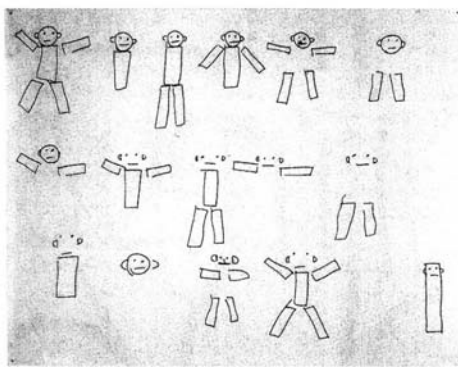


What Is That Person Thinking?



WHEN MATT MULLICAN is invited to lecture on his artistic practice to a large group at a museum or school, he typically begins his presentation by affixing a number of images to the wall behind him: first, a photograph of one person, followed by a comic-strip rendering of a second person; then two stick figures (one framed, the other unframed), an abstract sign for the human body (akin to those found at crosswalks or on bathroom doors) and a similarly spare icon denoting a head and chest (think of the cropped international symbol for customs officers at airports); and finally, a circle, a square, and a triangle assembled together in a loose configuration of parts. Each of these individual pictures, Mullican says, is named "Glen." (In truth, however, only the photograph depicts anyone recognizable as such, whether the visage of astronaut John Glenn, actor Glenn Ford, or some other familiar personage.) Once the images are hung, the artist moves down the line, methodically pricking each picture with a small pin, before turning back to his audience with a single question: Which image feels the most pain?

Spectators could be forgiven for being momentarily stumped, since a kind of awkward silence seems precisely Mullican's point (whatever his claim that audiences eventually agree on the framed stick figure as particularly sensitive to the stab). For the artist's query inevitably prompts viewers to reflect anew on the subtle dynamics underpinning their ordinary experience with representation—or, more to the point, their ordinary experience with experience. Audiences are asked to take stock of the way empathy functions on the most instinctive levels and in connection with the most mundane of tasks, and to acknowledge and examine in turn the degree to which one invests images and objects with a life of one's own devising. We cultivate and care for the world we imagine. As Mullican observes in conversation: "When you look at a picture of a figure such as this, you end up seeing the fiction you are projecting onto that picture. You are confronted, in fact, with the very identity of your projection."

It should come as no surprise, then, that Mullican, when he came of age during the mid-1970s, was considered a kind of distant cousin to the "Pictures" generation. (Although he was not in Douglas Crimp's famous 1977 Artists Space show, Mullican's first New York exhibition had taken place at the same venue the previous year, and indeed his work will be included in an exhibition devoted to the "Pictures" milieu at the Metropolitan Museum of Art this spring. He is currently the subject of an extensive survey at the Drawing Center in New York.) If Mullican was interested from the

beginning in the various ways people engage with representations and endow them with particular significance, he was also deeply aware—like so many other artists of the day—of the contextual modes of meaning and identification that were being engineered by mass-media photography and film, and subsequently filtered into everyday life: the feedback loop of cathexis that lies at the heart of commercial enterprise.

Perhaps what has most set Mullican apart, however, is his willingness to expand his artistic frame or, as in the case of "Glen," to render it as tenuously as possible. As early as 1978, he was subjecting himself to something akin to the treatment his stick figures now receive on the lecture circuit—performing while under hypnosis in an effort to articulate the effect of different framing devices on our comprehension (both intellectual and psychological) of the material world. "I originally sought the most extreme kind of theater I could come up with," Mullican recalls today, "where the people who were onstage believed that they were the characters they were portraying; where somehow they were not acting even while they were acting. Their psyches would portray a fiction, but the actors wouldn't have the normal relationship to that fiction." Hypnotism is a distancing device bound to make audiences address anew the roles they unthinkingly inhabit on a daily basis; and yet the element of entrancement also renders problematic any suggestion that art is, in fact, providing real illumination of those roles. After all, Mullican is only offering one more state of mind, even if, as the artist claims, hypnosis "most clearly identifies the way you project onto others, since it identifies that way through you, or through what you become."

The interview scenario, too, makes implicit demands on its participants, creating prescribed roles for subject and interlocutor that all-too-easily succumb to type and, moreover, suggesting that there is some "deep" content to be teased to the surface over the course of a conversation. One major consequence, and pitfall, is that an adherence to convention causes points of real interest to be overlooked. (Something similar might be said with respect to the conditions for artmaking and criticism more generally.) Mullican generously agreed to be interviewed under hypnosis in an attempt to avoid such hazards. The following conversation took place last year with the assistance of Mullican's hypnotist and collaborator, Dr. Clifford Passen, MD, in the artist's loft in the SoHo district of New York.

