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EXHIBITION

**MATT MULLICAN**

**12 BY 2**

4 JUNE - 19 SEPTEMBER 2010

INSTITUT  
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

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**Born in California in 1951, Matt Mullican occupies a highly distinctive niche in the Contemporary Art field, in terms of both the nature and the range of his artistic goals.**

**The IAC is offering his largest solo exhibition in France since the one at Le Magasin Center for Contemporary Art in Grenoble, in 1990, where the emphasis was on his *City Projects*.**

**Continuing an international career that has included Documenta in Kassel in 1982, 1993 and 1997, he presented the exhibition «DC: Matt Mullican - Learning from that Person's Work» at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne in 2005.**

**Working in the fields of performance, installation, digital technology and sculpture, Mullican is seeking to develop a cosmological model based on a highly personal vocabulary combining the formal and the symbolic.**

**Hypnosis and cartography are his principal modes of operation. He explores functional sign systems of his own devising through activities under hypnosis, in a permanent oscillation between the real and its schematization, between fiction and its physical reality. Drawn from the international signage system or invented by the artist, these omnipresent pictograms are associated with primary colors to model a cosmology in the form of an endlessly expanding cartographic encyclopedia of signs and symbols.**

**Everything existing in the world - materials, concepts, temporal or geographical situations, people and modes of perception - can be fitted into Mullican's overall method of classification, whose five distinct parts can be identified by their respective color referents: green corresponds to the elements and nature, but also to death and hell; blue to the world «unframed» by consciousness, which includes the city and everyday life; yellow to the world «framed» by art and science; black to language and signs; and red to ideas and pure spirit, but also to Paradise.**

**The partial or total working-through of this system can take a host of different forms: sculptures made of concrete, metal or glass, frottage paintings, flags, bulletin boards covered with pinned images, posters, stained glass windows, models, etc. Whether taken in terms of its separate elements or as a whole, the system and its compartmentalization represent a vertiginous attempt to contain the totality of both the world and its representation.**

**For some years now Mullican has been emphasizing a more distinctive aspect of his oeuvre, which he calls *That Person's Work*, «That Person» designating the multiple subjective entity - male or female, young or old - utilized in his performances under hypnosis. Using the automatic writing mode, the experiments carried out during the performances**

give rise to texts and abstract calligraphies; these are then reworked within labyrinthine installations, accounts of an alternative existence springing from a «fictionalized» autobiography.

For his exhibition at IAC, Mullican has opted for a combination of the experimental and the archival, using close association of works and documentary material to put the overall œuvre into perspective. The focus here is on the recent cycle *That Person's Work*, which will be elucidated by works from the 1970s and which, combined with his use of hypnosis, allows for exploration of different works in different disciplines. The IAC exhibition «12 by 2» stands at a crucial point on the Mullican path in that it brings together, for the first time, the artist's own work and the fictional output of «That Person». Made explicit in the title, this duality characterizes all the spaces and is underscored by such very recent creations as the *Glass Pieces*.

