



Meeting Ground

By Patricia Hickson

For more than forty years the Wadsworth's MATRIX program has joined contemporary artists to the museum's permanent collection

Intended to create a dialogue between the old and the new, MATRIX has been the model for many similar museum programs today. It has also provided some of our most celebrated artists with their first solo museum exhibition in this country. Among these are Keith Haring, Louise Lawler, Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson, Nancy Spero, and Richard Tuttle.



Mark Dion



Deb Sokolow

For the fortieth anniversary of the MATRIX program in 2015 the New York artist Mark Dion, who had attended the Hartford Art School in the 1980s, created a special installation drawn from the museum's permanent collection. His starting point was the paradigm of Western hierarchical thinking—Aristotle's Great Chain of Being. Playing with the idea that all living things occupy a fixed position from the least evolved forms of life to the most, Dion placed a series of photographic details of paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts at the Atheneum along the walls of the gallery.

By arranging these details horizontally the project became an amusing critique of the absurdities of the great chain's vertical stratification; by selecting carefully from various masterpieces Dion also created an enticing celebration of the museum's breadth and depth.

Mark Dion was featured in MATRIX 173, 2015–2016.

Details taken by Mark Dion of works in the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art for his MATRIX installation, *The Great Chain*. Top to bottom: Book of Hours, Southern Netherlandish, Bruges, c. 1450–1460; *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1550–1575; *In the Yosemite Valley* by Albert Bierstadt, 1866; *Still Life with Fish* by Pablo Picasso, 1923.

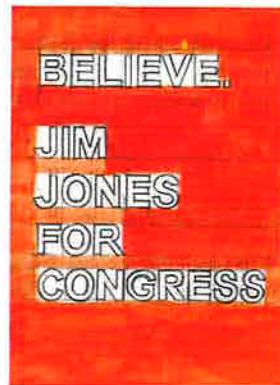
Mark Dion with part of his MATRIX installation. Photograph by Allen Phillips.



Panel 5: November 5 from Some Concerns About the Candidate by Deb Sokolow, 2013. Mixed mediums on paper and panels. Courtesy of the artist and Western Exhibitions, Chicago.



Deb Sokolow. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Deb Sokolow's text-and-image-based narrative drawings often focus on well-known figures and controversial subjects such as Jim Jones, the leader of the People's Temple cult that met its end in the mass suicide in Guyana in 1978. Jones is the subject of *Some Concerns About the Candidate*, Sokolow's 2013 MATRIX project, which imagined Jones visiting Hartford during a fictional run for Congress. (Jones had harbored political ambitions in early adulthood.)

The story unfolds on large panels and sheets of paper, like a super-size comic book that has been taken apart and spread across the walls of a gallery. The artist's hand is intentionally imperfect, with the graphite smudged, covered with Wite-Out, and even masked by black bars, mimicking declassified government documents.

Sokolow explains that *Some Concerns About the Candidate* is "tangential, subjective and at times illogical...an exploration into human nature and the cult of personality phenomenon." Much of the narrative takes place in Avery Court, the museum's modern Bauhaus-style interior where the centerpiece is the curious and incongruous mannerist sculpture *Venus with Nymph and Satyr* (c. 1600) by Pietro Francavilla. Venus becomes a witness and touchstone of the dark narrative.

Deb Sokolow was featured in MATRIX 166, 2013.

Preliminary sketch for Jim Jones campaign poster from *Some Concerns About the Candidate* by Sokolow, 2013. Mixed mediums on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Western Exhibitions.

Rashaad

Newsome



Emblems of aristocratic life are joined to the heraldry of contemporary street culture in Rashaad Newsome's work. The artist has mined music magazines and auction catalogues for the luxury items of hip-hop royalty and put them together in collages and wall sculptures that resemble heraldic shields. The result is a wry leveling of the social and political playing field.

In his collage *Venus de Video*, Newsome refers to two famous representations of Venus: the late second century BC Greek *Venus de Milo*, and Alessandro Botticelli's fifteenth-century *Birth of Venus*. Newsome's own goddess of love (rapper Nicki Minaj) is set against a field of jewel-encrusted flowers surrounded by a variety of glistening gems and gold and platinum chains with a pink Lamborghini at its base. The frame is painted with Ferrari's customized pearlescent car finishes in powder blue and white. This armorial composition of excess toys with hip-hop stereotypes.