—Tim Griffin

Opposite page: Matt Mullican performing under hypnosis at Tate Modern, London, January 27, 2007.
This page: Matt Mullican, *Untitled*, 1975–76, ink on paper, 8½ x 11".



Matt Mullican, untitled (detail), 2006, ink on paper, 13½ x 8½". From Matt Mullican, *That Person's Workbook* (MER, Paper Kunsthalle and Ridinghouse, 2007).

CLIFF: So choose one of your arms and raise it above your head so you can look at your hand. It doesn't matter if it's the front or the back. Either way is fine. Just find the best, most comfortable way to do it.

And pick one of your fingers to stare at. It can be your thumb or your index finger. Just put your attention on that finger. And as you stare at it, you'll notice that the rest of your hand sort of fades out of focus, and you can just concentrate on that one finger. And you can either keep your eyes open, looking at the finger, or you can visualize it in your mind if you close your eyes. And just put your attention on that finger. As you do that, you'll notice that your arm starts to feel heavy. Just keep your attention on the finger. As the arm gets heavier, at some point it's going to want to fall, and as it comes down, you go deeper and deeper still with relaxation. But you won't be in a real deep state of relaxation until your arm comes all the way down to the chair.

So just allow the rest of your hand to feel very focused. And notice your arm starting to get heavy, slowly, very slowly coming down. And your arm gets heavier, and as that happens you fall into a deeper and deeper state of relaxation.

[Speaker becomes softer and softer as he hypnotizes subject.]

MATT MULLICAN: My neck. My neck is very stiff. OK, yeah. I'm OK [begins singing].

TIM GRIFFIN: First, I wanted to thank you for—

MM: Well, you're welcome.

TG: —having a conversation, because—

MM: Because.

TG: —I've spoken with Matt previously about That Person, and he's made a number of interesting observations. But I've never had the occasion to hear from That Person about Matt and his work. So my first question is the simplest one: How do you feel about Matt?

MM: [makes the raspberry sound] Hmm [sigh]. [deep exhalation] Stink. I stink [sniffs]. Smell.

TG: Literally . . .

MM: Uh-huh. I stink. How I feel about Matt. How I feel about Matt. How I feel about Matt. Mattio, Mattio, Mattio . . . Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt. M-M-M-A-A-A-T-T-T.

TG: What's your relationship with him?

MM: [groults/roars like lion and then makes choking and coughing sounds]

TG: Are you choking?

MM: [whistles] OK. Stupid questions. Stupid questions. Stu-u-pid [blows air through lips]. I . . . oh, boy. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Now, let me think. Let me think. I have to think. Oh, yeah. Hmm. Just . . . what was your question again?

TG: How do you feel about Matt?

MM: About Matt. It's a very complicated, stupid question. Oh, God! How do I feel about Matt? [laughs] Oh, boy, what kind of an answer can I give to that question? Hmm. God. Well, oh, you know [groans; doorbell rings].

TG: Matt has referred to your consciousness as an icon for himself.

MM: Oh, hold the horses. Hold the horses. Let's hold the horses [gets up to answer door; speaks on intercom]. Hello? Hello. I'm busy. I can't talk now. I can't talk. No, can't talk [returns to chair]. I'm back. I'm back. Boy, I tell you, I don't know

There is Matt A and there is Matt B. Matt A is pretty well aware of everything that's happening. Matt A knows that the audience is in front of him. Matt B is that guy who is kind of drooling on the floor over here on the right, coming up with these weird ways of talking and not knowing quite what's going on.

if it's going to work, to be honest. I'm back now. I mean, I'm back to being me. But it's like you were talking to an animal. Did you get a sense of that? Good luck coming up with a transcript. It's a joke. Maybe he'll answer the questions, but you're talking one brain versus another there. You cannot imagine how different they are, because when I was listening to you . . . what the fuck?

CLIFF: Do you want to talk about it at all?

MM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, go ahead.

CLIFF: First of all, That Person has such a sense of humor.

MM: But when I was looking at my fingers, my eyes were not focusing, so I saw two fingers. You know, two—one here and one here. It was just

like the concentration of keeping the two. And you . . . what were the questions? Oh, the questions were so . . .

TG: Don't worry about it.

