BAM presents the world premiere of Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler’s *River of Fundament*, Feb 12—16

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*River of Fundament*
A film by Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler
Produced by Matthew Barney and Laurenz Foundation

Written and directed by Matthew Barney
Music written and directed by Jonathan Bepler

**BAM Harvey Theater** (651 Fulton St)
Feb 12—16 at 7pm
Tickets start at $20

**Brooklyn, NY/January 17, 2014**—Taking the American landscape as its backdrop, the film *River of Fundament* is an epic story of regeneration and rebirth, set in three major American cities—Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York. Loosely based on Norman Mailer’s 1983 novel *Ancient Evenings*, the film follows the death and reincarnation of two principal characters, who take the form of Norman Mailer and an anthropomorphic automobile. A collaboration between visual artist Matthew Barney and Berlin-based American composer Jonathan Bepler, the film was conceived of as a contemporary opera that combines documentary footage of three live acts performed in outdoor environments in Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York, with live action cinema, largely set in a careful recreation of Mailer’s Brooklyn brownstone apartment where the late author’s wake is underway.

In *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer’s protagonist, the nobleman Menenhetet I, uses magic and trickery in order to become reincarnated three times in the womb of his wife, who then becomes his mother. In each attempt at reincarnation, the undead must cross the river of feces to attain new life, with the goal of changing his corporeal status from that of nobleman to pharaoh. In his third and final attempt to transform, Menenhetet III becomes stuck in the womb, failing to reincarnate. In *River of Fundament*, Barney recasts “Norman” in the role of the protagonist, as he endures two rebirths, failing in the third, in hopes of attaining a higher status among the ancestry of Great American Letters. The looming spirit of Hemingway haunts Norman as he transitions from one body to the next.

The film unfolds in three parts, each of which includes one of the live acts that follows the narrative of the automobile. Aspects of the protagonist’s will and desire for transformation are put into action in the outdoor productions that are performed in *REN* (Los Angeles, 2008), *KHU* (Detroit, 2010), and *BA* (New York City, 2013), involving the 1967 Chrysler Imperial from *CREMASTER 3*, a 1979 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am, and a 2001 Ford Crown Victoria Police Interceptor. Rivers and thoroughfares dominate the landscape, evoking the river of feces described in Mailer’s novel. From the freeways of Los Angeles, to the River Rouge and Detroit Rivers central to the automotive industry, and finally to New York City’s East River—host to a funereal barge ferrying the Mailer apartment—manmade and natural arteries transport the protagonist on his journey from death to rebirth. As in Bepler’s previous explorations of sound and its potential as a vehicle to channel transgressive states, *River of Fundament*’s musical
component is an autonomous element that shapes the subliminal drives at play within the storyline.

The central scene of *River of Fundament* is a wake for Norman Mailer, which is imagined as a lavish dinner party attended by New York’s cultural literati including Salman Rushdie, Liz Smith, Dick Cavett, Lawrence Weiner, and Larry Holmes, as well as characters from *Ancient Evenings* and Barney’s earlier film project *The CREMASTER Cycle*. The wake takes place inside the Mailer apartment, which in the final act of the film is ferried down the river. This central scene of the wake is intercut with scenes from the earlier performances and the story of Norman’s journey along the river of fundament parallels that of the automobile, and is populated by the incestuous characters detailed in the myth of Osiris. As the story of Norman’s lives are recounted to him by an elder pharaoh, Norman’s widow and wives contemplate the soul’s journey as a series of recitatives, quoting passages from *Ancient Evenings*, as well as American authors Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William S. Burroughs.

*River of Fundament* features a notable and diverse cast. Specialists from various industrial processes—including large scale iron smelting, automobile demolition, and sulfur casting—join dramatic actors Ellen Burstyn, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Paul Giamatti, John Buffalo Mailer, and Elaine Stritch. In addition, the film features characters from Barney and Bepler’s previous collaboration *CREMASTER 3*, including characters played by Barney and Aimee Mullins. Avant-garde vocalist Joan La Barbara, percussionist Milford Graves, baritones Eugene and Herbert Perry, funk/blues singer Belita Woods, singer Lila Downs, singer/songwriter Shara Worden, singer/actor Deborah Harry, composer/organist Dr. Lonnie Smith, and the Mystic River Singers (a Native American pow-wow group) lead an eclectic group of musicians.

Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler have worked together since *CREMASTER 1* in 1995. Bepler continued to score Barney’s films *CREMASTER 2, 3, and 5*. Barney’s *The CREMASTER Cycle* (1994-2002), consisting of the films and related sculptures, photographs and drawings, was exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York to critical acclaim. The *CREMASTER* films have achieved worldwide distribution in the worlds of art, film, and music. With a strong belief in the spirit of collaboration, Barney and Bepler have worked with a broad range of talents in the past including Norman Mailer, actress Ursula Andress, performance artist Marti Domination, singer-songwriter Patty Griffin, thrash metal drummer Dave Lombardo, the Budapest Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra, hardcore bands Agnostic Front and Murphy’s Law, and the Radio City Rockettes.

Following the world premiere at BAM on February 12, *River of Fundament* will make its European premiere at the Bavarian State Opera, Munich, in March 2014 in conjunction with *River of Fundament*, an exhibition of sculpture and drawing at Munich’s Haus der Kunst curated by Okwui Enwezor. Following the premiere, the film will tour for two years in proscenium theaters at international performance festivals. The tour is organized by the Manchester International Festival.

*River of Fundament* is presented worldwide on behalf of the artist by Manchester International Festival.

For press information, contact Joe Guttridge at jguttridge@BAM.org, 718.636.4129 x4.

**About the artists**

**Matthew Barney** was born in San Francisco in 1967 and raised in Boise, Idaho. He attended Yale University, receiving his BA in 1989, and then moved to New York City, where he lives and works today. From his earliest work, Barney has explored the transcendence of physical limitations in a multimedia art practice that incorporates feature-length films, video installations, sculpture, photography, and drawing. In 1994, Barney began work on his epic *CREMASTER Cycle*, a five-part film accompanied by related sculptures, photographs, and drawings, which he completed in 2002.
Barney has exhibited worldwide and has received numerous awards including the Aperto prize at the 1993 Venice Biennale; the Hugo Boss Award in 1996; the 2007 Kaiser Ring Award in Goslar, Germany; and the San Francisco International Film Festival’s Persistence of Vision Award in 2011.

Composer Jonathan Bepler was largely self-taught on many instruments before he attended Bennington College, where his studies focused on composition, improvisation, and performance. Bepler’s interest in collaboration and interdisciplinary work was further explored during the twenty years he lived in New York City, before moving to Berlin. His work often involves the co-mingling of seemingly disparate elements, a love of chaos, and a desire for reconciliation. He has collaborated with choreographers including John Jasperse, Sasha Waltz, and Jennifer Lacey. Bepler has worked with the Ensemble Modern, the Glenn Branca Ensemble, and the Basel Synfonietta. A multi-channel sound installation for Broken Ensemble was recently exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati. His 2008 score for The Rape of the Sabine Women, a collaboration with artist Ann-Sofi Siden inside the Royal Dramatic Theater of Sweden, was shown in Berlin and Stockholm.

Credits
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General Information
BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, BAM Rose Cinemas, and BAMcafé are located in the Peter Jay Sharp building at 30 Lafayette Avenue (between St Felix Street and Ashland Place) in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn. BAM Harvey Theater is located two blocks from the main building at 651 Fulton Street (between Ashland and Rockwell Places). Both locations house Greenlight Bookstore at BAM kiosks. BAM Fisher, located at 321 Ashland Place, is the newest addition to the BAM campus and houses the Judith and Alan Fishman Space and Rita K. Hillman Studio. BAM Rose Cinemas is Brooklyn’s only movie house dedicated to first-run independent and foreign film and repertory programming. BAMcafé, operated by Great Performances, offers a bar menu and dinner entrées prior to BAM Howard Gilman Opera House evening performances. BAMcafé also features an eclectic mix of spoken word and live music for BAMcafé Live on Friday and Saturday nights with a bar menu available starting at 6pm.
Subway: 2, 3, 4, 5, Q, B to Atlantic Avenue – Barclays Center (2, 3, 4, 5 to Nevins St for Harvey Theater)
          D, N, R to Pacific Street; G to Fulton Street; C to Lafayette Avenue
Train:  Long Island Railroad to Atlantic Terminal – Barclays Center
Bus:    B25, B26, B41, B45, B52, B63, B67 all stop within three blocks of BAM
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For ticket information, call BAM Ticket Services at 718.636.4100, or visit BAM.org.

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