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MIT List Visual Arts Center presents
Matthew Day Jackson: The Immeasurable Distance
May 8-July 12, 2009
Hayden, Reference Galleries

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 7, 2009, 5:30-7:30PM

Saturday, May 9, 2009, 2PM, Bartos Theatre
A conversation with artist Matthew Day Jackson and MIT Professor David A. Mindell, author of *Digital Apollo*, (MIT Press), moderated by curator Bill Arning

Cambridge, MA—April 2009. The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to present *Matthew Day Jackson: The Immeasurable Distance*, a solo exhibition that includes works based on Jackson's artist's residency at MIT. Jackson's complex research, histories, and hagiographies are manifested in sculptures, constructed paintings, objects, books, and videos. In this exhibition, organized by Bill Arning, Jackson continues his investigations into human consciousness and explores how positive evolutionary developments in human thought and culture occur under physical or mental stress. Other works explore how constructive and destructive technological developments often stem from a similar impetus: to expand human experience despite all odds, proving that progress is possible, whatever the risk. Drag racing, the Apollo space missions, test-pilot culture, the nuclear legacy in terms of both science and culture, commingle with iconic twentieth-century figures like visionary Buckminster Fuller, Big Daddy Don Garlits, Eleanor Roosevelt...even the artist's mother. Jackson relates these modern myths using his iconic players as mischievous tricksters to question what it means to live at a time when technology has rewritten philosophy and religion.

Jackson grapples with such big themes as technology, nature, and God. In his most recent works, the artist considers how scientific discoveries granting mankind seemingly godlike powers can be applied for constructive, destructive, or morally ambiguous ends. Even the most seemingly pure progressive thinking can contain the seeds of its own nemesis, while weapons also can be repurposed for peaceful ends. No venue could be more appropriate for interrogating this situation than MIT, where the positive and negative applications of science are in a complex century-long dance.

One aspect of the exhibition focuses on Jackson's intense interest in the 1969 Apollo 11 space voyage, the first mission to land a human on the surface of the moon. MIT developed the computer codes that brought the astronauts safely to the moon's surface, a 1400-page document called *Luminary 1A* that is in the collection of the MIT Museum. Within the codes are quotations from Shakespeare and the radical politics of the 1960s ("Burn Baby Burn") and strange asides to future readers ("Look around and see where you are"). In collaboration with the MIT Museum, the artist created a facsimile edition of the document, which is a digitally scanned and bound series of antique-style books that will be available for viewers to peruse.

Jackson's *Study Collection* (2009) is an enormous stainless steel shelf-unit (inspired by the artist's visits to the technological artifacts in MIT Museum's basement storeroom). It features models of all of the missile systems including the V1, V2, Thor, Titan, and Cruise missiles, as well as models of Fat Man and Little Boy along with other thought-artifacts created in the artist's studio.

Study Collection also features a series of models that show the artist's skull morphing into the skull of Phineas Gage, a railroad construction foreman who miraculously survived a tragic accident in which an explosive charge drove a large iron rod through his skull, destroying a portion of his brain's frontal lobes. The accident has been chronicled in medical history as profoundly influencing 19th-century thinking about the brain and its localized functions as they relate to personality and behavior. Harvard University Medical School's Warren Museum contains Gage's actual skull in its collection of historical artifacts. *Study Collection* features a 3-D digital scan of the 3-foot damping rod that shot through Gage's skull making him a living oddity and example of the mind/body split.

In *The Lower 48*, (2006) Jackson created a series of photographs that make up an expansive wall-size grid. Taken over the course of approximately four months while driving through the Continental U.S. in the summer and fall of 2006, each of Jackson's 48 photographs depicts an anthropomorphic land formation. Jackson's photographic compositions reveal the decidedly human characteristics contained in the rock formations. A fantastic look at the familiar, these "land portraits" capture fleeting glimpses of nature personified.

Chariot II-I like America and America Likes Me (2008) was first shown in *The Violet Hour* at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle. The work starts as a meditation on Jackson's family background and his decision to pursue a life and career as a fine artist. Conceptually, the work can also be experienced as a monument to the unlimited power of the human spirit to grow and to remake itself and the world. (The subtitle is derived from a work by the German artist Joseph Beuys whose work and materials were also frequently employed in homage to the power of positive transformation.)

In creating *Chariot II*, Jackson rescued a crashed car frame from the front lawn of his cousin, racecar driver Skip Nichols. Jackson painstakingly restored and rebuilt the car as a material metaphor for transformation. The car appears to float on a spectrum of electronic lights arranged in a circular red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet sequence. The lights receive their power from an alternative energy source, which is the result of a collaboration between Jackson and MIT's Energy Initiative (MITEI, dedicated to solving the world's growing pressing needs for renewable, reliable energy). *Chariot II* uses state of the art solar panels to collect enough sunlight to light the piece. In experiencing this work, viewers will be reminded that solar energy is rapidly emerging as an important renewable energy source and that MIT is in the forefront of pursuing new technological advancements in green energy.

Another theme Jackson explores is the Promethean implication for the use of scientific knowledge. In his painting series *August 6, 1945* (2009) Jackson creates aerial views of two city grids. Created with burnt wood and melted lead, the paintings make an obvious reference to the atomic bombings in Japan. The images showing Hiroshima and Washington, DC, reveal both cities forever linked to each other in the history and legacy of the development of nuclear weapons.

For *Heart of Prometheus*, (2009), Jackson commissioned the father of drag racing Big Daddy Don Garlits to build a display version of his Chrysler Hemi Drag racing motor from *Swamp Rat VI* out of previously raced parts. Sitting on an artist-designed motor-stand, the sheer mass of the machine only hints at what it could do were it fired up. In *John Stapp/Matt Jackson* (2009) the artist's face is filmed while drag racing, recreating the G-force stress that test pilot John Stapp endured in one of many iconic images documenting pilots training. In preparation for the piece Jackson formally took drag racing lessons at Frank Hawley's Drag Racing School in Gainesville, Florida. He earned a license from the NHRA (National Hot Rod Association) to drive in the Super-comp dragster division.

Matt Jackson: The Immeasurable Distance will be on view during MIT's celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission, scheduled for June 11 and June 12, 2009. A collaborator on the project is David A. Mindell from MIT's Program in Science, Technology, and Society whose 2008 MIT Press book *Digital Apollo* discusses how technology for the mission was written to give the human astronauts a function as pilots-rather than as redundant passengers or as they derogatorily referred to the role they were assigned, "spam in a can".

About the Artist

Born in 1974 in Panorama City, CA, Matthew Day Jackson lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Jackson first grabbed art world attention through his entry in the 2005 exhibition *Greater New York* at P.S.1 in New York City. His work, *Sepulcher* (2004), was a Viking burial ship with sails made from the artist's punk rock T-shirts stitched into a giant, Mondrian-like painting. For the 2005 Whitney Biennial of American Art, Jackson contributed *Chariot, The Day After the End of Days* (2005-2006), a pioneer covered wagon floating above a bed of fluorescent tubes.

Jackson's solo exhibitions include *Drawings from Tlön*, Nicole Klagsbrun, New York, NY (2008); *Terranaut*, Peter Blum Gallery, New York, NY (2008); *Diptych*, Mario Diacono at Ars Libri, Boston, MA (2007); *The Lower 48*, Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York, NY (2007); *Paradise Now!*, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, OR (2006); and *By No Means Necessary*, The Locker Plant, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX (2004).

Selected group exhibitions include *Art Focus 5, 2008*, Jerusalem, Israel; *Heartland*, Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, (2008); *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art, Mission: to interpret and understand contemporary art*, Barbican Gallery, London, UK (2008); *Matthew Day Jackson, Jen Liu, David Maljkovic: The Violet Hour*, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA (2008); *The Old, Weird America*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX (2008); *1st Athens Biennale*, Athens, Greece (2007); *2nd Moscow Biennale*, Moscow, Russia (2007); *3rd Beijing Biennale*, Beijing, China (2007); *Huma Bhabha and Matthew Day Jackson: Sculptures and New Print Editions*, PeterBlum Gallery, New York, NY; Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York, NY (2007); *To Build a Fire*, Rivington Arms, New York, NY (2007); *Uncertain States of America—American Art in the 3rd Millennium*, Herning Kunstmuseum, Denmark, Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland (2007); Whitney Biennial, *Day for Night*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2006); and *Greater*

New York, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, NY (2005).

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Directions:

The MIT List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the red line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main St. west to Ames St., turn left, and walk one block to the cross walk. The MIT List Visual Arts Center housed in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Limited metered parking is available on Ames Street. A parking garage is located at the Cambridge Center complex (entrance on Ames between Main and Broadway) during business hours and on campus after business hours and on weekends.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Wednesday: 12-6PM; Friday-Sunday: 12-6PM; Thursday: 12-8PM; Closed Mondays and July 4.

Information: 617.253.4680 or <http://listart.mit.edu>

All exhibitions at the MIT List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible. Accommodations are provided by request.

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