

## WHITE CUBE

David Altmejd

*The Serpent*

14 March – 19 April 2025

White Cube New York

Debuting a new large-scale installation alongside a series of busts and bronze sculptures, 'The Serpent' at White Cube New York marks the latest evolution in Canadian artist David Altmejd's interrogation and upturning of nature's sacred hierarchies – those intrinsic yet volatile structures through which order and chaos contend. Forged through an instinct-driven process that merges realism with crude expressionism, Altmejd's work manifests as a potent expression of the subconscious mind, wherein elemental dichotomies of man and beast, entropy and structure, growth and decay, co-mingle in an ecstatic revelation.

Entering the first floor of the gallery, we are met with *The Serpent* (all works 2025) – a monumental, winding serpent, composed of a chain of conjoined human heads, its own head lifting to meet that of its conjurer, *Snake Charmer*. The reciprocal relationship between these two sculptures enacts a dialogue between creation and creator, between matter and design – a tension that Altmejd both interrogates and exalts. During the process of creating *The Serpent*, Altmejd found *Snake Charmer* to be a guiding presence – a quiet master of order, without which *The Serpent*, with its generative chain, might have continued evolving toward limitless ends. Though initially uniform, *The Serpent*'s heads gradually diminish in size and morph into the heads of rabbits further along the sequence. In recent years, animal entities have featured with increasing frequency in the artist's oeuvre, particularly the rabbit, a manifestation of the Trickster archetype in Jungian psychology – a shapeshifting disruptor, a playfully subversive force, a messenger of the subconscious. *The Serpent*, with its chthonic ties to the underworld, here functions analogously to Trickster, its very genetic code entwined with it.

In the preconscious realm where much of Altmejd's sculptural work emerges and takes form, other animals and spirit entities enter the scene. In the upper gallery, swans and nymphic figures commune in an expressive display of dance and music. The swan assumes form in two sculptures, transfigured by Altmejd into musical instruments wielded by enigmatic human figures. Individually titled *The Prometheus Chord* and *The Lydian Chord*, the 'Swan Musicians', with their visored eyes, facial hair and minimalist regalia, exude the swagger and self-assured presence of otherworldly rock stars. They engage in a performance with the 'Nymphs', three life-size bronze sculptures suspended mid-movement, with their arms raised and dresses billow-

ing. Amid the meticulous detailing of these sculptures, rough-hewn surfaces disrupt the illusion of stillness, imbuing them with movement and life.

Altmejd interprets this gathering of figures as manifestations of different facets of his Self. In the 'Swan Musicians' for example, intimations of the swan's long-standing affiliations with masculine virility, which run as far back as Zeus's seduction of queen Leda in Greek mythology, can be found. Mythic precedent aside, the swan's very nature reinforces its symbolic potency: at once a creature of formidable power and grace, the swan represents a confluence of archetypally feminine and masculine energies within a single form. Its body glides across water, dipping occasionally beneath its surface – an element that, in Jungian thought, serves as an analogy for the unconscious. Allusions to music, too, become pertinent. Across disciplines – from philosophy to physics – music has been long understood as a governing principle of nature, an unseen architecture that structures existence. Yet, where there is order in Altmejd's work, there must also exist its counterforce disorder, or as he observes, 'If music symbolises order, I want to make matter dance.'

Working through a process of discovery, Altmejd navigates what he describes as the shifting temperaments of 'chaos and order' both aesthetically and materially. A tension that pervades his practice, the work embodies a dialectic of control and surrender freighted with unconscious import, resulting in formal qualities of alternating precision and roughness. Altmejd has long been attuned to these dual forces existing within his work, yet his relationship to them has evolved. 'It has its own intelligence, its own reason, its own desires, its own will', he acknowledges, relinquishing control to become a guide. Wall-mounted head sculptures – hands cupped around mouths, partially agape – stand as both sentinels and provocateurs, bearing witness to this unfolding event. Like tuning forks, the heads articulate the projection of sound, their hands shaping the air as if to transmit the frequencies embedded in their titles – *C, E, G#, B* – notes that together form the architecture of a suspenseful, mysterious chord. They speak to the reflexive nature of his practice, underscoring that Altmejd's work is not only an exploration of material and matter but also a discovery of the self – he himself both an observer of his work's self-generative existence and an inextricable participant within it, enmeshed in the life he has set into motion.

