sending up" Barney to some kind of just reward or paying elaborate homage to him. Either way, Ball's fetishistic portrait is more theatrical and compelling than the stage-prop-like character of much of Barney's own sculpture. [*The installation is on view at P.S. 1 in New York through May.*]

—Ann Wilson Lloyd



Lynn Ger
28 square