MM: Well, I felt like you were talking to Matt in Matt in Matt. You were talking to me inside me as That Person talking to you as him. It's like, "OK, so . . ." It's a maze. And I'm kind of half-way in between now. I'm spacey, and yet I'm awake enough to deal with you here.

CLIFF: The way I would proceed with That Person, Tim, is to ask, "What would you like to talk about? We're here to talk about you and your art, and what part of that would you like to discuss?"

MM: My feeling . . . you know, I'm barking. I felt that I'm just waiting to do something and what I'm doing is . . . just like barking. And you were talking about something that didn't apply. That Person doesn't think the same way you're asking the questions, because he is not me. I mean, he is me, but he's not me. Your question assumes that he would have a similar brain to mine—that somehow he would think the way that I would think, and I don't think he does.

TG: This we did not know.

MM: No, he is reactive. He reacts to a situation. He himself doesn't conceive. Give him anything, he'll just react to it and that's fine. And right now,

I feel now that I am two people. I won't say that we're cohabiting my brain, but we are cohabiting my dialogue with you. I also have a headache and I'm dizzy. I feel a ridge up the middle of my head. And my memory of That Person was that he was about seventy-five years old, this man. He had a big nose, a beard, big ears, bushy eyebrows, and he was very, very thin.

What else? I mentioned dogs.

TG: This is That Person?

MM: That's just him in this dialogue with you right now. The armature. I don't think he stays that way. I mean, Cliff put me into a very deep trance—not the deepest, but certainly deep enough for our purposes. And when you're in a deep trance, it's like popping about five pills. And the drugginess allows you to do something like roll on the floor and look at the sky. But you're asking me to philosophize. Maybe that's interesting. When you get stoned or take LSD, you start philosophizing; you start thinking about the universe in a different way, asking questions.

TG: But stupid ones . . .

MM: That word *stupid* is stupid. He uses that

word. It's a child's word. When I say "stupid" it's like, "You're stupid." It's stupid because the question simply doesn't apply to the state of mind. It's like two different languages. I am rolling on the floor, and you're asking me about what kind of shoes I like to buy. And I'm still half-way there now, but I'm acting like I'm me. So let's . . . what would be a refresher on a computer? What do you do?

CLIFF: We're going to reboot the computer.

MM: OK. We don't need to have my hand up, do we?

CLIFF: No. All we're going to do is make sure you're familiar with that state of relaxation.

MM: You know, here I'm in a fucking state of trance and the fucking doorbell rings. And how do I act? What do I say? I mean, how do I legitimately answer the door and be in a trance?

CLIFF: Well, you just did it.

MM: I know, but how do you do it? You're the hypnotist.

CLIFF: Without thinking.

MM: No, I am thinking, "Matt, the doorbell is ringing. The jig is up. This is fake. You're not really in a trance. This is all fake."

CLIFF: I'm going to count backward from five. When we get to one, you will be at just the right state of relaxation for this experience today. Starting at five, counting backward, four, three, two, just the right state of relaxation . . . and one.

MM: OK. Since the armature is the problem, perhaps you can tell me who I am to answer the questions.

CLIFF: You are That Person.

MM: That Person is so many people, so which person am I? Am I the dog on the street that just endlessly walks? Am I the dad who has to deal with the front door? Am I the artist who is putting out an article? Am I the father? Where are we sitting?

CLIFF: We're sitting in Matt's TV room. I'm here, and Tim Griffin is here from *Artforum*. He's interested in you and in how you make art. So is there anything that you'd like to say about that?

MM: Oddly, I feel that we're in a castle, almost a kind of cartoon castle. That castle on a hill . . . Sacré Coeur. If you got Sacré Coeur and you

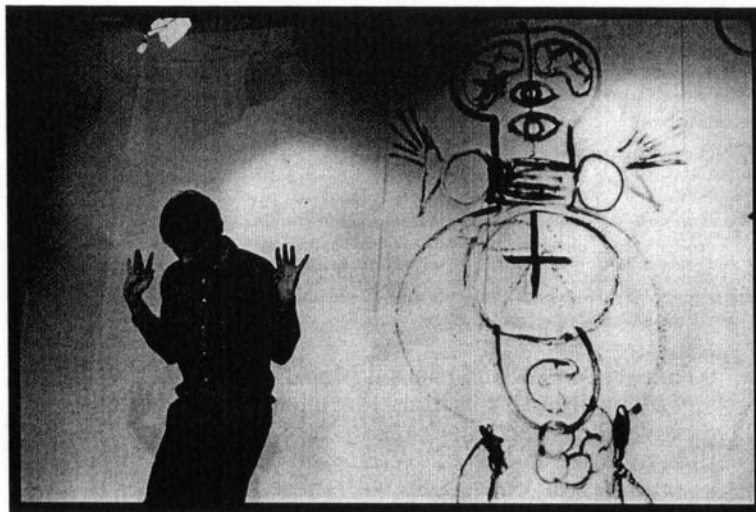
made it out of taffy and you stretched it so it was supertall, really thin and long—almost like a white rocket ship, or a bunch of white rocket ships—and you were in the back room of that church, a round room, that's where we would be. How old am I?

