

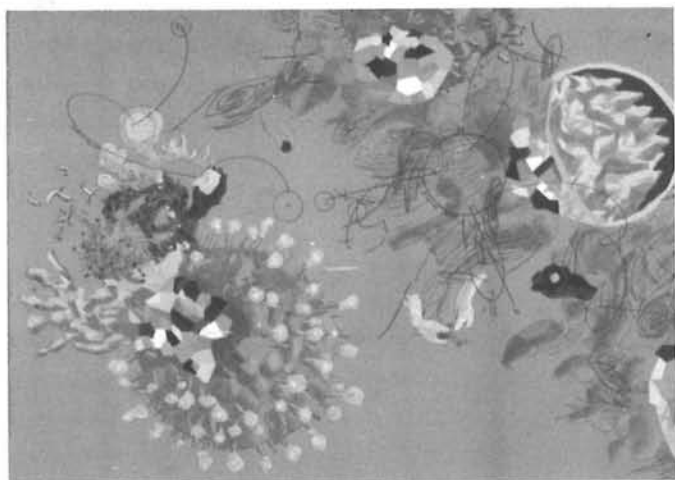
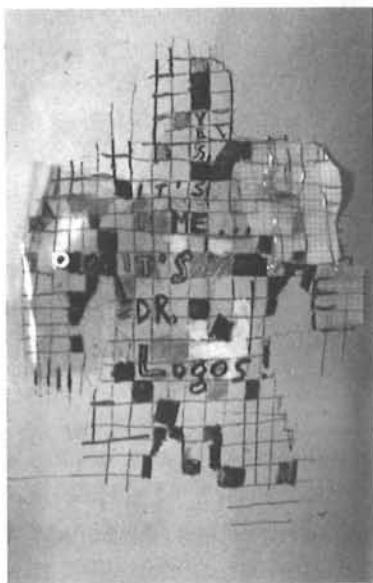
**Cleveland Center for
Contemporary Art**

Mythopoeia:

Projects by Matthew Barney,
Luca Buvoli, Matthew Ritchie

February 12 – May 2, 1999

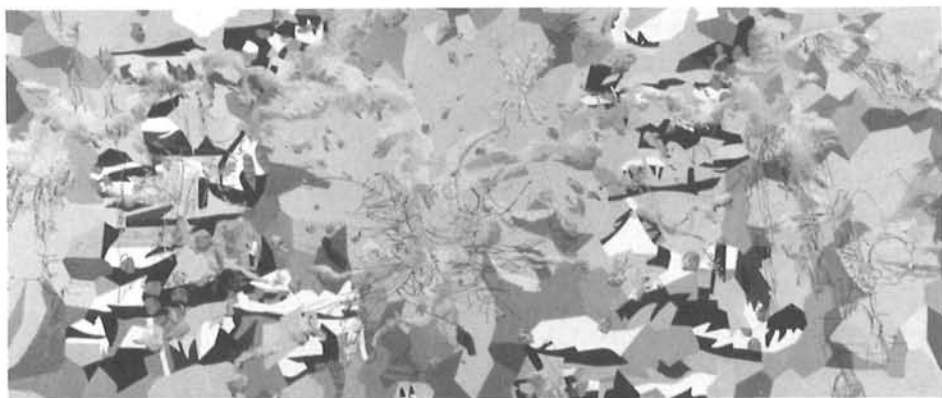
Luca Buvoli, *Not-a-Superhero #4,
The Return of Dr. Logos* (detail), 1993
Candy wrappers and other media
on paper, artist's book
11 x 7 inches, 16 pages and cover
Courtesy of the artist



Matthew Ritchie, *Day 1.1* (detail), 1996-97
Oil, marker on canvas, 56 x 100 inches
Photo: courtesy of the artist and Basilico Fine Arts, New York

Myth: a story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people, a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon

Mythopoeia: to make a myth: a creating of myth: a giving rise to myths



Matthew Ritchie, *Lucky*, 1998
Oil, marker on canvas, 80 x 200 inches
Collection of Jean-Pierre and Rachel Lehmann
Photo: courtesy of the artist and Basilico Fine Arts, New York

Mythopoeia unites the eccentric mythologies created by three renowned contemporary artists who have emerged over the past decade. The worlds of Barney, Buvoli and Ritchie incorporate such disparate pop culture and artistic genres as the comic book, science fiction and Greek mythology. Through an extraordinary cast of characters and a complex iconography that defies the tradition of linear narrative, these artists each weave a curious tale that, at its heart, probes the instability of identity and knowledge in the face of the 21st century.

