THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

MARK DION

MATRIX 173

THE WADSWORTH ATHENEUM’S

OCTOBER 1, 2015 – JANUARY 3, 2016

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART
New York artist [M]inspiration in the
of the MATRIX series,
extamps the personal
art and science.
Chain of Being, D
develop a Wadsworth
and decorative art.

The concept that
simplest to the most
tradition, as well
New York artist Mark Dion attended Hartford Art School in the early 1980s and found inspiration in the Wadsworth Atheneum's collection. In this fortieth anniversary year of the MATRIX series, Dion was invited to create a special project. For MATRIX 173, he explores the permanent collection to investigate the intersection of the histories of art and science. Based on the Greek philosopher Aristotle’s ancient model of The Great Chain of Being, Dion followed the classic hierarchical chain of living creatures to develop a Wadsworth-specific version composed of details from paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts found in the museum.

The concept that all living things are arranged in a continuous progression, from the simplest to the most noble, is one of the most persistent ideas in Western intellectual tradition, as well as one of the most dangerous and absurd. The great chain of being, or ladder of life, was used to justify the system. Dion added the chain, rather than subverted it.

Following traditional tropes to the greatest, insects arthropods, fish, even demigods and dragons, shells, birds, and flowers, Dion’s chain concept, however, begins with lowly worms and...
80s and found anniversary year MATRIX 173, he the histories of model of The Great creatures to sculptures, ladder of life, reflects the values of those in power. For hundreds of years, this notion was used to justify their privileges as natural or God-given, and legitimize the class system. Dion addresses this concept with humor, ridiculing the model of the great chain, rather than celebrating it.

Following tradition, Dion organizes The Great Chain from the least evolved form of life to the greatest, in a horizontal line around the gallery. He includes invertebrates and arthropods, fish and reptiles, birds and dogs, apes and humans, monsters and angels, demigods and demons, and, finally, the Devil and God. Related creatures—such as shells, birds, and cats—break the line in vertical configurations. Within the great chain concept, humans, as both flesh and spirit, occupy a location midway between lowly worms and Divine Maker.

The series of 125 cultures and time larger objects, ments and diversity of the Whadsworth Athen reveals the differ PATRICIA HICKS
years, this notion size the class of the great vertebrates and angels, — such as in the great way between

The series of 125 photographs depict circular details of masterpieces from various cultures and time periods chosen from the walls, pedestals, and storage vaults of the Wadsworth Atheneum. The isolated creatures, removed from their original contexts in larger objects, might stimulate visitors’ curiosities to search the museum to discover the original art sources. Dion’s Great Chain of Being benefits from the quality and breadth of the collection, but is also circumscribed by its limits. His eclectic selection reveals the different forms and styles of art making, which is emblematic of the diversity of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s collection.

PATRICIA HICKSON Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art in conjunction with artist MARK DION
The artist dedicates MATRIX 173 in loving memory of his friend and fellow artist Jackie McAllister (1962–2012), who worked at the Wadsworth Atheneum early in his career.
MARK DION

EDUCATION

1986  BFA, Hartford Art School, University of Hartford
2003  Honorary PhD, Hartford Art School, University of Hartford

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2015  Mark Dion / MATRIX 173, The Great Chain of Being, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT
Future Histories: Mark Dion and Arseny Zhilyaev, Casa del Tre Coi, V-A-C Foundation, Venice, Italy
2014  Mark Dion: The Lost Museum, Brown University, Providence, RI
2013  The Octagon Room (on long-term view), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA
Mark Dion: The Macabre Treasury, Museum Het Domein, The Netherlands
2012  Mark Dion: Xylotheque Kassel, Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany
Mark Dion: Phantoms of the Clark Expedition, The Explorer’s Club, presented by the Clark Institute, New York, NY

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

2012  Den, a site-specific installation for the National Tourist Routes in Norway
An Archaeology of Knowledge, for the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
2011  Oceanomania: Souvenirs of Mysterious Seas, Musée Océanographique de Monaco and Nouveau Musée National de Monaco / Villa Paloma, Monaco
The Marvelous Museum: A Mark Dion Project, Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA
2010  Systema Metropolis, Natural History Museum, London, England
2009  The South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit, Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL
2008  Rescue Archaeology, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
1999  Tate Thames Dig, Tate Gallery, London, England

WORKS IN THE ESTATE

The Wadsworth Atheneum
All works are 16-x-20 inches, courtesy Mark Dion and Stamos, unless otherwise noted. Photography: Allen Phelan.