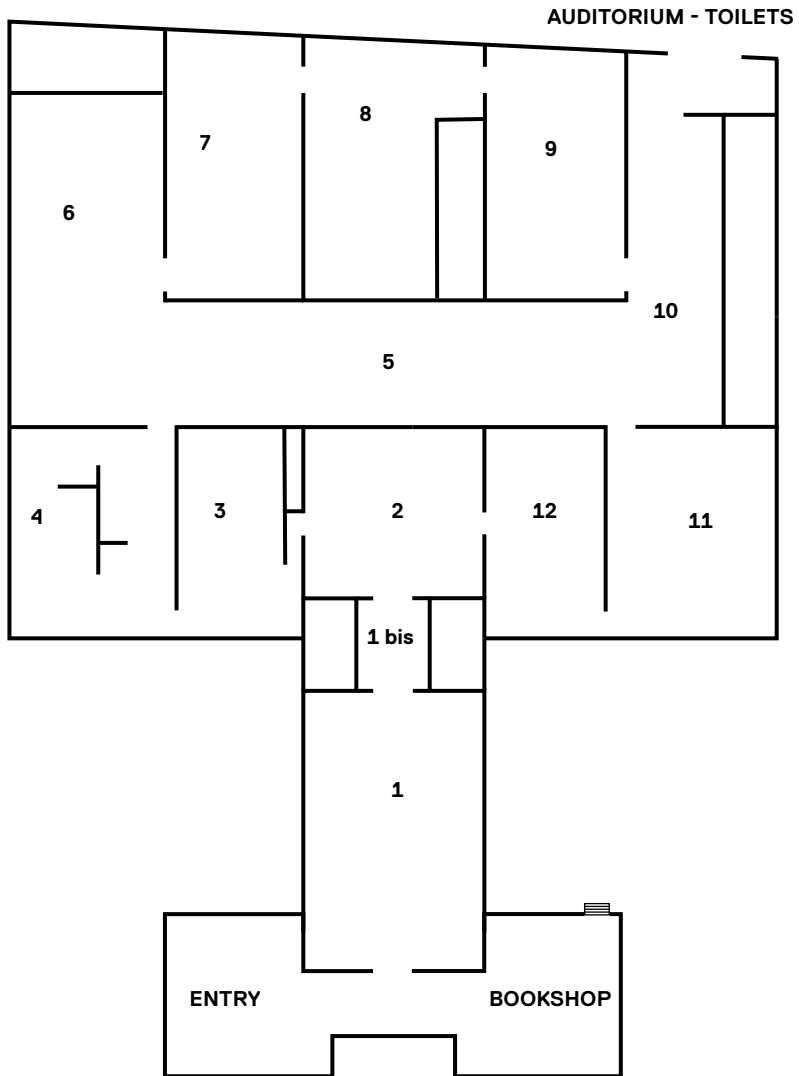
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# Exhibition rooms

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**1 & 1 bis** WORKS 1971 - 2010

**2** ARCHIVES

**3** PERFORMANCES

**4** 70'S INSTALLATION

**5 & 6** LEARNING FROM THAT PERSON'S  
WORK

**7** MODELS AFTER THE LUDWIG MUSEUM

**8** COMPUTER PROJECT

**9** NOTATING COSMOLOGY / MODELS  
FOR THE COSMOLOGY

**10** GLASS PIECES

**11** UNDER HYPNOSIS, THE KITCHEN /  
PAVILION

**12** COMBINATION OF THE TWO /  
PERFORMANCE AT ANTON KERN  
GALLERY

# rooms 1, 1 bis

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As an introduction to the exhibition as a whole, Mullican has created an installation which is an extended version of the one shown at the St Louis Museum of Contemporary Art in 2009. Comprising over 1300 mixed media pieces - drawings on paper, collages, photographs, rubbings, flags, digital images, etc. - this installation takes in close to forty years of his output, covering the walls in a way that generates an immediate sensation of visual saturation. This impression is accentuated by the rubbing **UNTITLED (COSMOLOGY) 1984**, which itself occupies almost the entire floor area in the first room.

An immersive exercise in profusion, this installation embodies the fundamentals of the Mullican oeuvre in terms of process and vocabulary, pointing up both its encyclopedic dimension and its capacity for expansion. Charged with signs, it contains the whole of the Mullican grammar and the processes underlying its modeling and development. In doing so it gives concrete expression to one of the essentials of the artist's oeuvre: the fact that the works are all indissociable and make up a constantly growing semantic network.

Since the 1970s the artist has been working on the creation of symbolic worlds which have gradually accumulated to form his **cosmology**: a vast corpus of signs adding up to a map of the world which covers all fields of activity and perception. In the course of this exploration of the relationship between the subject and the world, five levels of existence emerge, associated with color codings and a specific lexicon. The first level, green, designates the materiality of things, most often finding expression in the stylization of elements as three simple geometrical shapes: circle, triangle, and

square. This level is also associated with death, very much present in Mullican's pictograms and the subject of numerous investigations using images and work with corpses.

The second level, blue, has to do with everyday activity, or what the artists most often calls *world*: the unframed world, represented by a schematized globe.

The third level, yellow, refers to artistic and scientific activity in relation with the *world framed*; here the same schematized globe is inserted into a square.

The black level represents language, which enables the artist to create interaction between his different levels of appropriation of reality and so move from a purely material state to a more abstract approach to consciousness.

At the apex of the tree diagram the red level, identified by a head in which the location of the brain can be seen, designates spiritual activity and subjectivity.

Mullican has developed different operative modes for rendering this gigantic taxonomical **cartography** functional: the collection of images, an endless series of drawings and sketches, preparation of explanatory diagrams (or **CHARTS**), and experiments with forms of writing.