The exhibition features three discrete projects: Luca Buvoli and Matthew Ritchie have each developed a site-specific installation, which serves as the latest installment in their respective mythic sagas; the latest film in Matthew Barney's epic, the *Cremaster* series, as well as his first film in that series will be screened off-site as part of the Cleveland Film Society's 23rd International Film Festival.

Matthew Ritchie — *The Big Story*

Upon entering the Center's main gallery the viewer first encounters Matthew Ritchie's installation, *The Big Story*. As is the case with all three projects in this exhibition, Ritchie's current installation is one component of a larger project that the artist has been expanding upon since 1994. Simply put, each new installation is another chapter in Ritchie's epic saga, which tells the story of creation, reaching from the beginning of time to its end, today. The tale spun by Ritchie does not proceed in a linear fashion from beginning to end. Rather, Ritchie works backwards and forwards from the conceptual focal point of the epic and the central moment in the creation of time and place—The Big Bang. Through an elaborate cast of characters and an intricate system of governing strategies, Ritchie grapples with the creation, disintegration and reformation of the entire universe. In telling his epic tale, Ritchie is interested in exploring painting as a symbolic language. Each character and universal element is represented by specific shapes and colors, which can only interact on the canvas according to the traits of the characters they represent. At first glance the resulting paintings and drawings appear to be large abstract compositions in the tradition of Jackson Pollock. Once given the key to Ritchie's visual system, however, the works take on a mythic life that slowly unfolds before the viewer.

The conceptual building blocks of Ritchie's project were first introduced in the exhibition "working model" (1995). This installation of sculptures, wall drawings and paintings introduced the systems and hierarchies that would form the basic "rules" governing the creation of Ritchie's artwork. This artistic language was represented in a detailed chart that revealed the vocabulary of shapes and colors that would form the basis of Ritchie's story. In essence, the installation as a whole served as an elaborate schematic of the universe and offered a glimpse into the intricate project being undertaken by the artist.

In "working model" Ritchie's mythic universe was static—we were simply introduced to the characters and the rules of the game in a very scientific, diagrammatic fashion. The next segment, "The Hard Way" (1996) found all of the characters and elements introduced in "working model" pushed into motion. As Ritchie's characters interact on the canvas and on the gallery walls, chaos ensues. Here, Ritchie introduces the "Watchers"—the seven central characters in his creation myth who correspond to the seven lobes of the human brain. As Ritchie explains, the Watchers are "a gang of seven damaged celestial agents [who] have been thrown out of heaven... As they fall to earth like the giant comets that fell in 50,000 B.C., each character shatters into segments which fall across the seven continents." The universe has collapsed into chaos and the Watchers are now abstractions trying to find their way back to their original forms—symbolic of the evolution of thought.

In the next installment, "The Gamblers" (1998), Ritchie takes us back to the beginning of time, before the existence of the universe or of the Watchers. Here we discover that the Watchers were born of the chaotic interactions of earlier characters. These seven characters, called the Gamblers, represent the basic building blocks of the universe. In this chapter, the Gamblers are trapped in a hot, dense Boston hotel room playing a desperate game in an effort to escape—to create the right conditions to begin time. The Gamblers' collective struggles, arguments and petty jealousies combine to create an explosive situation—The Big Bang.

All of this brings us to the newest chapter in Ritchie's epic saga. "The Big Story" combines elements of each of Ritchie's previous installations to tell the whole story to date. Through paintings, drawings, wall drawings, a large-scale floor installation and an accompanying artist's book, we are presented with a virtual map of the beginning, middle and end of the universe. The central element of the installation is the floor piece, made of a space-age plastic called Sintra, which serves as an abstract map of Ritchie's entire project. At its center lies the Big Bang. Exploding from the center of the floor piece are a series of radial structures leading to the periphery, symbolic of the seven lobes of the brain—or the characters of the Watchers. On the large wall at the far end of the gallery is an enormous map/diagram, which can be used as a key to unravel the meaning of Ritchie's installation. One can imagine "The Big Story" as a sort of fantasy game in which the viewer serves as the playing piece. With an understanding of Ritchie's abstracted visual language, one can enter the piece and play across the game board, exploring the vastness of the universe beginning with the Gamblers and the Big Bang and progressing to the Watchers' exile from heaven and the resulting evolution of life and thought.