## BIOGRAPHY

David Altmejd was born in Montréal in 1974 and lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the University of Québec in Montréal and graduated with an MFA from Columbia University, New York in 2001. His numerous international exhibitions include a major survey exhibition 'Flux', which travelled from Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris to MUDAM in Luxembourg and the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (2014–15). In 2007, he represented Canada at the 52nd Venice Biennale with his installation 'The Index' and has also been included in the 13th Kaunas Biennial, Lithuania (2021); the Liverpool Biennial, UK (2008); the Whitney Biennial, New York (2004) and the 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003).

White Cube New York is open  
Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm  
Admission is free.

Children must be kept in hand at all times.

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## FIRST FLOOR

### 1 *Snake Charmer*

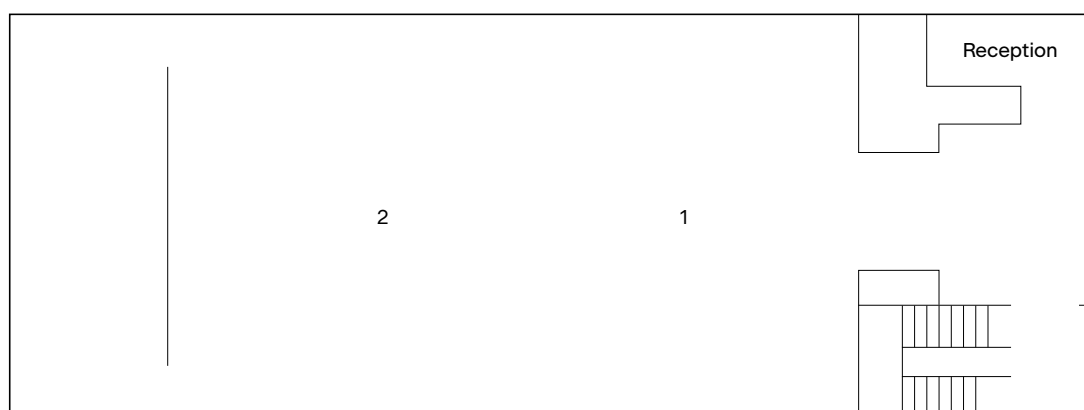
2025

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metallic foil, foam, steel rods,  
wood, pencil, acrylic paint, PVC pipes, glass rhinestones  
41 ¾ × 29 ⅞ × 33 ¼ in. | 106.0 × 75.9 × 84.5 cm

### 2 *The Serpent*

2025

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, human hair, fiberglass, metallic  
foil, foam, steel rods, steel plates, steel bars, wood, colored  
pencil, pencil, glass, quartz crystals, glass rhinestones,  
acrylic paint, metal studs, primer  
98 × 104 × 296 in. | 248.9 × 264.2 × 751.8 cm



FIRST FLOOR

- 3

*E*

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metallic foil, pencil, colored pencil, acrylic paint

14 ¾ × 6 ¾ × 8 in. | 37.5 × 17.1 × 20.3 cm
- 4

*G#*

2025

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metallic foil, pencil, colored pencil, acrylic paint, metal wire, glass rhinestones

12 ¾ × 7 ⅞ × 7 in. | 32.4 × 18.1 × 17.8 cm
- 5

*B*

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metallic foil, pencil, acrylic paint, screws

12 ½ × 7 ½ × 8 in. | 31.8 × 19.1 × 20.3 cm
- 6

*C*

2025

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metallic foil, pencil, colored pencil, acrylic paint, screws, glass rhinestones

11 ¾ × 7 ⅜ × 7 ½ in. | 29.8 × 18.7 × 19.1 cm
- 7

*The Lydian Chord*

2025

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, human hair, foam, steel rods, concrete, pencil, Sharpie, acrylic paint, metal wire, glitter

32 ½ × 48 ¾ × 30 ½ in. | 82.6 × 123.8 × 77.5 cm
- 8

*Nymph 3*

Bronze

78 × 25 × 31 ¼ in. | 198.1 × 63.5 × 80.6 cm
- 9

*Nymph 1*

Bronze

61 ½ × 29 × 20 ½ in. | 156.2 × 73.7 × 52.1 cm
- 10

*Nymph 2*

Bronze

76 × 29 ½ × 21 ½ in. | 193 × 74.9 × 54.6 cm
- 11

*The Prometheus Chord*

2025

Epoxy clay, epoxy resin, human hair, foam, steel rods, concrete, pencil, Sharpie, acrylic paint, metal wire, glitter

42 × 44 × 17 in. | 106.7 × 111.8 × 43.2 cm

