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On Matthew Barney Following the Rules of Critique (I'm *Drawing Restraint*)

With a name as big and notorious as Matthew Barney's, it was hard not to have some preconceived notion before seeing the exhibition *Drawing Restraint* for the first time at the SFMOMA. It was difficult to see just with my eyes and not have my brain interfere with the experience of seeing the show. And as such, my viewing and critique of the exhibition went from *macro* to *micro* back to *macro* again. The preconceived ideas I had about Barney and the *Drawing Restraint* series along with the first pass over of the works made up the first '*macro*;' I could see only the entire exhibition as one oeuvre which bothered me for reasons which were as yet unclear. But as I narrowed my examination to the parts that made up the show, I found some really beautiful and (dare I say) interesting work. Barney has a very delicate drawing style, which reminded me a little of some Egon Schiele drawings though certainly stranger in content. His sense of composition and his use of materials in his sculptures and large installations were certainly strong. Some of the photographs were beautiful and striking in their colors and compositions alike. So what was bugging me? As my attention began to drift back to the '*macro*,' I began to wonder why Barney needed to put all these things together in a way that suggested he was trying to say something more 'important' and 'significant' than can be said with simple works of art. I realized this attitude was what bothered me. My biggest wish was that Barney would have enough confidence in the parts that he didn't need to lump them all into this *oeuvre*, to make something appear of great consequence: the drawings that were cased in the resin tables could have been enough on their own; the photos would have been enough with out the enigmatic self-lubricating plastic frames; the installations of ship-wrecks and casts of petroleum enough with out the videos hanging over head; the videos enough without the photographic stills on the walls; the performance of *Drawing Restraint #14* enough with out the Douglas McArthur costume. Even the exhibition as a whole would have been enough with out the "philosophical", at times esoteric, rhetoric which abounds on the printed material. As I looked back again from a *macro* viewpoint, I realized that what bothered me was Barney's working so hard to make his work *something*, that in fact, it made it all *nothing*. It reminded me of a quote from Michael Kimmelman's book "Portraits: Talking with Artists at the Met, the Modern, The Louvre, and Elsewhere:"

"Art is a *métier*," Balthus declares, having worked himself into a lather again. "I don't consider myself an artist. I consider myself a worker. Unfortunately now this idea seems useless, because if you look at modern art you see that now everybody can do everything," he shakes his head in disgust. "And in fact nobody does anything."