In parallel with the working out of his cosmology, which he enriches with a point of view combining the semiological and the visual, the artist has been working since the 1970s on an exploration of the invisible existence and subjective meaning of things. He does this by creating **fictive identities** - via performances under hypnosis and his stick figure, Glen - in order to multiply personal experiences of existence, including those involving a modified state of consciousness.

The resultant personification of his stylized **STICK FIGURES** enables him to intensify his meditation on the lifeless body and create **subjective projection** spaces.

Since the 1980s Mullican has also been producing rubbings based on flags, relief pieces, and posters made of cut-up and glued shapes that are part of his oeuvre. What we have here are imprints associating the symbolic field of the artist's vocabulary with a physical modality linked to the notion of energy.

Taken together the works on show in this first room point to the genesis of the artist's research: to his lexicological approach and his thinking about the **modeling** of representation.

As the construct of a representation of the world, Mullican's cosmology harks back simultaneously to those medieval representations associating the terrestrial and celestial orders, the «encyclopedic spirit» of the Renaissance, and the knowledge classification systems of the Enlightenment. Working through humanity's immemorial need to schematize the world, this cosmology attains to the universal, to utopia. Shaped with all the scientific rigor of a purely personal vocabulary drawing on the history of art and society, it also asserts its extreme contemporaneity by stressing the primacy of experience and perception and their transcription in an iconological register now unhampered by any dividing line between reality and fiction.

## room 2

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Here Matt Mullican has brought together etchings, publications, notebooks and posters, presenting them as the **archiving** and ordering of the prolific explorations of the first room.

Replicating the vocabulary of his cosmology in different ways and at different states of advancement, these series allow for a kind of deciphering of it: **pictograms** and color codes, together with symbols and their variants in **UNTITLED (PORTFOLIO, SOLWAY), 1988** ; transcription of elements resembling visual poems in the group of 64 etchings; and handwritten notes, diagrams, lists of components, images from comics, etc., in the *Notebooks*, which also contain commentaries on the evolution of the oeuvre.

Under the title **STREET SIGNS, (1975–1994), 2005**, several series of posters work through an international signage aesthetic - the kind used in airports - as a way of presenting Mullican's cosmological signs individually or in network form. Thus the five-part color series *Street Signs* isolates the sign via a kind of magnifying glass effect, and points to it specifically within the artist's classification system (*elements, world, frame, sign, subject*). The signature «Mullican» identifies each poster as if it were a trademark.

Another *Street Signs* series, this time in ten parts, combines pictograms and color codes on a white background, using tree-diagram and horizontal structures to unify the five worlds of the cosmology. This series draws man in the world, following an anthropomorphic progression in which world and body become indistinguishable.

As a space for the ordering of his cosmology, this second room also provides the artist with the opportunity to introduce «That Person», via a series of eight

etchings.

Within this global world, then, Mullican proclaims the specificity of his own existence - That Person - as characterized by the complexity of his œuvre's entanglements and visual hermeticism, and by **duality**. This latter is foregrounded by the figure «2», whose graphic modulations conjure up the vegetal, the animal, intertwinings, and musical keys.

## room 3

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Matt Mullican began his performances under **hypnosis** in the 1970s. He perceives the experience of trance as taking him into the interior of the image - in other words into the interior of himself - by projecting his gaze into the drawing and letting free association take its course. For his first use of hypnosis in the mid-70s, he called in a hypnotist, together with actors who embodied the life of an imaginary figure from birth to death.

While the cathartic and schizophrenic aspects of this approach are freely admitted by the artist, the performances nonetheless involve a humorous, intuitive exploration of the thought process and its close overlap of intellect and emotion; they also give shape to buried mental states we habitually keep at bay. This can explain the appearance of «primordial images», notably as theorized by Jung, or original representations which unconsciously influence behavior.

Like an archeologist of the mind, Mullican indulges in what he calls «going through the mirror»; for him this is a way of summoning up the viewer's subjectivity and sounding out the reality that lies beyond the visible.

Situating action in a different space-time between reality and sleep, the hypnotic state is conducive to the emergence of archetypal visions.

Mullican broke off his **performances** in 1982, then returned to them ten years later, intensifying his principle of dissociation between subject and object, real and virtual, and speculating about perception as the projection of subjective experiences.

# room 4

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## 70'S INSTALLATION

This space is devoted to various Mullican works from the 70s and 80s; their presence together in the same space is a foreshadowing of the artist's two major projects: **COSMOLOGY** and **THAT PERSON'S WORK**.

