

“The Feeling of Things”: an Interview with Matt Mullican

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Lara Morrell
Mullican Matt

Pirelli HangarBicocca presents a spectacular exhibition of over 40 years of work by **Matt Mullican**. Curated by **Roberta Tenconi**, the exhibition occupies a 5500 metres square space, presenting the artist’s prolific production in a variety of different materials including glass, stone, metal, posters, neons, photographs, paintings, videos, performances, lightboxes and computer-based projects as well as virtual reality and a large selection of iconography.

The exhibition takes us on a journey through the space and the artists’ five worlds which are split into five areas of different colours which represent the iconic cosmologies of the artist. We’ve interviewed Matt Mullican at the preview of his exhibition to talk about “**The Feeling of Things**“, about Glass and about his old friend Glenn..

Lara Morrell: May I firstly congratulate you on this colossal and cosmic exhibition, from what I gather this is your first major retrospective in Italy, what has it been like putting all your work together and seeing it here in a space such as Hangar Bicocca?

Matt Mullican: It is a responsibility to have a space like this, it is not an easy thing but I had lots of time and that was the key, its a space with such a tremendous ego, from a point of view which is undeniable. I didn’t want to make it into theatre which is one of the devices which other artists have used in order to to handle it. I wanted the whole thing lit and deal with it in its own terms and use it for what it can do, which for me by itself is spectacular. We always had a enough time to actually do what we wanted and the staff here have been tremendous. Everything was perfect but I have to say it was like dressing a whale, it is complicated and a chore. I have in actual fact done many retrospectives but not one in which I could build the actual museum itself, I used the low walls to create the vista. Like that scene from Citizen Kane with all the crates, you know what I mean? That shot is a feeling and gives you the scale and thats what gets you feeling. People go to the Gran Canyon not to see it but to feel it, when you see it you breath goes away and thats what this space is. You feel the scale, its so huge.

L.M.: Seeing all you work from the last 45 years together in this way, has it helped you in your quest to explain and order the world around you?

M.M.: You know the quest for what I am deciphering, what ever it is I am deciphering, I am smart enough to know that I am not going to get there and I knew this a while ago. The pieces that I guarantee that will be in shows are the pieces from 45 years ago. The pinching a dead mans arm, and the birth to death list both from 1973 are works that I can show forever, then of course there’s the hypnosis, The Meaning of Things which is the

most important recent work I have done and the most important pieces are still seldom, they don't happen all the time and I am really excited when I am onto one. I think the most important thing about this shows are the walls and the structure. Actually seeing the work here, it became my studio space, my studio is wherever I am and this is the best studio I have ever had. It lights the work up in such a particular way, I learned from the work. I got vertigo from looking up at my pictures at this scale, I have never seen them like this before.

L.M: May I ask you a more pernicky question? Our studio is based in Venice, I've noticed a prominence in the use of glass throughout the exhibition, what is it about glass? What does this material represent for you?

M.M: I love glass, glass has a perfection about it, it reflects us, you see through it also solid and its old and its been around for a long time. I like working through materials, I've worked in granite, glass, stain glass, tapestry, many different material and I am really interested in how those materials are read. There are artists in materials. In the early 80s I made the decision to go through the crafts, because I was interested in the context of the sign and I had done posters and flags and all that and then I wanted to go onto the crafts.

L.M.: Where did you blow the glass, in Murano?

M.M.: No unfortunately not, the first blown glass pieces were done in New York, where I was living at the time and in Germany and Austria. Glass has a huge place in my work, as you can see, I just love its perfection, its transparency. It plays a huge role in this exhibition and perhaps its one of the factors which makes it so perfect, although its not, at least we have an element which represents it, we feel that representation and thats again what I was interested in, when you see the sign in these different areas, and different materials and you change the sign, you change the adjectives, the adjectives are feelings and the feeling of things is vital. I've broken the world down into feelings not senses. What is the sense of the body? Its physicality? There is a sense, what is that? I think its mental, its the feeling of presence, its the sixth sense, the feeling of your physical body. This is the next thing I am interested in because our feeling is the nervous system, this is something I am really interested in. I am always gravitated towards the most fun!

L.M.: On from glass to your old friend Glenn, could you tell me more about him and how he is getting on?

M.M: Glenn is the stick figure, I gave him a name to give him the image of identity like Donald Duck or Bugs Bunny so I could have a relationship with him beyond so it wasn't just a picture it was actually a person I could have a relationship with, I was interested in the avatar-ishness of him, like a friend from the other side. Glen has a studio where he works, Glenn is there, he is always there.

L.M.: Does he stay the same or does he evolve, grow and change?

M.M.: In his essence he stays the same, in the Meaning of Things, that piece which you absolutely must read at the beginning of the show, in the first corridor on your left, you begin with The Man and His symbols which is Carl Jung and then The Meaning of Things

begins, read the text and look at the pictures, that's the most important new piece of all the work and it's a killer because Glenn is not Glenn anymore. You'll see how Glenn functions.