

MAI 36 MADRID

Matt Mullican

16.11.24 – 01.02.25

Mai 36 is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Matt Mullican, organized in dialogue with two simultaneous exhibitions by the artist in Spain, curated by ProjecteSD Barcelona and 1Mira Madrid. Each of these exhibitions offers a distinct perspective on Mullican's artistic trajectory over five decades.

This exhibition focuses on Mullican's large-format "rubblings" - for which wooden panels are carved and then transferred onto primed colored canvases by rubbing with oil sticks. These works constitute a hybrid medium, combining characteristics of printmaking, drawing, and painting. Mullican considers the rubbing to be the first medium of reproduction, placing these pieces within a long tradition of transferring and disseminating images, texts, and data.

The exhibition brings together seven rubbings that address fundamental questions in Mullican's artistic practice, including his early explorations of reality and perception, which began during his student years in the 1970s.

Untitled (Carbon), from 2014, is the only text-based work in the exhibition and represents the "green world" or "world of elements" in Mullican's five-color scheme. Over the years, the artist has developed a personal language composed of formal and symbolic elements associated with five recurring colors: green, blue, yellow, black, and red, each linked to a different "world." The first world, represented by green, symbolizes the material world; the second, blue, refers to everyday life; the third, yellow, relates to the world of culture and science; the fourth, black and white, represents language; and the last, red, corresponds to subjective experience. The yellow space in Untitled (Element and Empty Interior Space), from 2014, refers to a fictional studio that first appeared in Mullican's drawings in 1973. This fictional studio is home to a stick figure created and identified by Mullican as "Glenn." Through this character, Mullican investigates human perception and empathy toward fictional characters, aiming to demonstrate that even stick figures "live" in some way.

Similarly, the color grid in Untitled (City and Light Patterns) recalls Mullican's light experiments from 1972 and his idea that everything we perceive is simply patterns of light. This applies whether we look at the physical world or the fictional one, whether in photographs, comics, or even a cup of coffee in the morning. This notion of fictional reality is also explored in Untitled (Tintin's World Framed to Elements at the Center), from 2018, which incorporates a multicolored detail from a Tintin comic.

The exhibition continues with Mullican's cosmological model, a schema that describes human existence from before birth to after death. Similar to ancient cultural cosmologies, this model seeks to explain how the world functions. The early series of 40 drawings titled Untitled (Details of the Cosmology), from 1982/83, is the first work in which Mullican presents various details of his cosmology, separating each element into 40 steps. Finally, the black-and-white frottage from the sketchbook Untitled (Between Chapters), from 2022, represents the cosmological model in its complete circular scheme, where birth and death—both in a material and spiritual sense—converge at a single point, creating a continuous and repeatable cycle of life.

Mullican's work has been exhibited at many international venues, including the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan (2018) Camden Arts Centre, London; and Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2016); Kunsthalle Mainz, Germany (2014); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2011); Tate Modern, London (2007); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2005); Kunsthalle Basel and Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2001); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1998); Centre for Contemporary Art—Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, and Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (1996); Nationalgalerie, Berlin, and IVAM, Centre del Carme, Valencia (1995); Wiener Secession, Vienna (1994); and MOCA, Los Angeles (1989 and 1986). He has participated in several collective exhibitions, most recently the 55th Venice Biennale (2013); Singapore Biennale (2011); and 28th São Paulo Art Biennial and Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum, New York (2008).