The space is presented as a metaphorical version of Mullican's fictional Studio of late 1973, with the organization of the different works of the period as retrospective **series** demonstrating the emergence of his specific modalities: accumulation, multiplication, classification, abundance, analytical breaking-down, dissociation between reality and subjective perception, and constant referencing of the body and death.

Posted at the entrance are working notes relating to the different issues Mullican had begun working on in the early 70s, in the form of anatomical checklists, ideas, synopses of performances, etc.

The artist brings all his work into this virtual environment, together with images of the memories, dreams, and cultural influences that led to the creation of his cosmology.

One of the first series shows us the emergence of the cosmology. In 1975 Mullican gave birth to what he called his **CHARTS**, a networking of the components of his cosmology via diagrammatic representation.

The *Charts* enable definition of the ongoing relationships between the signs, whether these latter are invented or real. Linear or circular, the Charts give dynamic expression to the forces and interrelationships governing the different levels of consciousness making up the cosmology.

Different components and representations scattered around the space agglomerate and become an integral part of the **cosmology**: bones (laid out as if the artist had discovered a grave), a flag, schematizations of the body, and image series (reproductions of early etchings, photographs of landscapes, etc.) enter the cosmology via a process of symbolization. Mullican endows this cultural, historical, and mystical corpus with a social dimension: his cosmology is intended neither as a religion nor a model, but as the subjective expression of his artistic vision of the world, a mingling of archeology, ethnology and iconology. He overtly espouses the tradition of the «encyclopedic spirit» which, during the Renaissance and the Classical period, marked out those who allied logical precision with curiosity about information and a philosophical turn of mind.

For Matt Mullican **death**, presented in a range of mises en scène, is an experimental subject in its own right. Symbolically present in the group of images (stairway to Hell, struggle between angel and demon, extracts from comics set on the bodies of the characters: **DETAILS FROM A FICTIONAL REALITY, 1973**), in fictive biographies (**BIRTH TO DEATH LIST, 1973**), and in the artist's creation of dreamlike spaces (**FICTIONAL REALITY, PHYSICAL EXPERIMENTS, 1974-75**), death is also the raw material of the series **UNTITLED (DOLL AND DEAD MAN) (1973)**. Mullican deepened his approach to subject/object duality with this series, whose two segments involved the handling of a cadaver followed by associations of portraits of dead people with portraits of a doll. Invited to «go through the mirror» - to enter the image - the viewer changes object into subject, placing the inert body of the man and the lifeless doll on the same plane. «What I was interested in was not going for the body, but going for the face. I was interested in the personality...What I did



with the cadaver was to cover his eyes, his ears, his nose, his mouth...I slapped his face, I blew the hair on the back of his neck, I pinched his arm. I did to the cadaver what the stick figures were doing to themselves.»

Bringing the human **body** back to life was also the subject of drawings showing a stylized character named Glen moving about his *Studio*, experiencing different everyday situations and carrying out various psychological and physiological experiments.

As a vehicle for experimentation, Glen is the lead-up to Mullican's various performances, notably those involving the perception of reality. Going contrary to these uses of the body as object, the artist enters into the reality of the image and, by doing so, challenges the spectator's subjective projection (see the performances **ENTERING THE PICTURE, 1973** and **THE FALL TO HELL, 1976**).

«For me the idea was to focus not on the objective side of the work but, naturally, on its subjective side... What interested me wasn't the surface, but going into the image, so to speak: going through the mirror by moving from the objective to the subjective. You analyze the surface, you fragment it, and then at a certain point you forget the mirror and begin to think about what it's reflecting.»

Considering perception of the world as a psychological and symbolic phenomenon, and the eye as only perceiving luminous structures, Mullican created **LIGHT PATTERNS**. As part of the studies of light he had been engaged in since 1972, these chromatic variations are also another way of breaking down our vision of reality into its various components.



*Learning from That Person's Work*, 2005 / *Cityplan etched on crystal balls*, 2009. © Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne / Rhône-Alpes

## rooms 5, 6

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### **UNTITLED (LEARNING FROM THAT PERSON'S WORK: ROOM 1 TO ROOM 7), 2005**

Mullican's «That Person» was presented for the first time at a 1982 performance at The Kitchen, a contemporary creation venue in New York. Under hypnosis the artist informed the audience that he was neither male nor female, neither young nor old, but rather the conduit for a person «existing at the center of all these concepts.»

