"My name is Matt Mullican. I live at 370 Mesa Road, Santa Monica, California. I'm 6'2" tall. I weigh 180 pounds. I'm 22 years old and single."

Since the mid-70s, I've been doing a series of lectures titled, "Who feels the most pain?" which consist of stories and fond memories. One of my early memories was giving a lecture to my family in Chickasha, Oklahoma, about what I was doing. I could explain what I was doing without ever mentioning the word "art" or "artist". I was talking about the world and experience. I still believe that one could talk about art and artists in that manner. When I was at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1972, I was very interested in light patterns and the quality of the light of colours in a dark room. A great number of my works were a collection of little coloured cards pinned onto the wall to show them under the conditions of changing the lights in the room. For instance, if the light is changed to green, all the colours look different. As my performance, I laid colour cards on the floor in the dark auditorium, then picked up certain colours as best as I could. When the lights were turned back on again, a bunch of cards had naturally missed being picked up. This experience made me recognize that all I saw were light patterns.

If I say "all I see are light patterns," where does life exist in those patterns? When I said "all I see are light patterns" in 1973, what was I saying? I'm saying that there is a huge difference between who I am and what I see. At this very moment, I say that I'm not looking at you, but at the light reflecting off of you. If I say, "all I see is the light reflecting off of you", what does it mean? Does it mean that you're neither living, nor human? Neither man, nor woman, but simply phenomena? People who are sitting in front of me, the floor that is laid out, everything is the same. This is a fairly radical idea, but it was the
idea that I was experimenting with. I remember seeing a girlfriend getting out of a car and walking towards me and saying to myself: "I'm not seeing her, I'm just seeing the light reflect off of her." This created a huge distance between me and her, but it also created a huge distance to everybody else. Twenty years later, I was sitting at a bar with my wife on an early date at Magoo's. I'd had my second martini and was telling her that there might be some trouble in our relationship because of these certain attitudes that I have and the way I see things. Later, she confessed that she thought that I was going to confess my sexuality, not being quite straight. But it wasn't about that at all. It was that, as an artist, I look at things in a certain way and always have a distance. There is a distance in my life, which is absolutely still there today. Then, where does life exist in those patterns that I've seen? All my work has been done at this point.

At Easter in 1973, I was on a trip driving back to Santa Monica and had an idea – the idea was about a little line drawing of a detail of a car's tire, that never existed and never would exist. It was a fictional detail. The implication that a detail shows a part of something that exists, but it doesn't exist, it's kind of in-between. Endless questions about this detail occurred in my mind: Who is driving the car? What's the colour of the car? Is it morning, or afternoon? How fast is the car going? What's the make of the car? Is it a Chevy, a Pontiac, a Cadillac, or a Porsche? Is anybody in the back seat? What kind of day is it? What kind of time of day? This idea was the light bulb of my life. When I had the idea after experimenting with optical perception, I decided, "This is my future." It was a hook into something that I could really have fun with for quite a while. I couldn't rationally explain to you why I felt it, but it was instinctive and an exhilarating feeling.

Within months, I was drawing a stick figure named Glen on a drawing page, while taking an undergraduate course in John Baldessari's class called "post-studio art". I didn't have a studio to work in, but I made a fictional studio with Glen in which I did all kinds of experiments. I dealt with his motives, his physicality, his hair, his fear, et cetera. In the end, approximately 500 drawings of Glen inside the place were produced. In the space, there was a clock, a plant, and a calendar that I drew, and he was doing various things. The most important thing he did was to pinch his arm. He pinched his arm and felt pain. I wanted to know where the pain that Glen felt was. "God, I feel it, where is it?" I wanted to identify that pain. I wanted to prove that the stick figure lives life. It may sound ridiculous, but it was the time...
to experiment with ridiculous plans and statements. As soon as I'd started to invent the form of life, or the living being inside my drawing space, I decided to draw a dead stick figure to contrast with the living one in order to figure out what is really the difference between a living and a dead stick figure. I drew him as a dead man in the corner on the back.

