Painter Matthew Ritchie was born in England in 1964; and he studied at Boston University and at Camberwell School of Art in London. He currently lives and works in New York. Ritchie has had solo exhibitions at the Dallas Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, and the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York. His work has been exhibited in such venues as the 1997 Whitney Biennial, Mass MoCA, and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art. He has also realized web projects with the Walker Art Center, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and MIT, and he has had a project published in *Parkett Magazine*. His large-scale wall and floor painting installations and artist's books projects for the internet are all part of an ongoing project of finding visual metaphors for the creation of the universe and the history of time. His work follows a group of symbolical characters who play out their stories in a world of colors and forms that are governed by their own set of rules constructed by the artist.

Jenelle Porter is a curator, writer, and a partner in a design firm that specializes in artist's catalogues. She was formerly curator at Artists Space in New York (1998–2001) where she organized *Infotecture*, *'Pictures' at an Exhibition,* and *Uri Tzaig*: *Duel*, among many others. She has written for several exhibition catalogues, including authoring a book on Uri Tzaig. She has worked at the Walker Art Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art. At the Whitney she assisted with the 1997 Biennial, in which Ritchie's work was included. She lives in Los Angeles.

About MIT's Percent-for-Art Program: MIT's Percent-for-Art Program, administered by the List Visual Arts Center, allots up to $250,000 to commission art for each new major renovation or building project. The program was formally instituted in 1968 but earlier collaborations between artists and architects can be found on the Institute's campus. In 1985 architect I.M. Pei and artists Scott Burton, Kenneth Noland, and Richard Fleischner collaborated on a Percent-for-Art Program for the Wiesner Building and plaza, home to the List Center and the Media Laboratory. Other Percent-for-Art works include a terrazzo floor by Jackie Ferrara for the Tang Center and out-door sculptures by Louise Nevelson and Tony Smith. Other publicly-sited art includes works by Alexander Calder, Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso, Beverly Pepper, Michael Heizer, Victor Burgin, Jennifer Bartlett, Bernar Venet, Frank Stella, Isaac Witkin, and Jacques Lipchitz.

Funding for this publication was generously provided by Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund.

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PublicWorks

MATTHEW RITCHIE

***Games of Chance and Skill*, 2000–2002**

A commission for the Zesiger Sports and Fitness Center

Architect: Roche & Dinkeloo Associates

The Swimmer

The installation *Games of Chance and Skill* presents the universe as a metaphorical shape peopled by the embodiment of Creation's talking points. But besides the fact that you are surrounded by vivid color, carefully rendered shapes, diffused light, random markings, and, well, general chaos, there is a deeper story. It starts with swimming.

The act of swimming demonstrates a perfect energy system. A virtually weightless body glides through water, action results in reaction as a stroke and a kick propel one along in correlation to the force exerted. If you stop moving, you sink. In this corridor, you look through the window at a swimmer in the pool, and behind and above you, on the wall and ceiling, colorful maps illustrate systems of action and reaction, energy, and entropy. Your thoughts are swimming in a universe of information.

Matthew Ritchie's work of the last several years has explored and documented the manifold creation narratives of the universe: religious, scientific, and mythological. Though comprising traditional practices of painting, sculpture, and drawing, Ritchie's work perpetually extends to nontraditional installations that incorporate enormous light boxes, vinyl and pen wall drawings, books, and web projects. Short stories, written to accompany each body of work, refer to pulp fiction, voodoo, and mythology, and cover topics ranging from love, gambling, and horror, to quantum physics, and religion (among other things). Ritchie uses and distills these varied elements until they are compressed to their simplest form: information. For him, information is his raw material that is dizzingly mapped and diagrammed across and through systems of color, line, paint, metal, glass, and light. Ritchie's iconographic gestures allow an analytical study of how information arranges itself in a closed system. Here, the system just happens to be a model of the formation of the universe.