CLIFF: Matt thinks you're about seventy-five.

MM: God, was I actually thinking *you* were seventy-five? Doctors are always granddads because they've seen it all and they know everything. But now Tim is going to ask me a question. Please ask the first question again.

TG: How do you feel about Matt?

MM: My first thought is, "Oh, I'm in a doctor's office." Because that's what a shrink would ask:



"Well, how do you feel about yourself? Are you feeling good? Are you feeling bad? Are you feeling like you're worthwhile and you're kind of pathetic and you're stupid?"

Boy, Tim, you're getting the scoop. I guess that's why you're here—to get the scoop. Matt, I would have to say in all honesty—honestly, honest—to be honest, honestly honest, honestly honest, honestly honest, I would say that Matt, honestly, is Matt. Honestly, you know the first thing that comes to mind is not a good thing, and it's a bit troubling because whatever I say, it's there. It's in print. This is a printed thing, and this is the first time Matt has to say something about himself in print. So I'll run in the opposite direction. I run in the opposite direction. I run in the opposite direction. Demons and angels, Jesus fucking

Christ, angels and demons, demons and angels, angels and demons [*continues on repeating "angels and demons"*].

TG: [*interrupts*] How do you feel about your art?

MM: [*sighs*] Matt spends his life being on the line, being in the middle. He's not going to fall to the left or to the right. He's a tightrope walker. So he is wonderfully stupid and stupidly wonderful. He's pathetically great and horribly pathetic. He's nothing, because he's neither here nor there. He's zip. There is a great song . . . I mean, not a great song, but it's Fatboy Slim. How does it go? He's such a good, good singer, good guy, Fatboy Slim. "A Little Bit of This and a Little Bit of That." And then there is another song of his

called "Right Here, Right Now," right here, right now, right here, right now. And then there is another song that said, "Put your hands up in the air, put your hands up in the air." I don't think that's him, but it sounds an awful lot like him.

TG: And when you perform, where do you think you are?

MM: Right here, right now, right here, right now, right here, right now. You know, you kind of want to get the unconscious answer and the conscious answer. Right? You can always ask me how I feel when I perform and get the conscious answer. But you're after the unconscious answer. The trance answer.

CLIFF: Let's be right here, right now.

MM: We are right here, right now. I'm not making you angry, am I?

TG: No.

MM: Sure?

TG: Yeah.

MM: OK. Ask me the question again, please.

TG: Are you right here, right now?

MM: When I'm performing?

TG: How do you feel when you perform?

MM: Well, I don't feel all there, and I don't feel [*makes very strange sounds followed by exhalations*] that you . . . what I'm doing is taking it apart. [*sighs*] And how do you do that? How do you do that, and where do you go when you do that? What do you say? How do you say it? OK, here I am. When you're in a performance, when I'm performing, when I do what I'm doing now, I

don't know what I'm doing. So I touch things. Start with the easy stuff and then you get more complicated. I rub my cheek on the wall, on the wall I rub my cheeks [laughs]. Oh, boy, here I go. You start with the simplest things. You start with the simplest things and then maybe they become better, more complicated. You know, the performances . . . I do one and I do another one and I do another one and I do another one and I do another one. I don't know what to do, so I do what I did already. And then I do it again and I do it again and I do it again because it's easy. It's simple.

TG: And how do you come to make a drawing?

MM: [laughs; breathes heavily] Ask me another question, please.

TG: So are you aware of the audience?

MM: Yeah. I'm talking to you. We're in my loft and I'm talking to you, but I'm not normal. So where am I? I'm . . . [makes odd noise] Too bad it's not an audio magazine. It would be much more effective to hear my voice than to read it.

TG: And how do you engage with audiences?