Luca Buvoli, *Inside and Outside Time: The Real Story*, 1998-99
 Artist's book, 6.25 x 6.5 inches
 Courtesy of the artist



Luca Buvoli — *Inside and Outside Time: The Real Story*

Each of Luca Buvoli's installations, like those of Matthew Ritchie, represents another episode in a continuing saga. Begun in 1992 as a series of unique hand-drawn and collaged comic books, Buvoli's narrative has grown to include sculptural installations and animated films that follow the adventures of a character named "Not-a-Superhero" as he battles a series of foes. For his installation at the Center, Buvoli's protagonist fights Temporibus, the Guardian of Pseudocyclical Time, from a flip book, to a physical installation of the sculptural elements of the story, to a 16mm animated film, to the pages of Buvoli's artist's book.

Buvoli, an Italian artist now living and working in New York, created his first comic book when he was nine years old. What started as a boyhood infatuation with mass-produced comic books and a desire to embody all the strength

and power of a superhero, has emerged for Buvoli into a series of hand-made comic books, which at once pay homage to and disassemble the notion of the archetypal superhero. As an adult, Buvoli opts for a hero who fights the same adversaries that we as individuals fight from day to day: the foes of logic, understanding and time. Ultimately, Not-a-Superhero does not struggle to be a superhero, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but to be *superhuman*—a supreme individual.

Buvoli's hero is a vulnerable hero who fights the everyman's fight, sometimes emerging victorious and other times succumbing to his vulnerability and human flaws, ending up as confused as ever. Represented in hand-made comic books as a loose series of lines and scribbles and in accompanying installations as a loosely abstracted sculpture fashioned from bits of clothing and detritus from the streets of New York, Not-a-Superhero, like us, is a confused mess of fragments, barely legible, and ultimately quite fragile.

In previous series, "Not-a-Superhero" has battled such foes as: "The Dissector" who threatened to uncover the protagonist's true identity and all of his accompanying vulnerabilities; "The Lord of Guilt" who represented suffocation at the hands of Catholic guilt; and "Dr. Logos," the embodiment of language and rationality who sought to trap Not-a-Superhero in obtuse language that actually creates a separation of mind from body and an absence of meaning.

The latest installment in Buvoli's series, *Inside and Outside Time: The Real Story*, began as a flipbook and sculptural installation, created in 1995. For his installation at the Center, Buvoli expands the story, introducing an "action playset," an animated film (the fourth in his series) and a new endeavor for Buvoli, a fold-out artist's book. In Buvoli's words, "...this 'non-event' follows the perpetual fight of the fragmented protagonist 'Not-a-Superhero' versus the 'dehumanizing menace' Temporibus, the Guardian of Pseudocyclical Time." Like many of Buvoli's episodes, *Inside and Outside Time* operates on two levels: the first, a basic level of story-telling in the tradition of the comic book; the second, a complex structure of language and form that draws from such disciplines as Marxist theory, film theory and philosophy.

At the heart of this latest episode is the struggle between linear and cyclical time. This philosophical struggle is embodied by the protagonist's physical struggle against Temporibus. As this episode begins, Not-a-Superhero is trapped in a constant state of "becoming"—a philosophical state that, in essence, is a desire to escape bodily limitations. In an effort to transcend this state, Not-a-Superhero goes to the clocktower where he confronts Temporibus. Our hero runs, flies, is grasped and falls in a continuous, never-ending loop. Not-a-Superhero is threatened by this constant negation of his existence. By being trapped in the repetitious cycle of events that unfold at the clocktower, Not-a-Superhero can never reach the next plateau, can never truly reach his potential.

Through the physical structure of the sculptural installation, the artist's book and the animated film, Buvoli mirrors the protagonist's struggle with the constructs of time. Buvoli's installation consists of two circular rooms: the first serves as a theater for his animated film; and the other, as an "action playset" that houses the sculptural version of this episode. The circular structure of the rooms (reminiscent of the structure of the "zoetrope," an early device used to create movement before the invention of cinema) mirrors the cyclical structure of the

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narrative and the hero's struggle against cyclical time. Combined, the two rooms create the sign for infinity, offering another element that points to Not-a-Superhero's never-ending struggle. The "zoetrope" is also seen in the structure of the fold-out book created to accompany this installation. The book is structured like an accordion that, when unfolded, creates a large cylinder or ring. The first drawing after the front cover matches the last drawing in the book, again resulting in the re-creation of a continuous event. A similar repetition is achieved in Buvoli's animated film. Through a variety of innovative animation and editing techniques, Buvoli is able to re-present the same cycle of action in a number of different ways.

