

gulf coast

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Matrix, Mystery, and Meaning: M-theory and Angelbert Metoyer:

In the mid-1990s, physicist Edward Witten proposed the concept of M-theory. To summarize the theory in terms that are comprehensible to those of us who are not versed in theoretical physics, M-theory is an attempt to unify different versions of string theory — a speculative mathematical model that describes the basic building blocks out of which the universe is composed, and the forces through which these constituent parts interact. Witten didn't specify what the "M" stood for when he coined the term. Appropriate considering the complex nature of the theory (and the universe that it attempts to explain), Witten has since stated that the ambiguous initial is multivalent. Depending on the context and one's perspective, it can mean "inatrix," "mystery," "magic," "myth," or "mother theory."

Much like M-theory, Angelbert Metoyer's artistic practice is profoundly multidimensional. The artist's painting, sculpture, video, sound art, and performance presents viewers with a palimpsest of materials, images, and themes. He examines the scientific and the spiritual through an array of subjects including quantum physics, psychoanalysis, memory, music, astronomy, and the primordial. Though Metoyer's methods and sources of inspiration are wide-ranging, they are nevertheless inextricably intertwined. Rather than portraying a visual world that is expressive of disconnection and confusion, Metoyer manages to elucidate the complicated concepts with which he is engaged, deftly weaving together intricate threads in order to make meaning out of the mysterious.

Metoyer's *M-Window* series demonstrates the layering and synthesis that is at the core of his formal and conceptual process. *Guangzhou Memory* (2010) and *Self Portrait (gold in the sky)* (2010) are composed of several panes of etched glass evenly spaced in front of a mirror or aluminum ground, which provides depth within the compositional frame. As one moves in front of the work, numbers, words, and hermetic markings shift in and out of focus, visible from one vantage point and fading into the background from another. This visual slippage invites a

closer and more participatory engagement with the work. Despite its comparative flatness, Metoyer's work on paper and canvas is equally expansive. As in many of the *M-Windows*, a constellation of paint, dirt, and specks of gold flickers over *She Gave Light as I Past Through* (2007) and *My Last Vision in Memphis (When Dirt turns to Gold)* (2010-11), endowing the paintings with a celestial atmosphere. Through his depiction of geometric diagrams, esoteric equations, and archetypal forms, Metoyer references modern science and ancient mythologies, both of which address essential questions concerning the origin and structure of the universe.

Although such cosmological symbolism is universal in subject matter, Metoyer's work is also deeply intuitive and portrays an enduring dimension of subjectivity. For example, titles such as *Self Portrait* and *My Last Vision* speak to his own personal experiences, preoccupations, and memories. The *Song Keeper* series is based on his interest in music and pop culture, and much of his complex imagery stems from lore passed down from his Creole ancestors. In addition, the handprint motif that recurs throughout Metoyer's body of work provides a literal stamp of his individuality. However, in keeping with M-theory, Metoyer's artistic practice is associative, relational, and interactive. Confronted with materials like mirrors, aluminum, and glass, one's own visage is reflected in the multi-layered surfaces of his work, encouraging a dialogue between the artist, the viewer, and the cosmos.

ARTWORKS BY ANGELBERT METOYER

- Guangzhou Memory*, 2010** | oil paint, gold dust on mirror (3 planes of etched glass), 62" x 40"
***Mirror of All (Golden Wood)*, 2010** | (2 planes of etched glass), 60" x 48"
***Self Portrait (Gold in the Sky)*, 2010** | oil paint, earth, gold dust on aluminum (3 planes of etched glass), 60" x 48.8"
***The Mother of Mars*, 2010** | oil paint, gold dust on mirror (3 planes of etched glass), 13" x 7"
***My Last Vision in Memphis (When Dirt Turns to Gold)*, 2010-2011** | Earth, gold dust, oil paint, and acrylic on canvas, 115" x 94"
***Song Keeper F (Green Dots)*, 2007** | mixed media, 38" x 25"
***When We Saw All*, 2010** | oil paint, earth, and gold dust on mirror (4 panes of etched glass), 60" x 48"
***Icon 12*, 2010** | charcoal on paper, 27" x 42"

All images courtesy of Deborah Colton Gallery, Houston.