MM: [laughs] I'm totally, totally engaged right now. But there is a problem, because there is Matt A and there is Matt B. OK? Matt A is pretty well aware of everything that's happening. Matt A knows that the audience is in front of him. And then Matt B is that guy who is kind of drooling on the floor over here on the right, coming up with these weird ways of talking and not knowing quite what's going on. Matt B is in total denial that the audience is there. That's a source of a lot of the trauma he feels—these cross-wired instances, which is the whole thing.

I remember one of the very early performances I did at the Kitchen in the 1970s, where I was a three-year-old or a two-year-old or a five-year-old. And I'm on the floor drawing a picture and my mind is saying, "Matt, you're doing a pretty good job of it. Look at you. The audience is there looking at you. Look at your body. It's acting so weird. Your legs are flipped over just like a five-year-old's. How do you do that? How are you doing this? This is really cool." And so Matt A says this about Matt B, and Matt B is in tow, very involved and there is no problem. The trouble starts when Matt A and Matt B start being a tag team.

TG: And where does this put Matt A?

MM: I talked to a shrink at a party about going into a hypnotic trance state, and she asked, "Are you a passenger?" And it is like that. But then what happens is the passenger loses it. There can be a reversing of the two things. It's a switch, changing the implication of the whole story. . . . What was the question you asked?

TG: So That Person was here briefly?

MM: Oh, he's here now. Don't worry. He has a star on his head and he's putting his hands over

that. My father was a painter. That's how he did all his drawings. He just sat down at the table in front of the TV and made ten drawings in an evening, not knowing exactly what he would be drawing before he drew it. That whole theory about going into that world, that intuitive landscape, intuition . . . What was your question?

TG: Are certain drawings more successful?

MM: Matt A certainly has favorite drawings. Matt B, I don't think he does. I think he would

love to be free-willed, but I don't think he feels free-willed. I think he feels victimized. He's always being told what to do [laughs]. You know, he's in a trance.

CLIFF: He seems to have a lot of doubt about himself.

MM: Well, yeah. Wouldn't anybody? Matt B is more of a how than a what. Matt B is a way of becoming a what. So the trance state is becoming the person, you could say, or the icon is becoming the person, the model of the person is becoming the person. The brain does this. We do this constantly. We do this all the time. And, in a way, the whole process is an attempt to uncover this process.

CLIFF: And yet what makes Matt B come out and perform in front of people?

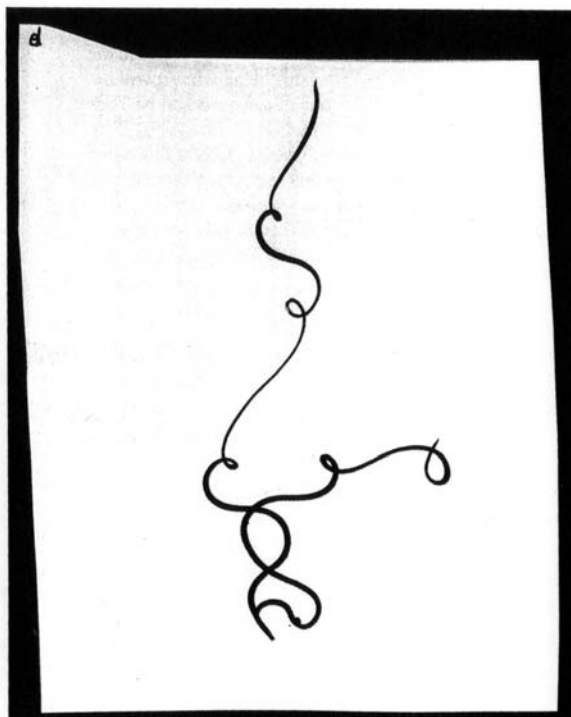
MM: He's protecting himself. You know, Matt B is pretty terrified of his own lack of form, his own lack of will, his own lack of substance, and his own lack of brains and body. He doesn't want to fall off the rope he's walking on. Matt A has come up with this scheme in order to figure things out. Matt B is just trying not to die in the process. Are there more questions, Mr. Tim?

TG: I was surprised to find this quotation in a drawing that appears in *That Person's Workbook*: "In our society now we prefer to see ourselves living than living." —Guy Debord."

MM: Guy Debord wrote that.

TG: Or That Person wrote that. Why?

