

Matthew Barney & Elizabeth Peyton

Blood of Two

Slaughterhouse, DESTE Foundation Project Space, Hydra
16 June — Spring 2010

Located on the Greek island of Hydra, a picturesque retreat devoid of cars and accessible only by foot or donkey, the new DESTE Foundation Project Space, Slaughterhouse, features the unlikely pairing of Matthew Barney and Elizabeth Peyton in a collaborative site-specific installation. Barney, whose cryptic subject matter reached a zenith in his *Cremaster* series of films (1994–2002), and Peyton, a painter best known for celebrity portraits that resemble fashion illustrations, have managed to overcome their disparate practices, producing a ritualistic artwork that encompasses local customs without succumbing to the tropes of cultural tourism.

While no works have individual titles, *Blood of Two*'s largest piece is a coffin-size glass-covered vitrine made of bronze and steel which was submerged in the sea for several months before being pulled out by local divers and carried by Hydran men to the former slaughterhouse, in an elaborate ceremony that borrowed from a traditional local Easter celebration. Inside this repository are five delicately rendered framed pencil drawings by Peyton, four of which celebrate the animals of Hydra – a seagull preying on a fish, for example – as well as a depiction of the Ancient Greek deity Artemis, goddess of the hunt. Also inside is a stack of drawings with a green rusty, water-stained patina made by both artists that resembles a large tome, although its contents are impossible to view. The vitrine has an undeniable beauty and mystery, whose appearance matches the corroded interior of the room.

To the left of the main part of the abattoir is a smaller area with three framed works: an oil painting by Peyton of a fish dinner; two semiabstract works that look like they have been waterlogged; and a schematic by Barney of the slaughterhouse seen from the side, showing a pipe that carried blood and offal to the water, where it would then be feasted on by dogfish. As part of the exhibition's opening, a small dead shark was strapped to the top of the vitrine for its trip from the water, adding further reference to the structure's recent past. The opening also inaugurated the traditional Miaoulia festival, honouring those who fought in the Greek Revolution, the war for independence from Turkey, which began in 1821.

Further down the hillside, next to the water, is a smaller building whose flat roof holds an abstract sculpture by Barney that resembles a black salt-encrusted stalagmite. Inside is a portrait in oil of Barney by Peyton, framed with glass to withstand the elements. Its purpose in relation to the overall theme is unclear and makes Peyton's involvement seem slighter, given that Barney's fascination with myth is unmistakable throughout. With *Blood of Two*, Barney and Peyton were able to engage the people of Hydra and the island's history, making them participants rather than viewers, while remaining true to their own visual languages. Both artists have become somewhat easy targets for criticism since they reached the top of their game, but Barney managed to rein in his over-the-top aesthetic and combine it with Peyton's penchant for the romantic to create an anthropological, experiential project in tune with this distinctive setting. *Chris Bors*



Blood of Two, 2009 (installation view).
Photo: Hugo Glendinning. © the artists.
Courtesy DESTE Foundation, Hydra