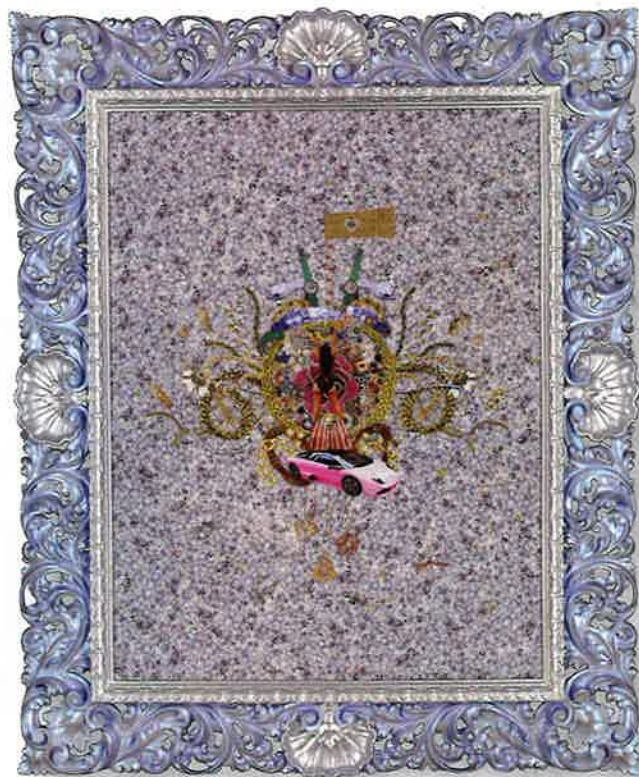
Newsome chose objects from the Wadsworth Atheneum's collections, such as the bust of Louis XV of 1755, to be displayed in dialogue with his compositions. He formed similar conjunctions in his musical compositions, combining Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* with clips from rap videos showing the hands of artists such as LL Cool J and Redman coordinated so that they appear to be conducting Orff's masterpiece in another witty unraveling of high and low.

Rashaad Newsome was featured in MATRIX 161, 2011.

Rashaad Newsome. *Photograph courtesy of the artist.*

Venus de Video by Rashaad Newsome, 2010. Collage on paper in customized frame, 72 3/4 by 60 inches. *Courtesy of Ramis Barquet Gallery, New York.*

Bend by Newsome, 2010. Plexiglass, leather, faux fur, and jewelry; 32 by 17 inches. *Ramis Barquet Gallery.*





Putting aside the real history of Hartford, the Los Angeles-based artist Frohawk Two Feathers contributed his own version in 2014. Through a fantastical set of “official” portraits, battle paintings, territorial maps, and military paraphernalia, the artist compiled a tongue-in-cheek alternative tale of Hartford set in the late eighteenth century. The project *On errythang (On everything)* was one installment of an ongoing project, the rise of Frenghland, a fictitious union of France and England, parts of which Two Feathers has installed in other cities here and abroad.

The visual narrative is told through portraits of duplicitous royal family members, corrupt military leaders, and rebel assassins, all coded with facial and body tattoos. They don tribal costumes, military uniforms, and European fashions, supplemented with pertinent accessories.

In consideration of the history and tradition of the Wadsworth, Frohawk Two Feathers requested that the gallery be designed as it would be to present eighteenth-century European paintings. The deep blue wall color and the white chair rails of the MATRIX gallery were copied directly from the museum’s eighteenth-century British paintings gallery. At first glance the gallery appeared to be a conventional display of military portraits and history paintings. Instead it was a powerful and amusing counter narrative, an untold story imagined for the museum’s city.

Two Feathers’s *On the country* (2014) was inspired by Emanuel Leutze’s battle scene *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops* (1848) in the Wadsworth’s collection. Leutze shows the Spanish Conquistadors ripping gold necklaces from the throats of the dead Aztecs, an act mimicked in Two Feathers’s bloodbath between the soldiers of New Holland and Frenghland.

Frohawk Two Feathers was featured in MATRIX 170, 2014–2015.

Detail of *On the country* by Frohawk Two Feathers, 2014. Acrylic, graphite, tea, and coffee on canvas, 44 ¼ by 59 ½ inches. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York.

Installation view of *On errythang (On everything)*, MATRIX 170 by Frohawk Two Feathers. Phillips photograph.

Frohawk Two Feathers. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Frohawk



Two Feathers

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