MM: Well, there is Matt A and Matt B. Matt B is the actual image of living oddly and Matt A is the person living. And yet they're reversed and Matt B, That Person, is more sensual. Matt A is me, but the image of the person is the guts while the person, me, is almost a shell. We all live our lives through icons or roles that we follow, and that we feel comfortable with—but then who are we when you take away those icons? What's left? More icons? Different icons?



Opposite page: Matt Mullican performing under hypnosis at The Kitchen, New York, November 4, 1981. Photo: Paula Court. This page: Matt Mullican, untitled, 2006, ink on paper, 13 1/2 x 8 1/2". From Matt Mullican, *That Person's Workbook* (MER. Paper Kunsthalle and Ridlinghouse, 2007).

his face, but don't worry, he's around. We are a combination. It's like Siamese twins, when you share all of these organs and you have to get on the operating table to split everything apart. Matt A and Matt B are intertwined to the extent of where it's almost impossible to distinguish and separate the two. So it isn't black-and-white. And I think that the lack of clarity is real. I think that's the way it always is, for everyone.

TG: And what happens when making an artwork?

MM: It's the theory of automatism. You're making and finding it as you go along. I grew up with

TG: You've said elsewhere that rituals fill the void for That Person.

MM: That's how he gets his joy. He fulfills a need. He loves to wake up, smell the air, get out of bed, feel the cool floor on his feet, put on his slippers and walk to the bathroom, go to the bathroom, come back, pick up his glasses, walk to the kitchen, put on the coffee. He gets a kettle, fills it with water, puts on the gas as high as it will go so it boils quicker and he watches the pot, walks into the pantry, grabs a filter for the coffee and then goes to the freezer, gets the coffee, puts it into the filter, puts it into the little filter holder and then puts it on top of the coffeepot. The water has boiled. He pours the water into the coffee and it smells great. Then he gets a cup, fills it with coffee, gets some milk, puts it in there, some sugar, spills it around and drinks it and sits down and looks out the window at how beautiful it is. Hmm. So rituals are very important. Birthdays and Christmas are his favorite days.

TG: Is Matt B a magnification of all the fears and desires of Matt A?

MM: I actually don't know what the desires are for Matt B. But there is big fear, you know, like in this article for this magazine. In a drawing, I would put it in big type, Big Fear [laughs]. Where is the pen? I brought a pen [finds pen; starts drawing; begins pounding]. See, why do I do that? Why? Big fear. I hope I spelled it right. Whereas Matt A, here I am [gasps]: "I'm Mr. San-ity, Sanity, Sanity, Sanity, sane, sane, I'm sane. I'm sane-ity, sane. Sanity, sane. I'm sane." Repeat, repeat, repeat . . . such an impulse. Such an impulse. Such an impulse. This is going to be edited, edited, edited, edited, edited—ah! [banging]

TG: Why are you afraid?

MM: Fear of failure, maybe, fear of embarrassment.

TG: Some drawings do not seem fearful at all.

MM: They use the subject of fear, but they're not fearful. They're fun-loving drawings. They look like they belong in a circus, right? Big-top drawings. They don't express fear. They advertise it. They get it done. They pass the time of day, like singing.

TG: And yet fear is the subject?

MM: There was a student at CalArts when I went to school, who covered herself in protective equipment, a helmet, knee pads, elbow pads, gloves, shoulder pads. And she made a video of herself smashing into the walls of her studio on roller skates while screaming for her mother for a half hour. She presented this and at the end I asked her what the purpose of the piece was, and

she said she was going to send this videotape to her mother so her mother knows that she's protecting herself with this equipment. Now, that doesn't make sense, but it makes sense. But this woman also slept with a boa constrictor for months and months, because she was "keeping it warm" [laughs]. She disappeared. Whew. That was CalArts.

CLIFF: And what's the fear here?

MM: There's fear from the first word, when you asked me to define myself and to define him, the fear of being pigeonholed, maybe, the fear that by stating something it will become real. We're feeding an image of myself in a trance state to the media to the point of this being what it will be. This will become that image, and maybe That Person would like that not to happen. Why pigeonhole him? Why make an icon of him when he is the opposite of that in a way, although he is also an icon?

TG: That's the tightrope that the magazine always has to walk. How do you deal with a project

rified of being disliked. Or that might be Matt A as well, of course.

TG: I guess it comes to that question again of fear.

MM: Of being a fake and stupid . . .

TG: And of why That Person still appears in front of a group and actually makes work.