After continuing to work on these works for three months, I went to live in New York City for the first time. I was really getting into the world of comic-book reality, and deeply engaged myself with experiments, cutting up comic books and showing dead comic-book characters. I was interested in seeing a real dead person. I'd become interested in the dead person through this fictional person. This became a quest. I tried to see one, but I couldn't get into any kind of school where they would have them. But one of my friends at Yale University who knew that I wanted to engage with a cadaver called me up and said: "We have a cadaver and we've just uncovered the face." He continued, "The cadaver's face has been covered for the whole first half of the term. Now it's been uncovered. The day after tomorrow, the face will start to be obliterated. We'll go into the eye, then it's going to be different. So please come up here." I immediately got on the train to go up there, because the face is EVERYTHING. When I got there, all the cadavers were on different, beautiful chrome steel tables. I was most interested in the face. We saw one male corpse, the back of whose head was cut to look at the brain. When we turned him over, his left arm fell off on the floor. I picked up the arm and I put it back. There he was. The cadaver looked like it might have been there quite a while, very crusty, smelly and slimy. I looked at the cadaver, and I did what Glen did to himself to the cadaver. Glen had pinched his arm. So I pinched the cadaver's arm, the one that had fallen off. To feel, to understand the pain that could be felt by that action. I put my hand in his mouth, I shouted in his ear, I covered his eyes, the face will start to be obliterated. We'll go into the eye, then it's going to be different. So please come up here." I immediately got on the train to go up there, because the face is EVERYTHING. When I got there, all the cadavers were on different, beautiful chrome steel tables. I was most interested in the face. We saw one male corpse, the back of whose head was cut to look at the brain. When we turned him over, his left arm fell off on the floor. I picked up the arm and I put it back. There he was. The cadaver looked like it might have been there quite a while, very crusty, smelly and slimy. I looked at the cadaver, and I did what Glen did to himself to the cadaver. Glen had pinched his arm. So I pinched the cadaver's arm, the one that had fallen off. To feel, to understand the pain that could be felt by that action. I put my hand in his mouth, I shouted in his ear, I covered his eyes, I blew the hair on his head to make it move, I touched his intestines, amongst other things. It was a very simple thing to do. But what I was most interested in was pinching the arm. That was really the key. When someone in the movies sees something fantastic, they say to the person next to them: "Pinch me! I want to know if I'm dreaming, or not." I was pinching the cadaver. Clearly, he didn't wake up. The next day my friend and I were talking about "him" and "it", and I said, "He looked sad. He looked like he was a homeless man. He looked like he sold his body for booze. It was crusty, smelly and green, and squished like a sponge." The "him-ness" and the "it-ness" were clearly very obvious. That was a primary insight, that we were flipping back and forth unconsciously about the "him-ness" of the cadaver and the "it-ness".

As the next step, I have a head and a body in the most minimal way to identify the human form. It was simply about engaging with just the head and the body, which were around me. I have all of those things as photographs or objects, all of which are on the table, and whenever I would give a lecture on my work, I would lay out the photograph, the comic book, the stick figure, the sign, and the whole thing. Then I would get a pin, à-la-voodoo. I would prick the photograph, the cartoon man, with the pin, and would prick the framed stick figure and the one unframed, the sign, the man broken up, the head and body. Then I would ask the audience: "Who feels the most pain?" The audience always answered: "The person who feels the pain most is somehow between the stick figure that is framed and the one that is unframed." It was sort of where the audience would agree that the most pain was transferred. That was the first time I started working with this idea of "Who feels the most pain?" All my exhibitions
in the 70s followed this pattern: laying out my photographs, my drawings, the signs, these stick figures, the signs, the signs broken up, and then going with the head and body, and a piece of wood resting on a pillow, which I call “sleeping child”. The whole exhibition was like a chart for trying to understand this. Now, if I was to change the idea and say: “Who feels the most pain? Who can hurt themselves the most that I feel?” I would say: “There is the photograph, in which a person who has a needle is putting it into his/her arm. It is painful to watch. There is a cartoon person putting a needle into his/her arm, the stick figure putting the needle into his arm, the sign of a person putting the needle into its arm”, and so forth.

Going in the other direction, we go to a video, which was shot by a Portapak, of myself pricking my finger, called Bleeding green blood. I’m jabbing my finger with a pin, trying to get it to bleed. To go beyond it, you can go to technicolour movies and go further beyond, go into a theatrical situation, where the person is on stage pretending to prick his finger. To go further, I will get a volunteer from the audience to come up here and prick their finger, and then you can say: “Who feels the most pain? It’s not the stick figure this time. I would say probably the person from the audience feels the most pain, but it could very well be any of the others as well. I was certainly involved with the idea of what someone or something feels.

Back again in the 70s, I wanted to make a super-theatre that was somewhere in between the volunteer from the audience and the theatrical situation in which the use of hypnosis came into my work. I wanted to hypnotise somebody to believe that they were pricking their finger, to believe their ages as I set up—five years old, or eighty-five years old. I hired three actors and a hypnotist. I found an advertisement in the Village Voice for a hypnotist, Jerome Salmon who lived in the Village. It was a weird period around in 1976 in New York. Salmon hypnotised me for the first time. I hired him and he hired these three actors to perform at The Kitchen Center for Performing Arts in SoHo. The three actors acted out details from an imaginary life that I had written in 1973, which would include both big subjects like a birth and little subjects like slamming the door, swimming, shopping, or looking in the mirror and at the audience. One of the statements was: “Looking out of your window”. This girl was hypnotised to believe that she was looking out of a window over the audience and screaming at the top of her lungs for her brother to give himself up to the police, because they were going to beat him up. She was terrified of her brother not doing it, so that she was screaming for him.
person" acting. I was completely in shock when I saw it, since I didn't have any idea that I was acting like that. My children invented a term for the face, calling it "rat face".