Since then the various apparitions of «That Person» - the expression designates the external figure finding expression through Mullican's body - have allowed for fine-tuning of audience representations. The installation *Learning from That Person's Work* sets viewers at the heart of a system of words, collages, paintings, photographs, in which four video monitors allow them to determine the person's principal traits of character. Glued to white sheets hung from one end of the space to the other are different works - nine sheets of paper, covered for the most part with black-painted writing and numbers - attributed to «That Person». The layout takes the form of a series of corridors, each associated with a theme; and each theme reveals the obsessions of «That Person». Seven fields of investigation are given particular attention:

1. photos of beautiful things: girls, birds, babys [sic.], puppys, rainbows.
2. love songs, love poems, Shakespeare - love is Number 1
3. mathematics, tables of exchange, metric fact, practical.
4. recipies for survival and good tasty food Firts Aid.
5. phylosophy [sic.] to live by great thoughts! great life!
6. my photos of holes and centers etc..

### 7. spiritual thoughts diagrams.»

Mullican adds that for him «That Person» remains a mysterious manifestation: he does not even know if he is a human being or a form of thinking matter. From the tendencies indicated by the list he deduces that «That Person» is someone rather conservative and romantic, for whom love counts above all else. The organization of the work, which immerses the visitor in these note-covered corridors, contributes to the impression of actually being plunged into «That Person»'s body. For Mullican the use of sheets accentuates this: «[A sheet] is like a skin, when you sleep, it is like a skin that covers you, that keeps you warm. It is interesting how it functions when it is put upon a wall. When it becomes a wall, it is a transient thing. As a child, one plays with bed sheets, one builds tents. In your bed, you're huddled. The beds are soiled and sexy, they are also unconscious and they are body. And they are death.» They conjure up the imprint of a body whose only trace of life, portrayed in these representations, is the collecting of images, love songs, price lists, and recipies .

In this state of hypnosis and the invocation of «That Person», we can thus see the development for Mullican of an operational mode, a way of generating narrative out of fictive biographical data.

### **CITYPLAN ETCHED ON CRYSTAL BALLS, 2009**

Partially reflecting «That Person»'s world, this installation of glass spheres and hemispheres projects the Mullican cosmology onto the «That Person» construct, thereby suggesting the equivalence of these two representations of reality.

## room 7

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### **UNTITLED (MODELS AFTER THE LUDWIG MUSEUM), 2005**

Placed next to the *Learning from That Person's Work* space, which partially surrounds it, the *Models after the Ludwig Museum* series is a further arrangement of «That Person»'s fields of investigation. The subtitle is a reference to the exhibition at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne in 2005, where this work was shown for the first time; this *Models after the Ludwig Museum* is a scaled down version of the original and thus a *mise en abîme* of the arrangement of the earlier space.

Since the 1970s the artist has been designing **models** which function both as imaginary-life spaces - like the *Studio* where Glen, his stick figure, lives and works - and as more symbolic environments to which he relates the different stages of his cosmology. This installation differs from both these modalities in that it reveals a more perceptual intent: faced with the spatial reduction of an immersive project the visitor - set outside «That Person»'s world - becomes a witness of that world in its totality.

Thus offered to the visitor's gaze, this recomposition of the architecture of the original induces an impression of extraction and elevation in relation to the world shaped by «That Person». This distancing effect allows us to re-situate the signs and symbols generated by «That Person»'s various obsessions in a broader setting, thereby validating the constitution of an alternative world as the concrete manifestation of his existence.

## room 8

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### **UNTITLED (COMPUTER PROJECT), 1989**

Use of the new technologies enabled Matt Mullican to return in greater depth to the principle of entering the image, already touched on via fragments of comics and the creation of his *Stick Figures*. In the early 1980s he adopted the computer as a new medium for his *Charts*.

One outcome, in 1986, was an **imaginary city** designed with the aid of the Connections Machine II computer, provided by the Hollywood firm Digital Editions. Drawn to scale down to the tiniest detail—the overall dimensions of the city were 6 x 3 kilometers—this plan transposed into a virtual urban space is made up of landscapes, streets and buildings. Each element matches the five levels of his cosmology, which were symbolized by colors and division into neighborhoods. This hierarchical structure allowed for their representation both as a plane and in three dimensions, in a manner that is simultaneously individualized (each component is clearly identified) and global (the whole makes up a city).