MM: Masochism. But the art part is easy. People are going to the performance within the context of art. People go to my performance in Lisbon expecting to see a performance, and they do. I don't know if they like it or not. They might think it is a primal-scream-therapy-type thing, which is my fear—that they just think it's a meltdown. I hope they ask, "How is this working? What is it? Why is it being made? What am I getting out of this?" But I don't know. My best friends can say, "Wow, that was something. You were really out there. What were you doing?" But what does any of that kind of feedback mean? Yeah, I was out there. And? Though I guess I don't know what one could really say about this stuff. And actually, the question of

whether it's good or bad might not even be the issue. It's a performance. It's a happening. It's pretty standard fare. Another question.

TG: Earlier you suggested that Cliff and I were a kind of audience. How does it feel to be interviewed?

MM: I'm feeling odd. I'm in the middle of my head, and there is a gap between me and my head, my brain, the outside

of my skull, or the inside of my skull. I feel that I am answering questions, which I enjoy doing. I enjoy asking, "Is there another question?" because it's something that I can respond to. I think there is a little bit of role-playing here. I'm being interviewed, so I'm acting appropriately, which is good because it gives me a brain to answer your questions in a way that maybe you are hopeful and expecting me to answer.

TG: Is this a performance? Should we walk around?

MM: No, we're fine here. Do you want me to recharge my batteries, get weird again?

TG: No. No.

MM: We can do that. I'm just . . . Goddammit, you know? Goddammit, you know? Goddammit. Goddammit. You know, it's like, where are we? Where the fuck are we? Where the fuck are we? That quote about seeing ourselves living. What the fuck? Is everything I do controlled in a way? Am I simply the sum of my actions up to this point, all the actions, all the people that I see? Does all that I do respond to a situation that has already been designed and I'm falling into it? You

We all live our lives through icons or roles that we follow, and that we feel comfortable with—but then who are we when you take away those icons? What's left? More icons? Different icons?

without rendering a fixed representation?

MM: There is always the problem of the shaman with this kind of work—the idea that Matt in the trance state is somehow more enlightened than Matt in the waking state. The shaman problem is that people look for answers in art. And even the way you two are looking at me as I talk, it's like somehow I'm telling truths. But I think we live in trance states most of our lives anyway.

What Matt A is interested in has to do with the why of the how as what. That means, "Why do I scratch my head? Why do I rub my eyes? Why do I roll on the floor? Why do I talk in these funny shapes and funny sounds? Why am I repeating myself?" Of course, if I'm talking this way, there will be certain concepts that make my Tourette's or my movement more obvious. Then That Person, the one that is doing those things, becomes what, becomes the noun, becomes the subject. It's how the brain deals that becomes the subject of what the brain is. But I don't know if Matt B is interested in anything except wanting that good cup of coffee—or wanting to please. He wants people to like him. And maybe he's ter-

know, I was at the Apple store with this curator and just touching all the objects, like the new Apple Air. It's so seductive the way they designed that thing. But what am I buying when I'm buying that thing? What do I expect things to be? Everything I'm doing now, the way I have my feet, the way I have my arms, the way I have my legs, the way I'm talking, the way I'm sitting, how I'm looking at you, has all been pretty well thought out earlier. And I'm just a passenger. I'm just along for the ride, and it's kind of fucked.

TG: And then you have That Person.

MM: The attempt is to break that, I think. Then again, even the attempt to break it is part of that system. But I try to uncover the context of meaning. It's abstract back there behind the sign, behind the word, and I think that we, our brains, think on multiple levels. You know, this background of the brain is what I'm after. And I was thinking that carpets, Persian carpets, have that in them. They somehow represent the intellect, this kind of brain, this kind of logic, this kind of patterning and moving and—and they do it so precisely.

TG: Is that how That Person thinks?

MM: I think he's acting in that thought rather than thinking in that thought. He is the how not the what. He's the how and he expresses it. But if he's left to his own devices, it quickly goes to the pits. It goes to this primal subject of Jesus Christ. Every performance does it. It's almost like there is a big hole in the room, giant hole, right? And you throw a marble and it will go around and around and it will go down into the hole and go down to the bottom. I think every single performance that I have done, as long as I have done them, has gone down that dark hole. It's a feedback situation between the two of us, and it just builds, it builds, it builds, and it just collapses.

CLIFF: Well, what is it like feeling yourself going down that hole?