Ritchie's version of the universe is inhabited by an assembly of forty-nine characters who occupy various space-time situations, and who possess multitudinous attributes that collapse onto one another like a telescoping rod. They are an illustrious bunch: complicated, desirous, alluring, and deeply cynical. Ritchie has stated that at the end of this colossal story there will be a single remaining character, a personage who contains all the other characters along with their respective tics, a schizophrenic bundle of energy and mass.

For over three years, Ritchie worked to develop *Games of Chance and Skill* with the Percent for Art Program at MIT. Collaborating with the architects, Ritchie assembled the work as not only a continuation of his oeuvre, but as an integral aspect of the architecture. The architects in turn responded to Ritchie's ideas by making significant alterations to their design. Comprised of three physically discrete elements, *Games of Chance and Skill* tinkers with the relationships among history, matter, and consciousness, and gathers all of Ritchie's cosmogenies in one place for the first time.

The wall relief, created from individual pieces of painted aluminum, reads from left to right, right to left, or from both sides simultaneously. Shapes and colors represent the heroes and villains of this story. On the far left, the gray branching shape represents Astoreth whose attribute is number, the first unknown quantity, the first coordinate. Astoreth, or Asta, is a hermaphrodite, willing and able to play it both ways; S/he is the lover of Stanley, a one-eyed cardsharp also known as Satan-El, whose defining attribute is duality.

The remaining Gamblers, as this set of seven characters is known, round out the initial conditions of the universe. The green mass is Lilith (Frequency), and the arm of soft blue funneling aloft is Lucifer (Light) or Lucky. Here, before space and time, we find the swapping of fermions (subatomic particles/the stuff) and bosons (subatomic particles/the energy) that characterizes the earliest state of the known universe. When we arrive at the jagged, yellow ellipse, the real action starts. Yellow is Bubba, alias Be-elzebub, a character whose tale is told in Richie's story, "The Gamblers." In a seedy hotel room just outside Boston, Bubba is eviscerated by Lucky and the other gamblers. Quantum decoherence is accelerated and solid matter emerges. The rupture of the yellow circle, in Ritchie's cosmological parlance, is your basic Big Bang.

More characters emerge now, too many to itemize here. The black threads embedded in the yellow circle represent Abaddon, or Zero. White is Stanley, mentioned above. Irregular brown shapes signify characters whom we've not yet met. The large, red circle is the period just after the Big Bang, the first million years when matter was intermingled with energy. Some say that this was the locus of the formation of linear time; others disagree. In this (cosmologically) brief moment, everything is still in play. The red disk is the millstone that the angel Dokiel (aka Duke) will throw into the waters of the world at the end of time. So time contains its demise at its very conception. Hold on to that one.

Adjacent to the red circle is a yellow crystalline ring: the circle of Hydrogen, the first element, which will fuel the stars. The largest shape of all, in blue and gray, represents our swimmer. As well, it is the headless corpse of Lucifer (don't ask, but there was serious payback for the Bubba murder) now fused with Asta to form Abraxas (Infinity). In the parallel timeline, a story called "The Slow Tide," this character is a senile bodybuilder who will drown in a freak storm off the coast of south Florida. The swimmer is the universe, the space-time continuum, $E=mc^2$. The brown curlicues are free energy, the trail of the Astronaut (Dynamis). His haywire rocket sends him into the heart of the angry, green tornado, also known as the actress, Mixis. Their overlapping brown and green masses represent the union of system energy and free energy. Their offspring leads, circuitously, to the formation of the planets.

The columnar green shape slanting up from the brown mass is the tree of life, the evolutionary ledge. From its branches grow irregular shapes in all the representative colors we've thus far explored, except here, they represent the seven lobes of the brain. Yellow is the limbic, the part of the brain concerned with basic emotions and instinctive actions; red, the medulla oblongata (sensual and entropic appetites); blue, the cerebellum; black, the occipital nerve (sight); white, the parietal (memory and sensory functions); gray, the temporal (time and space). Floating freely to the far right is a green form—the frontal lobe. Like the other areas of the map, this one has a cast of characters too.