Technological innovation thus allowed the artist to look into our relationship with reality, using images that are an integral part of our daily lives. The computer became an allegorical instrument expressing the creation of the world in the **language** of our time and letting the artist represent the city as a social phenomenon. In 1989 Mullican gave a new form to these computer images, using light boxes and fluorescent tubes.

This type of lighting is traditionally that of the advertising signs which enliven public spaces and tie in with the various signs and media the artist borrows from the urban context: airport signage, posters, flags, etc. This use of the computer gives rise to confusion between the real and the virtual, the digital and other visual arts media.

«I could put my whole language into any and every situation and that way represent the different ways of looking at them.»

**UNTITLED (YELLOWINBLUE I, YELLOWINBLACKMAP I, REDMAP I, BLACKMAP I, GREENMAP I), 2000**

Here we find the artist returning to the cartography notion of *Computer Project*. This series of five lightboxes looks like an assemblage of photomontage-style spatial constructions seen from above. In each we find the artist's color code and five cosmological levels, together with the same organization as for the *Charts*. At the centre the «framed world», represented in turn by its pictogram or by butterflies, is surrounded by the «unframed world» and «elements»: signs, reproductions of Renaissance etchings, maps of cities.

**UNTITLED (EXPERIMENT WITH LIGHT), 2001**

Ever since his series *Doll and Dead Man* (1973), Mullican has been interested in photography which, like the moving image, creates a distancing effect for the beholder. He believes in the existence of a psychological relationship between our perception of the object represented and the representational medium. Unlike drawing, photography is conceived of as the reality medium, the one that provides proof of the existence of a given object. Thus lightboxes are an additional opportunity to explore the artist's process of dissociation. By accentuating the depth effect, the lighting system appeals

to the viewer's subjectivity and draws him into the image. *The Experiments with Light* focus on the *Glass Pieces* Mullican has been working on since 2000, which constitute a sculptural version in glass of his cosmology. However, as they are not directly identifiable in these photographs, any attempt at objective perception leaves, yet again, scope for the viewer's imaginative powers and for duality: views or designs of cosmic space; real or digital constructions.

**UNTITLED (STUDIO EXPERIMENTS), 1995**

Using three light boxes, Mullican returns here to sequences from films made under hypnosis. These screenshots link up with «That Person»'s collecting of holes and centers.

Their common factors being utilization of the digital and the same mode of presentation, these works taken together allow us to interlink the artist's two major projects.

## room 9

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Brought together in this room are: a series of eight posters whose aesthetic is borrowed from an international signage system; pages of a book framed to make up a frieze; and a group of thirteen tables presenting the glass, wood and aluminum elements of **MODELS FOR THE COSMOLOGY, 2002**.

Here Mullican's approach differs according to the medium. His sign language is used differently according to the context it is given, so as to offer a range of **perceptual** situations. Invariably associated with a social function, the medium chosen for the cosmological vocabulary - whether poster, flag, rug, glass - will, by its very variability, allow for integration of subjective experience and appropriation by the viewer.

The point of this room is to demonstrate the way the artist tests out his cosmology, channeling it through different media and into three-dimensionality. Rooms 1 and 2, on the other hand put the cosmology on display in the form of its drawn versions.

On the thirteen tables are arrangements of the different objects which give volume to the stylized shapes indexed by the posters: the scales motif, personification of Hell, spheres and balls, etc. Traced on the glass with a marker, the simplified patterns re-embody the symmetry or the circularity of the symbols, adding an ornamental dimension to the objects.

Matt Mullican's world is permeated by the age-old themes of vertigo and falling, entry into the domain of darkness, exploration of Hell and Paradise, and the crossing of the boundary between life and death. Independently of the mythological and religious references they may contain, the summary figures drawn by the artist are primarily interesting for

the phenomenon of perception of reality they express: a reality that is more or less visible, and more or less conscious, dissociated and subjective. Using drawing, the artist breaks this reality down into syntax and converts it into symbol.

Here Mullican presents the 123 drawings making up his artist's book **NOTATING COSMOLOGY, 2008**, whose title refers to the listing and the transcribing, almost in the musical sense, of his cosmology. Echoing the posters and working through the same themes, *Notating Cosmology* functions in this space like a musical score.

The pages making up *Notating Cosmology* are taken from working notebooks spanning more than three decades (1973–2008). They list the artist's main questions and mental representations, which are given form as stylized drawings (birth, life path, destiny, death), symmetrical diagrams (angel and demon, Paradise and Hell), arrow diagrams (stairway to heaven, movement before birth, entry to Hell, etc).

