



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

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Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's MATRIX 173 Features Artist Mark Dion

Continuing the 40th anniversary celebration of its groundbreaking MATRIX exhibition series, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will present the Mark Dion / MATRIX 173 exhibition, "The Wadsworth Atheneum's Great Chain of Being," Oct. 1, 2015 – Jan. 3, 2016.

New York artist Mark Dion (American, born 1961) attended Hartford Art School in the early 1980s and, as a young artist, found inspiration and delight in the Wadsworth Atheneum's collection. Dion has returned to Hartford many times over the past three decades and continues to be a presence at the Wadsworth. In 2006, the museum acquired Dion's "Providence Cabinet" (2001)—a curiosity cabinet of cultural artifacts collected from one of three "New England Digs"—for the collection. Since 1991, the museum has also developed an impressive collection of Dion's works on paper.

For his MATRIX project, Dion combines the museum's collection with his practice of investigating the intersection of art and the history of science, applying proto-scientific systems with museum practices. He will develop a hierarchical chain of living creatures to create a Wadsworth-specific version of "The Great Chain of Being" (based on Greek philosopher Aristotle's ancient model) through details of paintings, sculptures and decorative arts found in the museum's collection.

"I am absolutely thrilled that Mark Dion has taken such an intensive interest in our various collections and that his MATRIX project generously samples these holdings with his singular approach and artistic vision," said Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art. "We are fortunate to add Mark to the ranks of accomplished artists who have participated in the MATRIX program."

The concept that all living things arranged in a continuous gradation from the simplest living form to the most noble, is one of the most dominant ideas in the Western intellectual tradition, and one of the most absurd and destructive as it sets up a class system determined by those in power. As is often the case, Dion takes on this essential foundational concept from the history of consciousness with humor and criticality; His project ridicules the great chain rather than celebrates it.

From the least important form of life to the greatest, Dion's "Great Chain" will include invertebrates and arthropods, fish and reptiles, birds and dogs, mammals and humans, monsters and angels, and, finally, the Devil and God. The series of 125 photographs will depict details of various masterpieces from the walls, pedestals, and storage vaults of the museum. Dion's complete photographic series will be acquired by the museum for the permanent collection.

The "Great Chain" will be presented in order—following the classical version—in horizontal and vertical lines throughout the gallery. Shown as circular artistic details, removed from their original contexts in overall compositions, the isolated creatures might stimulate visitors' curiosities, driving them through the museum in the interest of finding the original source works. Dion's "Great Chain" benefits from the quality and breadth of the collection, but is also circumscribed by its limits. Dion's eclectic selection reveals different forms and styles of art making, which is emblematic of the diversity of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's collection.

Public Programs

Dion will give a talk about his MATRIX project on Thursday, Oct. 1, at 6 p.m., in MATRIX's Bunce Gallery during the museum's First Thursday event. Dion will also give a gallery talk and participate in panel discussion during a free event on Sunday, Oct. 4, "Art & Curiosity Cabinets: Historical & Contemporary Perspectives," beginning at 2 p.m. Dion's "Great Chain" will be the inspiration for Second Saturdays for Families on Saturday, Oct. 10 from 1-4 p.m., which will feature live creatures visiting from the Connecticut Science Center.

Exhibition Credit

The MATRIX program is generously supported in part by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted, Carol LeWitt in honor of Andrea Miller-Keller, as well as the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Contemporary Coalition. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council's

United Arts Campaign and the Department of Economic and Community Development, which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continually operating public art museum in the United States. The museum's nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The Wadsworth Atheneum's five connected buildings—representing architectural styles from Gothic Revival to modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Admission: \$5 – 10; discounts for members, students and seniors; free admission Wednesday – Friday, 4 – 5 p.m.. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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