1. Detail from Unidentified Artist: Shell with Shells and Fruit, ca. 1777–80, French, Massachusetts Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Samuel P. Averell, 1934.208. 30. Detail from Friedlander’s Dish, no date, earthenware. A. Everdell Austin, 1958.62


Born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1961
Lives in New York City, works worldwide

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

The Wadsworth Atheneum’s Great Chain of Being
All works are 16-x-20-inch c-prints by Mark Dion
Courtesy Mark Dion and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York
Photography: Allen Phillips, Wadsworth Atheneum

1. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
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6. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
7. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
8. Detail from Balthasar van der Ast, Still Life with Shells and Fruit, c. 1630-40. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1937.491
9. Detail from Balthasar van der Ast, Still Life with Shells and Fruit, c. 1630-40. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1937.491
10. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
11. Detail from Balthasar van der Ast, Still Life with Shells and Fruit, c. 1630-40. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
12. Detail from Théodore Augustin Ribot, The Young Chef (Le Cuisinier aux Écrevisses), c. 1860-70. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
13. Detail from Jasper Geeraerts, Still Life with Lobster, c. 1645. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Merrill by exchange, and Gift of Samuel P. Avery Jr. by exchange, 2012.3.1
14. Detail from Box, Wood, INV942.1994A
15. Detail from Margaretha de Heer, Still Life with Insects and Shells, 1654. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1937.492
16. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
17. Detail from Johann Wilhelm Preyer, Still Life, c. 1850. Oil on canvas. Bequest of Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, 1905.28
18. Detail from Master of the Hartford Still Life, Still Life with Flowers and Fruits, c. 1600-10. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1942.353
19. Detail from Margaretha de Heer, Still Life with Insects and Shells, 1654. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1937.492
20. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
21. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
22. Detail from Plate, 18th century, Italian, Pesaro. Tin-glazed earthenware. A. Everett Austin, Jr. Collection, Gift of Mrs. Helen G. Austin, David E. Austin and Sarah G. Austin, 1958.62
23. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
24. Detail from Unidentified Artist, Still Life, 2nd half of 18th century. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
25. Detail from Margaretha de Heer, Still Life with Insects and Shells, 1654. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1937.492
27. Detail from Pablo Picasso, Still Life with Fish, 1923. Oil on canvas. The Philip L. Goodwin Collection, Gift of James L. Goodwin, Henry Sage Goodwin, and Richmond L. Brown, 1958.220
28. Detail from Bowl, no date, English. Earthenware. Gift of Dr. Horace S. Fuller, 1905.353
29. Detail from Plate, 1777-80, French, Marseilles, Honoré Savy. Tin-glazed earthenware. Bequest of Mrs. Surdon Trumbull, 1934.208
30. Detail from Alfred Sisley, The Pike (Le Brochet), 1888. Oil on canvas. Gift in honor of Helene
and Mark Eisner, by exchange, 1917.268
31. Detail from捐 Joseph Conrad, 1917.269
32. Detail from Marie de’ Medici, 1710 (shell), German, 17th century. Gift of the Pierpont Morgan, 1945
33. Detail from Wall fragments, Ceramics, 1550-1700 BCE, Egypt, 1747. German, Meissen
34. Detail from Pierpont Morgan, 1922
35. Detail from Henry E. Schnakenberg, 1917.272
36. Detail from The Wadsworth Atheneum’s Great Chain of Being (Latch-Hooked Rug), 2002.293.40
38. Detail from Plate, 18th century, French, ivory, engraved, and marked "B. Junius Goodwin, 1935.37.52.8. 24. Detail from Balthasar van der Ast, Still Life with Fish, 1654. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
39. Detail from Plate, 18th century, French, ivory, engraved, and marked "B. Junius Goodwin, 1935.37.52.8. 24. Detail from Balthasar van der Ast, Still Life with Fish, 1654. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
40. Detail from Plate, 18th century, French, ivory, engraved, and marked "B. Junius Goodwin, 1935.37.52.8. 24. Detail from Balthasar van der Ast, Still Life with Fish, 1654. Oil on panel. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1938.607
Unidentified Artist, Theodoros G. and Margaretha de Ast, 1938.607