The **archetypal notions** and **figures** the artist works through serve above all to fuel his modalities of reflection: collecting forms, structuring thought patterns, following the imagination/free association trajectory, projecting oneself into the image so as to elucidate ideas or enigmas.

The pages of *Notating Cosmology* also include scenarios for performances shown in photographs in room 4.

The «panel» made up of the eight posters is an imposing pointer to the major fields dealt with in the cosmology: life, destiny, god, angel and demon, Heaven, pre-birth, death, Hell. The associated symbols are extremely simplified forms for which it is interesting to note the recurring elements (circles, sticks) and the tiny nuance sometimes to be found from one sign to another as a means of expressing one or the other extremity of existence: thus life and death are represented by the same form symmetrically reversed.

## room 10

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The *Glass Pieces* allow for a new ordering of the cosmology, another spatial disposition of its signs and semantic combinations.

Here the cosmology finds its elevation and geometrical schematization through striking works in glass whose perception depends, moreover, on the lighting conditions.

Placed at eye level and characterized by their transparency, the *Glass Pieces* enable projection of the gaze into the different levels of the world represented, a world whose circulatory links they reflect.

**UNTITLED (DATABASE), 1994**, is a glass and wood sculpture that gives material expression to the tiering of Mullican's five worlds and their diffraction on all planes of representation and perception.

### **OVERALL CHART, 2003**

Other pieces state the *Charts* motifs via marker tracings on the glass, and thus extend the gamut of media used for presenting the cosmology.

The **STAINED GLASSES** offer a spatial arrangement of the simplified cosmology pattern, with its five parts and its color codes. The medium chosen harks back to the artist's interest in **light** and the experiments he began with it in the early 1970s. It refers, too, to his urge to explore what lies beyond the visible. The relationship with the sacred that is inherent in stained glass conjures up the kinship between Mullican's contemporary cosmology with their medieval cosmogony; and this link is also present in the heraldic dimension of many of his signs.



Matt Mullican, *Performance: Under Hypnosis*, The Kitchen, New York 1982 © Paula Court



# room 11

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In this single space, two environments provide a concentrate of the cumulative processes that separate Matt Mullican from «That Person».

## **UNTITLED (PAVILION), 2006**

Presented for the first time at Art Unlimited in Basel in 2006, this wooden pavilion has an interior covered with works by «That Person».

Eight panels long and half roofed-in, it provides a bay that plunges through space into the artist's favorite themes (cf. rooms 5, 6 and 7).

Papered all over with copies of pages from working notebooks and collages roughly glued onto sheets pinned into place, each wall of the pavilion offers an assemblage revealing «That Person»'s obsessions. The meticulousness of the hanging, as opposed to the compulsive look of the works, generates an effect of visual saturation at the same time as it gives the installation its celebratory character: this is a mix of votive temple and commemorative hall that immerses the visitor in a catalog of images depicting a stereotyped version of modern home comfort. Breaking in at the far end, love, feebly lit by two hanging bulbs, once again occupies a significant place.

In the 80s Mullican became particularly interested in his **BULLETIN BOARDS**, with various documents pinned to them. For him these institutionalized information supports reflected a social situation either public (school, company) or private (kitchen) that offered scope for arranging data.

Once again the thematic assembling of photos, texts or drawings on panels was the opportunity to systematize information and tie the resultant perception to a specific presentation medium, in other words to a specific,

meaning-inducing context.

Once more we find the **encyclopedic spirit** of his cartography of the world and his virtuoso associating of the logical and the poetic.

The *Bulletin Boards* are home to technical and scientific plates whose sheer range of subject matter - anatomy, astronomy, architecture, crystallography, electricity, geometry, seashells, numismatics, navigation, optics, ornithology, mineralogy - embraces an enormous diversity of forms, some organic, others man-made.

The thematic subgroups, most often brought together in alphabetical order, give the impression of having been extracted from larger wholes, in a reflection of Mullican's permanent interconnecting of detail and totality. Plates of his own work are added to the encyclopedic ones: diagrams of his cosmology, abstract experiments with forms and colors, black and white photos (everyday objects, a doll, performances, bones), *Stick Figures*, symbols, etc. Allegorical etchings are also to be found on the panels, pointers to certain iconographic references Mullican sometimes uses for his cosmogonic **representations** (angels and demons, Heaven and Hell, etc.)