In *Inside and Outside Time*, Not-a-Superhero is trapped in his fragmented body, unable to reach pure perfection, once again reminding us that we are all only human. On the pages of the fold-out book, in the loop of the animated film and in the structure of the playset, our hero's struggle is truly eternal.

To be continued...

Kristin Chambers, Associate Curator

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHIES

Luca Buvoli's work encompasses such media as sculpture, drawing, animated film and artists books. He was born in Brescia, Italy in 1963 and currently works and lives in New York. His work has been shown in museums and galleries worldwide and has been exhibited most recently at the Johannesburg Biennale in South Africa and at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. His sculptural work has recently been added to the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Matthew Ritchie is a native of England who is currently based in New York. He has had a number of one-person shows in New York, Brazil, Norway and France and his work has been shown in numerous group exhibitions including recent shows at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco and the 1997 Whitney Biennial. Ritchie is currently represented by Basilico Fine Arts in New York.



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Matthew Barney — *Cremaster 4* and *Cremaster 5*

Like Ritchie and Buvoli, Matthew Barney has created his own cast of characters through whom he explores the creation of identity. To date, Barney has made three highly elaborate and ambitious films, which explore a complex allegory of creation and identity through a unique epic that draws from Greek mythology, science and personal history.

As Nancy Spector, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim Museum, explains:

“... Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster* series is an epic five-part film cycle accompanied by related sculptures, photographs and drawings. The series describes the evolution of form through elaborate biochemical and psychosexual metaphors. Taking the male cremaster muscle (which controls testicular contractions in response to external stimuli) as its conceptual departure point, the films circulate around anatomical conditions of “ascension” and “decension” to describe mythological organisms suspended in states of latency. In Barney’s eccentrically erotic universe, nothing is constructed as simply one thing or another. Rigid dualistic categories — male/female, entropy/order, motion/inertia — give way to self-enclosed systems capable of yet unimagined states of potentiality.

“Eschewing chronological order, Barney has completed numbers 4, 1 and 5 of the *Cremaster* films thus far, each of which narrate fantastical allegories of growth, transformation and physical transcendence through a variety of skewed cinematic and theatrical conventions. In *Cremaster 1*... smiling chorus girls congregate to form shifting outlines of human reproductive organs on the blue astroturf of a Boise, Idaho football stadium. Their gliding movements are determined from above by a blonde starlet, a fully “ascended” creature, who miraculously inhabits two Goodyear blimps simultaneously and creates anatomical diagrams by lining up rows of grapes [...] *Cremaster 4* unfolds on the Isle of Man — a topographical body punctured by orifices and passageways — where a feverish motorbike race transverses the landscape, a dandified, tap-dancing satyr writhes his way through a treacherous underwater canal and three burly, seemingly ambigendered fairies picnic on a grassy knoll. Part vaudeville, part Victorian comedy of manners and part road-movie, this film portrays sheer drive in its eternal struggle to surpass itself.

“The final installment of the filmic chain, *Cremaster 5*, is set against the Baroque backdrop of an eighteenth-century opera house. Performed as a lyric opera complete with ribboned Jacobin pigeons, a love-lorn queen (played by Ursula Andress) and her tragic hero, this narrative of “decension” flows from the gilded proscenium arch of the theatre, to the aqueous underworld of Budapest’s Lanchid River, to humid thermal baths inhabited by vaguely hermaphroditic water-sprites. Here, the hero’s resistance to self-division reaches its final conclusion in death and apotheosis, only to circle back upon itself in this ever-ongoing, inevitably frustrated search for formal equilibrium.”

Matthew Barney was born in San Francisco in 1967 and currently lives and works in New York. His films and related sculptural installations have been exhibited in numerous galleries and museums including the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Centre Georges Pompidou. Having completed three of the *Cremaster* films, Barney is currently finishing production on the fourth. He is represented by Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York.

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Matthew Barney's first film, ***Cremaster 4***, and his most recent, ***Cremaster 5***, will be screened as part of the 23rd Cleveland International Film Festival. The program featuring Barney's films will take place on **Tuesday, March 23rd** beginning at 6:45 p.m. The screenings will be followed by a lecture by New York based art critic Jerry Saltz.

For additional information please call 216.623.0400.

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On view at the Center: February 12 - May 2, 1999

matthew barney
film screenings
march 23