MM: Pathetic. It's when the how becomes the what and we disappear down that hole. You know, it's the fantasy of collapse, fulfilling that role. Because in the beginning, I don't know what I'm doing, and I pick up a brush, because I have a brush there and I think I can do a painting for these people. They want to see me do a painting so I should do a painting. And then I don't know what I'm going to do. And then I'm reading the

paper or drinking my coffee and I listen to this and I talk to myself and I scream and I get nervous about, "God, I've done all this crappy stuff for an hour. Nothing is going on and what am I doing." But now I've got to deal with the audience. God, they're going to leave this room and they're going to think about me and what does

sensationalist I am in front of the audience, because I'm sure that's what they're thinking and I'm going to beat them to the punch.

CLIFF: How do you feel after this?

MM: Exhausted, totally exhausted. And frightened, I think. The last time after the tape I was scared. Oh, God [sighs]. It always kind of surprises people that I call him "him." I think it upsets them [puts hands over eyes].

TG: So what are you doing now?

MM: I'm looking at myself through my hands. You know, it's not him that you're talking to. It's me as him. You're talking to Matt A in the condition of being Matt B. That's what you're talking to, not Matt B.

CLIFF: Most of us don't have much experience in life seeing people who are on automatic pilot. In other words, of people who are acting without a lot of reflection or thinking about how it's going to be seen by other people. And then to see that right in front of you is a big deal.

MM: That's funny because he's so aware. God. Oh my. It looks like we're toning down here.

Matt B is really how he acts and how he's talking, how he's thinking, but it's Matt A still. At one point he says about how he's acting as if he's interviewed, and he is . . . Is this still going? I hope it is. He is not *not* performing. He is demonstrating aspects, so it's a jungle out there of how he talks—what is relevant to do in that context, in that situation. So I'm going into these primary situations where I can just start and I can, you know, do that. I mean, start repeating myself, getting into tics . . . tics . . . blossom all over the place [sighs]. Do you have more questions before I come out? Anything come up?

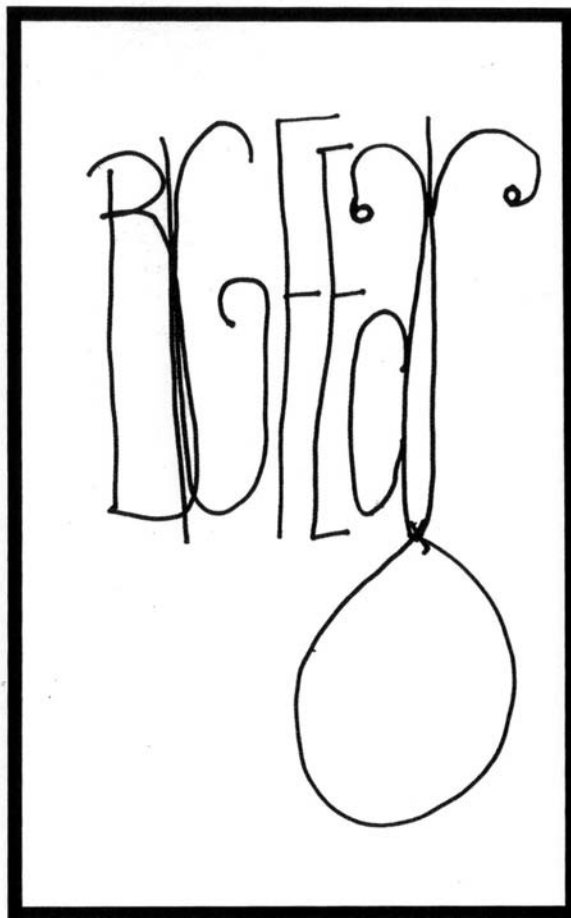
TG: No.

CLIFF: [after a pause] All right. So very simply, to come out I'm going to count up from one to five, and as I get closer to five, you'll get closer and closer to Matt A, to your normal waking state. When I get to five, you'll be in your normal waking state, starting at one, two, three—coming closer to what you're used to in your normal Matt A waking state, coming up now to four, almost at the surface, almost back, and five.

MM: [sigh] OK. I hope . . . I'm back.

CLIFF: You all right?

MM: I hope so. □



Matt Mullican, untitled, 2008, ink on paper, 14 x 8 1/2". Executed during interview session published here, 2008.

that mean? What are they going to say?

Then I freak out. I say, "Oh my God, I've done it again. I've failed. This is not working. I'm so sorry. This is just pathetic. Oh my God. What have I done? This is shit. This is absolute shit." And I have this conversation with myself in front of the audience about how awful I am and how crude and stupid and fake and ridiculous and