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# A Death Staged Over and Over

*Matthew Day Jackson Faces Mortality as Part of New Show*

Article

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By ANDY BATTAGLIA

Matthew Day Jackson has died five times, each with a sense of ceremony, and he plans to continue the habit.

One of his latest works, "Me, Dead at 39," to be unveiled in a momentous show at the Chelsea gallery Hauser & Wirth, is a self-portrait of the artist expired from unknown causes, hanging high above the ground and wrapped in a blanket as eternity looms.



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Bjorn Looss

Matthew Day Jackson works from his 'Me, Dead' series at age 35.

Tree burial—in which corpses are wrapped, raised and exposed to the elements—is one of several rites that Mr. Jackson has emulated in his "Me, Dead" series, and stems from a fascination with funeral practices across cultures. "There's a rash of photography of settlers moving across the American plains encountering stilt burials, or tree burial," he said. "In Tibet, they bury children in baskets in trees."

In 2009, he began the series with "Me, Dead at 35," which shows him in a coffin. Another, created when he was 37 years old, places him in a funeral pyre, only his feet visible from the flames. Yet another, "Me, Dead at 38," depicts him as a skeleton picked clean by vultures.

"We all know that we're going to die," Mr. Jackson, now 39, said at his Brooklyn studio. "Some people live in fear of that. Some people are afraid but wring it out."

"Me, Dead" began as an attempt to purge traits that he wanted put to rest, particularly while preparing for the birth of his first child. "I was always trying to be better, all the time, but there's really

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Bjorn Looss

Matthew Day Jackson works from his 'Me, Dead' series at age 37.



Enlarge Image

Sarah Thompson

Matthew Day Jackson works from his 'Me, Dead' series at age 36.



Enlarge Image

Philipp Baumgarten

Artist Matthew Day Jackson

every single show."

A recent morning at the artist's studio teemed with the consequences of those risks. "Victa," a working race car to be suspended from the ceiling at Hauser & Wirth, had been taken for a test drive at a New Jersey track the night before—and crashed into a wall. "We'll fix it," Mr. Jackson said.

The car will play a role in an array of other works, including walls constructed to evoke a suburban home and an installation that resets a sculpture by Auguste Rodin on the surface of the moon. The mix is indicative of Mr. Jackson's range, as well as his ability to put disparate elements in the service of a shared human experience.

"It offers me an opportunity," he said of the collection, "to meditate on what this show is about: bodies."

nothing to prove that," he said. "If there are things you don't like and you make a public document about how you're trying to fix it, you have to, or you're just a phony."

As the series progressed, with a new photo staged each year around his birthday, some macabre humor sneaked in. "I want them to be funny—they're ridiculous," Mr. Jackson said. But he is serious about his work, which mixes sculpture, painting, performance and photography into projects that are often self-examining and expansive in scale.

For "Me, Dead at 39," he built a metal-studded tree outside his studio, using a forklift and branches from a fallen specimen supplied by an arborist in Prospect Park. From that he hung 15 feet above the ground, wrapped in a blanket that he slept with as a child.

"It kept me warm, and I grew underneath it," Mr. Jackson said. "It's a trade blanket, made out of wool, and depending on how many hash marks it has, it denotes a certain value that was traded at trading posts for whatever American Indians had to trade."

Wrapping himself in it also reminded him of the MRI procedures he has been required to undergo since being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2006. "To get past the claustrophobic aspect of it," he said, "you have to go inside yourself. It's like I'm in a coffin."

Hauser & Wirth partner Marc Payot sees the series as part of a rich lineage. "It is one of the big themes of art, death, and he has no fear to take that on," Mr. Payot said. "The great and challenging thing about Matt is that he's risking everything, in every single piece, in



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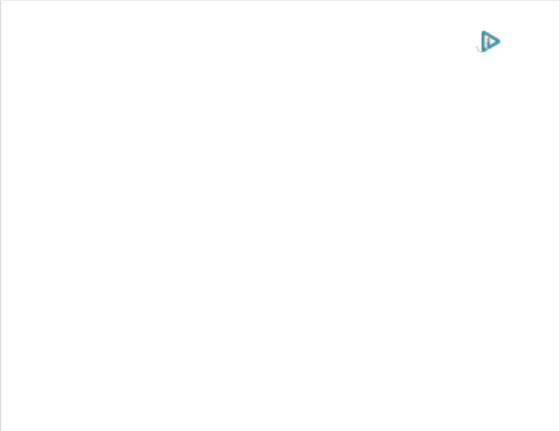
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