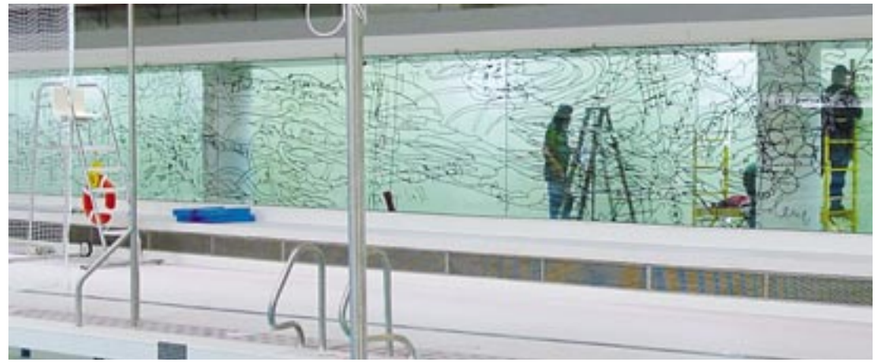
The frontal lobe, located directly behind the forehead and found in its developed form only in humans, controls behavior, learning, voluntary movement, and consciousness. In the midst of this green structure one can interpret all the colors of this universe, as the image of consciousness recapitulates the structure of the story. In other words, consciousness looks through the window at the swimmer, and in turn, looks back at itself. By the same token, you can now read the story from this point back to where we started, with Number.

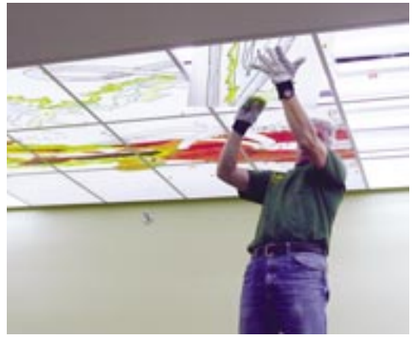
The two remaining elements of the installation, the light box and the window, restate the narrative on the wall but shift its meaning and possible interpretation in their own way, further blurring the story. The drawing on the ceiling light box parallels the mural in subject and color, but is overlaid with chaotic fragments and equations that restate the actions taking place there. This section, graffitied with its own scientific and allegorical meanings, represents a transitional state in the story, much like the moment after the Big Bang. This state is where real change can occur, where lives can be remade and either/or situations rendered obsolete.

Etched on the large window, swirling lines and crudely handwritten equations collide with one another. Fundamental equations of science (Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, the Laws of Thermodynamics, for example) mingle with notations ranging from gambling odds and voodoo symbols, to angelic seals from ceremonial magic. These notes, guides as much for the artist as for the viewer, are verbal clues to the larger narrative. This is where the project dissolves back into the real. Universe as the activity seen through the glass becomes both an enactment of, and a complement to, the equations drawn on the glass.

Although enormously complex, this grand story is not a collection of secrets to be revealed or lessons to be learned. It provides a way to see more of what surrounds us. Ritchie's project is about merging, through aesthetically compelling forms, his own complex interests with our own. He gives us some powerful tools for understanding the origins of the universe, one of the most difficult concepts we might ever wrap our brains around. Yet the documents created by his vast project are as much about incompleteness as they are about completeness. We propose that you use this color-coded map of creation as a key to deciphering the universe—a version of a version with vivid characters to cheer for and hiss at. This is just one way to tell it, and as Ritchie says, everything is true except for the parts he made up.

Jenelle Porter





Games of Chance and Skill
Matthew Ritchie 2000–2002
A single work with three site-specific elements

West corridor wall:
Enamel on plasma cut aluminum wall mosaic, mounted with an epoxy adhesive on aluminum backing plate, mounted to a painted wall.
9.4 x 77 feet

East corridor wall:
10 tempered sand blasted and painted glass panes mounted in a steel frame
6 x 77 feet

Corridor ceiling:
220 glass panels laminated with an internally lit digital Lambda print mounted in a commercial hanging grid system
8 x 80 feet

Commissioned by
the MIT Percent-for-Art Program

Photos by George Bouret

For more information about this project please visit
http://web.mit.edu/matthew-ritchie/html/indexQt.htm