Formally, as an attempt to cover all domains of knowledge and produce systematic lists of forms, the *Bulletin Boards* seem to reactivate—at the same time as they subvert—the encyclopedic concerns of the philosophers of the Enlightenment (cf. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, published in France between 1751–1772 under the editorship of Diderot and D'Alembert). The aim is to pin down visual proofs of the existence of the universe and to reintroduce them into contemporary life in association with the artist's personal representations.

Via their synchronic examination of Mullican's elements - similar to Aby Warburg's iconological research - the *Bulletin Boards* highlight the core aspect of his oeuvre: the creation of a system of symbols and the development of a language whose signs function on several levels of meaning simultaneously.

**UNDER HYPNOSIS, THE KITCHEN, NEW YORK, 1982**

Placed on the wall, the self-portrait *Under Hypnosis* comes from the performance of the same name, presented at The Kitchen in 1982 (and shown here on the monitor, opposite).

A chart of the artist's own body, this work was later used in the *Blown Glass Anatomy* pieces as an anthropomorphic figuration of his cosmology.

As is often the case with Mullican, the body is used here like a test tube, a locus for research and experimentation; a machine inside which energy flows, fluids, thoughts, and different levels of consciousness all circulate.

## room 12

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This room contains a group of works created under hypnosis. The installation plunges the viewer into the stage context of Mullican's performances, bringing together in a single space the cosmology and «That Person», both rooted in the artist's performance work of the 1970s.

**ONE NIGHT PERFORMANCE, ANTON KERN GALLERY, 2002**

The installation and the accompanying drawings all come from a performance under hypnosis presented by the artist in 2002.

For this performance the stage is divided in two by a low wall draped with yellow and red fabric - the framed world of scientific and artistic activity, together with that of the subject's spiritual activity - with a table on one side and a bed on the other. In the course of four segments Mullican performs a range of activities including drawing on the wall, reading the newspaper and stretching out on the bed. The enigmatic-looking figures produced during this work under hypnosis are a modeling of the images reaching him from this modified state of consciousness.

**UNTITLED (COMBINATION OF THE TWO; WHITNEY NY, RUBBING A AND DRAWING/ VIDEO), 2008**

On the wall are two rubbings taken from a fresco created during the performance *Combination of the Two*.

In the course of the performance Mullican walks about the stage with a cushion and a blanket, sits down at a table to drink, then uses a brush and a pen to create a work on the wall combining drawing and automatic writing (the account of this accompanies the rubbing).

Beginning in 1984 the artist produced a series of rubbings on the theme «transfer of energy». The rubbings are taken from sandblasted reliefs.

Pursuing his exploration of our perception of the visible, he looks into the relationship between model and copy, once more triggering a multiplication of his symbols and systems.

«The rubbing is not a painting, a drawing or a print, none of them and all of them. It is a retinal image in the sense of Plato's shadow. When I look at something, what any eye sees is the retinal image, but the world is not that. What the rubbing represents is what the eye sees, the relief is it.»

This «transfer of energy» governs the Mullican oeuvre. Each fragment, each series is inscribed in a whole and is to be understood as part of an entity bringing together the artist's two great projects: «That Person» and the cosmology.

«A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face.»<sup>1</sup>

1. Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*, trans. Andrew Hurley, Penguin Classics, 2000, p. 183

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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**Matt Mullican**  
**12 by 2**

Exhibition from 4 June to 19 September 2010

### OPENING TIMES

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wednesday to sunday - 1pm to 7pm

Free group tours  
saturday and sunday at 3pm  
or with advance booking

### HOW TO GET THERE

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Bus C3 to Institut d'art contemporain  
Bus 99 to Ferrandière  
Métro ligne A to République  
Station vélo'v à 1 minute à pied  
The Institut d'art contemporain is near  
Lyon Part-Dieu station and a minute's  
walk from a Vélo'v bike-hire station

### ADMISSION

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• full price : 4€ • reduce price : 2,50€

### LIBRARY

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with advance booking

### BOOKSHOP SPECIALIZED IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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Accessible during opening hours of the exhibitions

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**INSTITUT  
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN**  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

11 rue docteur Dolard  
69100 Villeurbanne  
France

tél. +33 (0)4 78 03 47 00  
fax +33 (0)4 78 03 47 09  
[www.i-ac.eu](http://www.i-ac.eu)