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Media Release

CATASTERISM

A Film by Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler

International Streaming Premiere June 12 to 26, 2022

www.catasterism.net

CATASTERISM, a new film by Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler, will be presented as a streaming premiere during Art Basel. *CATASTERISM* was written and directed by Matthew Barney (b. 1967) with music written and directed by Jonathan Bepler (b. 1959). The film will go live internationally on June 12 (2 p.m. CEST) and will only be available for two weeks on www.catasterism.net (until June 26, 2022).

In September 2021, Barney and Bepler presented a live performance at Schaulager titled 'Catasterism in Three Movements'. This collaboration featured a large-scale symphonic composition by Bepler, performed by the Basel Sinfonietta with conductor Jack Sheen; and choreography developed by Barney with dance artists K.J. Holmes and Sandra Lamouche.

CATASTERISM draws from documentation of those performances witnessed by a live audience, and expands the narrative with cinematic scenes filmed in the galleries and workspaces of Schaulager. The film elaborates on the characters' private rituals, and deploys forensic examinations of artworks within Schaulager to evoke connections between the material qualities of art objects and the ephemeral qualities of the music. With musicians moving through and inhabiting the building in varying locations and configurations, Schaulager's iconic architecture becomes a monumental acoustic body, as well as an almost ceremonial stage for performers. The project continues Barney's and Bepler's long history of collaborative projects with distinguished musicians in experimental and unconventional settings.

CATASTERISM unfolds in three acts. Act 1 sees the goddess Diana (Jill Bettonvil) outfitted in baroque camouflage and armed with a rifle, standing sentry-like among a widely spaced constellation of single string players. A painting by Albert Bierstadt, one of the foremost painters of the American West, hangs alone in Schaulager's vast gallery space. A Hoop Dancer (Sandra Lamouche) surveys the scene, diagramming invisible axes along which the musicians align. At the survey's conclusion, Diana and the Hoop Dancer face off; the orchestra's playing takes on an increased urgency, and builds to a dramatic sonic climax. The Electroplater (K.J. Holmes) disarms Diana and sends her energy skyward, performing the 'catasterism' of the film's title.

Act 2 features Jonathan Bepler's *Catasterism Suite*, an epic work of experimental orchestra music split into five movements. The music contains a wide array of sounds, from industrial roars and hisses to lilting songs and intergalactic chorales. Barney's expansive sculpture *Elk Creek Burn* (2018) looms across the chamber between audience and orchestra. Bepler originally conceived of the music as a corollary or allegory to this sculpture, a monumental horizontal tree with a spiraling metal fin. The singular bursts of copper and brass that seem to explode from within the charred tree suggested a visual score for the music, and the music in turn could score the sculpture. For Bepler, this form also evoked shared themes; the way that a natural geometry was interrupted by moments of eccentricity or chaos, and the tension between the earthly and the artificial.

Footage of works by Robert Gober, Katharina Fritsch, and Kenneth Noland anchor the music and the characters within Schaulager as a site.

In Act 3, the Electroplater and the Hoopdancer perform overlapping choreographies, converging around Diana in their orbits. The orchestra is deployed throughout the building, ritually surrounding the characters with layers of sonic conjuring. A cluster of string players slowly encroaches into the scene as if under the Electroplater's spell. The dramatic characters exit, leaving the music's airborne harmonics and windy breath to dissipate into the lofty atrium.

A catasterism is the story of how a mythological hero is transformed into a constellation; in its most basic definition, 'a placing among the stars.' *CATASTERISM* explores the relationship between nature and humans, the transformation of matter and media, and metamorphoses in the broadest sense. The narrative is also concerned with the American philosophy of Manifest Destiny, and the complex interrelations between the survey, the weapon, and the artwork in bringing the West under American control. These characters and themes of *CATASTERISM* relate to Barney's 2018 film *Redoubt*, which used the classical myth of the goddess Diana as a structure to explore mythologies of the American West.

The performance is connected to the series of commissioned works that Laurenz Foundation, Basel, has initiated and enabled since its founding, and finds its continuation with the launch of the film *CATASTERISM*.

Click here to go directly to the film: www.catasterism.net



For further details on the project, please visit: www.schaulager.org/catasterism

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