Here is another anecdote. Once I was walking down the street with my son and feeling perfectly happy. He just looked at me and said: "Rat face. You got a rat face. That's coming out again." The question is, who is "that person"? The person "who feels the most pain?", and this person that I become in a trance state. Who is he? I call him the "icon-brain". I've identified many things about him. He loves Christmas, birthdays, holidays. Christmas Eve is his favorite night. Favorite part of the day is his first cup of coffee in the morning. He loves breakfast, going out to restaurants and the second martini. My theory about the person is the following: Whenever we look at a picture, we somehow project ourselves into that picture. If I could grab that projection that I'm inserting and grab it before it's there, grab it and hold on to it, that is "that person". "That person" is how the person exists. He has a mantra that he repeats, saying, "I LOVE TO WORK FOR TRUTH AND BEAUTY!" I was talking to Lawrence Weiner, a famous conceptual artist. He said, I wouldn't share a beer with "that person" because you can't identify any of those things: What is truth? What is love? What is work? What is beauty? You can only use them for your own game and your own sense of purpose.

On another occasion, I was showing a performance piece in Linz, Austria, and a doctor was in the audience. After my talk and a screening of my film, he came up to me and he grabbed my shirt. He was totally angry with me, and said: "What are you doing? First of all, where did you learn to act like that? You are acting precisely like an autistic person. Why are you doing this?" I had to back up myself to say, "First of all, I was in a trance. Secondly, I saw and heard someone talk about how they think. 'That person' said that they do not think in words, implying that I do. When this other person said that she thinks in pictures, I asked myself: 'Do I think in words?' I answered: 'No, I know I don't think in words. Do I think in pictures? No, I don't think in pictures either.' Then, if I think neither in words nor in pictures, what do I think in? What is it? Who is to say?" I think way too fast and way too many dimensions are involved. It's impossible to identify what it is. It's presumably related to music, context, and memory. When I had the first light bulb about that future, it was such a clear vision, but no clue where it was going. However, I understood everything very quickly. What do you think in when you think? I told this to the doctor. He understood that everything was absolutely okay.

Here is my last anecdote. I have an exhibition up now at the Tamayo Museum in Mexico City. After my lecture about pictures there, someone came up to me and asked: "Why don't you ever use the word 'image'? How come? I'm curious why you don't." I have no idea why I never use the word "image". I was really thinking about the question and started talking about it with friends later at the dinner table. I asked: "Does an image have a thousand words in it?" When I was talking to my class at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg (Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg / HFBK), where I teach, I had this insight that pictures are mental. If all I see are light patterns, then pictures are mental, and the stick figure does exist in that reality. And that reality is a big part of my reality. That pictures are mental, but images, in a way, are the stuff of pictures. They're the language that pictures reside in, but they are not the pictures themselves. A "picture" is something else. A picture holds our relationship to the world and to ourselves.

*Transcript of a performance lecture*
Matt Mullican, *Blowing Hair on the Back of the Dead Man's Head, Watching It Move, Making It Move*, 1973-74, black-and-white photograph, dimensions variable, courtesy Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich

Matt Mullican, *Finger in Mouth*, 1973-74, black-and-white photograph, dimensions variable, courtesy Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich

Matt Mullican, *Holding Guts*, 1973-74, black-and-white photograph, dimensions variable, courtesy Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich

Matt Mullican, *Pinching the Dead Man's Arm*, 1973-74, black-and-white photograph, dimensions variable, courtesy Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich
Matt Mullican, all works: *Untitled (Stick Figure)*, 1974, ink on paper, 35.6 x 21.6 cm, courtesy the artist.

Matt Mullican, *Untitled (Stick Figure)*, 1974, ink on paper, 35.6 x 21.6 cm, courtesy the artist.
Matt Mullican, *Untitled (Learning from That Person's Work)* (details), 2005, ink and paper collaged on bed sheet, each 243.8 x 187.6 cm, courtesy the artist and Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich

Matt Mullican, *That world/Ese mundo* (installation view), Museo Tamayo, Mexico, 2013, photo Daniela Uribe, courtesy Galerie Capitain Petzel, Berlin
Matt Mullican, all works: *Untitled (Studio Experiment)*, 1995, computer-generated image, dimensions variable, production by Martin Dörbaum, Berlin; top left: private collection; bottom left: courtesy Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich; top right: courtesy the artist; bottom right: Collection Swiss Re Insurance Company, Zurich, courtesy Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich
Matt Mullican, *Untitled (Squared colored chart 4)*, 2011, oil, acrylic on canvas, rubbing, 122 x 122 cm © the artist, courtesy Capitain Petzel, Berlin / Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich

Matt Mullican, *Untitled (World Framed with Subject on the Outside)*, 2011, oil, acrylic on canvas, rubbing, 122 x 122 cm © the artist, courtesy Capitain Petzel, Berlin / Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich