Painter Matthew Ritchie was born in England in 1964, and he studied at Boston University and at Camberwell School of Art in London. He currently lives and works in New York. Ritchie has had solo exhibitions at the Dallas Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, and the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York. His work has been exhibited in such venues as the 1997 Whitney Biennial, Mass MoCA, and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art. He has also realized web projects with the Walker Art Center, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and MIT, and he has had a project published in Parkett Magazine. His large-scale wall and floor painting installations and artist’s books projects for the internet are all part of an ongoing project of finding visual metaphors for the creation of the universe and the history of time. His work follows a group of symbolical characters who play out their stories in a world of colors and forms that are governed by their own set of rules constructed by the artist.

Jenelle Porter is a curator, writer, and a partner in a design firm that specializes in artist's catalogues. She was formerly curator at Artists Space in New York (1998–2001) where she organized Infotecture, “Pictures” at an Exhibition, and Uri Tzaig: Duel, among many others. She has written for several exhibition catalogues, including authoring a book on Uri Tzaig. She has worked at the Walker Art Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art. At the Whitney she assisted with the 1997 Biennial, in which Ritchie’s work was included. She lives in Los Angeles.

About MIT’s Percent-for-Art Program: MIT’s Percent-for-Art Program, administered by the List Visual Arts Center, allots up to $250,000 to commission art for each new major renovation or building project. The program was formally instituted in 1968 but earlier collaborations between artists and architects can be found on the Institute’s campus. In 1985 architect I.M. Pei and artists Scott Burton, Kenneth Noland, and Richard Fleischner collaborated on a Percent-for-Art Program for the Wiesner Building and plaza, home to the List Center and the Media Laboratory. Other Percent-for-Art works include a terrazzo floor by Jackie Ferrara for the Tang Center and outdoor sculptures by Louise Nevelson and Tony Smith. Other publicly-sited art includes works by Alexander Calder, Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso, Beverly Pepper, Michael Heizer, Victor Burgin, Jennifer Bartlett, Bernar Venet, Frank Stella, Isaac Witkin, and Jacques Lipchitz.

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The Swimmer

The installation Games of Chance and Skill presents the universe as a metaphorical shape peopled by the embodiment of Creation's talking points. But besides the fact that you are surrounded by vivid color, carefully rendered shapes, diffused light, random markings, and, well, general chaos, there is a deeper story. It starts with swimming.

The act of swimming demonstrates a perfect energy system. A virtually weightless body glides through water, action results in reaction as a stroke and a kick propel one along in the water. The act of water resistance is an equal and opposite reaction. Your thoughts are swimming in a universe of information.

Matthew Ritchie's work of the last several years has explored and documented the manifold creation narratives of the universe—religious, scientific, and mythological. Though comprising traditional practices of painting, sculpture, and drawing, Ritchie's work perpetually allows us to transfigure conventional narratives into visual, aural, and spatial experiences. Ritchie's cosmographic gestures allow an analytical study of how information arranges itself in a closed system. Here, the system just happens to be a model of the formation of the universe.

Ritchie's version of the universe is inhabited by an assembly of forty-nine characters who occupy various space-time situations, and who possess multitudinous attributes that collapse onto one another like a telescoping rod. They are an illustrous bunch: complicated, desiring, alluring, and deeply cynical. Ritchie has stated that at the end of this colossal story there will be a single remaining character, a personage who contains all the other characters along with their respective tics, a schizophrenic bundle of energy and mass. Ritchie's cosmographic devices allow an analytical study of how information arranges itself in a closed system.

The wall relief, created from individual pieces of painted aluminum, reads from left to right, right to left, or from both sides simultaneously. Shapes and colors represent the heroes and villains of this story. On the far left, the gray branching shape represents Astoreth whose attribute is number, the first unknown quantity, the first coordinate. Astoreth, or Asa, is a hermaphrodite, willing and able to play it both ways; S/he is the lover of Stanley, a one-eyed round out the initial conditions of the universe. The green mass is Lilith (Frequency), and the arm of soft blue funneling ... and solid matter emerges. The rupture of the yellow circle, in Ritchie's cosmological parlance, is your basic Big Bang.

More characters emerge now, too many to itemize here. The black threads embedded in the yellow circle represent Abaddon, or Zero. White is Stanley, mentioned above. Irregular shapes, diffused light, random markings, and, well, general chaos, there is a deeper story. It starts with swimming.

magic. These notes, guides as much for the artist as for the viewer, are verbal clues to the larger narrative. This is where the project dissolves back into the real. Universe as the activity seen through the glass becomes both an enactment of, and a complement to, the equations drawn on the glass.

Although enormously complex, this grand story is not a collection of secrets to be revealed or lessons to be learned. It provides a way to see more of what surrounds us. Ritchie's project is about merging, through aesthetically compelling forms, his own complex interests with our own. He gives new tools for understanding the origins of the universe, one of the most difficult concepts we might ever wrap our brains around. Yet the documents created by his vast project are as much about incompleteness as they are about completeness. We propose that you use this color-coded map of creation as a key to deciphering the universe—a version of a version with vivid characters to cheer for and hiss at. This is just one way to tell it, and as Ritchie says, everything is true except for the parts he made up.

Jenelle Porter

For more information about this project please visit http://web.mit.edu/matthew-ritchie/html/indexQt.htm