Detail from Jasper Sumner and Sarah G. Sumner Collection Fund, 1913.544

40. Detail from Blue and White Continents (Europe, Asia, Africa, America), c. 1760, German, Meissen Porcelain Factory, Model by Johann Joachim Kaendler and assistants. Hard-paste porcelain. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.1294A


**65. Detail from Fair of bearded vultures, 1911.10.1–2**

66. Detail from The Stephen Terry Collection, 1913.544


36. Detail from Nautilus cup, c. 1820 and c. 1710 (shell), German, Dresden. Nautilus shell, silver-gilt, and amethyst crystals. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.269

72. Detail from Etruscan Landscape, 1929.422


82. Detail from The Stephen Terry Collection, 1913.544

38. Detail from Etruscan Spirituality, 1793. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1969.117

83. Detail from Head of a duck, New Kingdom, c. 1550-1070 BCE, Egyptian. Faience. Bequest of Henry E. Schnakenberg, 1971.52.31


68. Detail from Wall fragments, Third Pompeian Style, c. 20 BCE–20 CE, Roman. Fresco fragment. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1969.117

55. Detail from Sea Putto with Two Dolphins, late 18th or 19th century, French, Ivory. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.314A


56. Detail from Pastures New, 1942. Oil on panel. Gift of an anonymous donor, 1975.19

17. Detail from Life and Death of Louis XIV, 1638-43

52. Detail from Nautilus cup, c. 1710 (shell), German, Dresden. Nautilus shell, silver-gilt, and amethyst crystals. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.269

86. Detail from Head of a duck, New Kingdom, c. 1550-1070 BCE, Egyptian. Faience. Bequest of Henry E. Schnakenberg, 1971.52.31


62. Detail from Detail from Fidelia Bridges, c. 1739, German, Meissen Porcelain Factory, Model by Johann Joachim Kaendler and assistants. Hard-paste porcelain. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.1294A


64. Detail from Nicolaes Berchem, c. 1760, German, Meissen Porcelain Factory, Model by Johann Joachim Kaendler. Hard-paste porcelain. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.1286


88. Detail from Detail from Jacques Stella, c. 1490. Oil and tempera on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1969.117


10. Detail from The Stephen Terry Collection, 1913.544

45. Detail from Everald Brown, 1866. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. A. E. Terry, 1986.30

16. Detail from Detail from The Life of the Poet, 1793, French, Sèvres Porcelain Factory. Soft-paste porcelain. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.1003a,b


60. Detail from Detail from Detail from Jacob vinyl, 1832-36, London. Soft-paste porcelain. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.1149


96. Detail from Detail from Jacques Stella, c. 1490. Oil and tempera on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1969.117

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**9. Detail from 19th century, English. Earthenware. The Stephen Terry Collection, 1913.544**

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29. Detail from The Stephen Terry Collection, 1913.544

1. Detail from Pair of Wall fragments, Third Pompeian Style, c. 20 BCE–20 CE, Roman. Fresco fragment. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1969.117

63. Detail from The Four Continents (Europe, Asia, Africa, America), c. 1760, German, Meissen Porcelain Factory, Model by Johann Joachim Kaendler and assistants. Hard-paste porcelain. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.1294A

26. Detail from Detail from Detail from Jacques Stella, c. 1490. Oil and tempera on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1969.117

21. Detail from The Stephen Terry Collection, 1913.544
ARTIST TALKS

MATRIX Gallery Talks
Mark Dion
Thursday, October 1
6 pm
Free with admission to First Thursday
Mark Dion will discuss his MATRIX project in the Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery.

Art and Curiosity Cabinets: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives
Sunday, October 4
2 pm Gallery Talk with MATRIX 173 Artist
Mark Dion (MATRIX Gallery)
2:30-3 pm Gallery Viewing and Public Reception
3-4 pm Introduction to Cabinets of Curiosity with Mark Meadow (Theater)
4:15-5:30 pm Panel Discussion (Theater)
Free admission

Art and Curiosity Cabinets from the 16th and 17th centuries are reflections of their society and culture, inspiring us to think about how objects are displayed in light of our human curiosity and understanding. Join us for an introduction and discussion of Art and Curiosity Cabinets with Mark Meadow and Bruce Robertson (History of Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara), Janet Browne (History of Science, Harvard), and MATRIX 173 artist Mark Dion.