SHOWING

May 8, 2009 - July 12, 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.

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, which is in the collection of the MIT Museum. Within the codes are quotes from Shakespeare, quotations from 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 had a facsimile edition of the document digitally scanned and bound as a series of antique-style books that will be available for viewers to peruse. The team that wrote the computer commands developed this code while working on the Polaris missile system, thus the commands are an example of the reuse of weapons technology.
Jackson's *Study Collection* is an enormous stainless steel shelf-unit (inspired by the artist's visits to the technological artifacts in MIT Museum's basement storeroom). It will include a small-scale rocket model as well as models of all of the missile systems from V1, V2, Fat Man, Little Boy, Thor, Titan, Cruise missiles, and other thought-artifacts created in the artist's studio. *Study Collection* will also include another series of models that show the artist's skull morphing into the skull of Phineas Gage, an unfortunate railway-worker whose actual skull is in Harvard's Warren Medical Museum. *Study Collection* features a 3-D digital scan of a 3-foot damping rod that shot through Gage's skull making him a living oddity and example of the mind/body split.

It is quite fitting that the exhibition will be on view during MIT’s celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission, scheduled for June 11 and 12, 2009. The surviving astronauts from Apollo 11 will convene at MIT for a public forum, at a time when the crucial symbolic function of manned space travel has reemerged in national politics. 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 the 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.”

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.

**About the Artist**


Support for Matthew Day Jackson: The Immeasurable Distance has been
provided by the Council for the Arts at MIT and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Special thanks to the Peter Blum Gallery, New York, NY and Phoenix Media/Communications Group.

MIT List Visual Arts Center
20 Ames Street, Bldg. E15
Atrium level
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Directions + Map [http://goo.gl/maps/GWs1b]

HRS:
Gallery Hours: Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat., Sun., 12-6pm; Thurs., 12-8pm
Closed Mondays and holidays.
Admission is free.

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