

## Michael Joo

Michael Joo (b. 1969, Ithaca, US) investigates the concepts of identity and knowledge in a hybrid contemporary world. He creates narratives that explore places, people and objects through reinterpreting perception: why do we perceive as we perceive? Joo's non-linear, almost cyclical approach to his practice together with his combination of scientific language and research, results in work that is a documentation of process. Whether chemically treated, silver-coated or photo-based, Joo's artwork combines a range of techniques associated with sculpture, painting, photography and print-making. He continues to blur the boundaries between art and science through his investigation into ontology, epistemology and entropy; creating a cross-disciplinary and multi-dimensional dialogue to engage, question, meditate and explore.

By juxtaposing humanity's various pools of knowledge and culture Joo addresses the fluid nature of identity itself. He does this in a variety of mediums including film, sculpture, performance, and installation, with material ranging from bamboo to human sweat and silver nitrate. It seems as if the artist's intention is to achieve the unachievable: to make us see an object in real life that is barely conceivable as thought alone.

Using silver nitrate, a chemical traditionally used, in photography, the artist explores the compounds inherent reflective properties and ability to render visible the invisible. It allows the viewer to both be bathed in the reflected light of the work whilst physically appearing within the work itself, at once seeing the artist's work and their response to it. Joo's monumental site-specific installation, *Locale Inscribed (Walking in the desert with Eisa towards the sun, looking down)* (2014-2015) was conceived for the Sharjah Biennale. The installation encompassed an entire shipping warehouse; the walls were coated in silver nitrate, capturing and reflecting vista of the docks and desert sun. Applied directly on to the stone wall, the chemical revealed every small textural detail whilst the excess solution dissolved into painterly drips which fell to subterranean channels carved into the ground.

The channels were excavated from the ground after being mapped onto the warehouse floor using old blueprints of water irrigation systems, the mirrored wall seemingly encouraging the flow of water into the warehouse. The result - an enormous site-specific painting which captured space, light and environs to produce a verifiable truth encapsulated in a reflected image. For the viewer, reflected in the work with the city behind, they see a connection between the past and present become apparent, at once walking toward something whilst walking away from something else. *Improved Rack (Elk #18)* is a wall-mounted sculpture of elk antlers that are cut into pieces and held together by wire, each unit slightly at distance from the next. The work's form is domineeringly minimalist. However, the organic quality of the medium creates a contradiction, repeating the complex conceptual ideas behind it. Antlers are a sign of dominance and male sexual power: they symbolize a stag's strength, but they also flatter the hunter who collects them as trophy - as a souvenir of his kill. Antlers are an organic ready-made that represent male potency in multiple ways, where sometimes the death of one leads to the endowment of the other. In this aspect, they share concepts of human identity: the stag has to "shed" his antlers each year to re-grow a bigger version:

improvement is coupled with loss, death proceeds growth. Identity is a constant work-in-progress. Joo: 'We 'grow' and lose, only to re-grow again – a process that is both organic and 'man-made'. It is limited only by our own capacity to imagine ourselves or to see ourselves as strong beings.'

Joo is more interested in the way we perceive than in what it is we are looking at in the symbolic as well as the literal sense. For *Bodhi Obfuscatius (Space Baby)*, 2005, Joo surrounds an ancient Buddha sculpture with a matrix of cameras that film the Buddha and project the video onto a second atmosphere of screens. What the artist calls a "space helmet" – the extremely complex process of recoding, transmitting and repeating an object that forms the sculpture as a whole – creates an interaction between viewer and work filtered through modern communication technology. A dialectic evolves that questions the development of identity in modern culture. Joo: 'I think that our culture is hungry for ever-increasing complexity in the face of the homogenization effect that our information technology inspires.'

The seemingly liquid and hybrid environments that Joo creates reflect his own history: born to Korean parents in the United States, a science graduate turned artist, Joo comes from a multi-cultural background with an interdisciplinary academic history. The diversity of reference and material in his work mirrors the complexity and richness, which is so typical of identity – collective and individual – in modern contemporary society. It is a complexity that Joo has experienced and been influenced by since childhood.

Michael Joo received his MFA from the Yale School of Art, Yale University, New Haven, in 1991, after graduating with a BFA from Washington University, St Louis, 1989.

Solo exhibitions of his include: *Seven Sins*, Carolina Nitsch Project Room, New York, US (2017); *Barrier Island*, SCAD Georgia, Savannah, Georgia, US (2016); *Perspectives: Michael Joo*, Smithsonian Freer|Sackler Museum, Washington D.C., US (2016); *Radiohalo*, Blain|Southern, London, UK (2016); *Drift (Bronx)*, The Bronx Museum of Arts, New York, US (2014); *Transparency Engine*, SCAD Moot Gallery, Sham Shui Po HK (2014); Solo presentation of *Doppelganger*, Cass Sculpture Foundation, Goodwood UK (2014); *Michael Joo: Drift*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Connecticut, US (2014); *Michael Joo*, M Building, Art Basel Miami Beach 2013, Miami, US (2013); *Exit from the House of Being*, Blain|Southern, London, UK (2012); Galerie Marabini, Bologna, IT (2010); Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US (2009); *Michael Joo*, Palm Beach Institute for Contemporary Art, Florida, US (2004); the South Korean Pavilion at the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale together with Do-Ho-Suh, IT (2001); White Cube, London, UK (1998); and *Crash*, Anthony D'Offay Gallery, London, UK (1995).

Joo was included in *Korean Art: The Power of the Now*, TransGlobe Publishing and Thames & Hudson, London in 2013 and was the cover art for *Korean Contemporary Art* published by Prestel in 2012. Other Criteria published *Michael Joo* with an interview between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Michael Joo, 2007. In 2006, Joo was awarded both the grand prize of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Biennale, for *Bohdi Obfuscatius (Space Baby)* and the United States Artists Fellowship.

Selected group exhibitions include: *Ark*, Chester Cathedral, Chester, UK; *Emanation 2017: An Invitational Contemporary Art Exhibit*, Wheaton Arts and Cultural Centre, New Jersey, US; *Glasstress*, Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida, US; *Vitreous Bodies: Assembled Visions in Glass*, MASS Art (Stephen D. Paine Galleries), Boston, Massachusetts, US; *Naturalia*, curated by Danny Moynihan, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, US (all 2017); *Anyang Public Art Project*, Anyang-si, KR; *Still (the) Barbarians*, Curated by Koyo Kouoh, EVA International Biennale, Limerick, IE (both

2016); *Seoul, Vite, Vite!*, curated by Jean-Max Colard, as part of *Lille3000*, Euralille, FR; *America Is Hard To See, Film & Video Screenings: MIND EYE BODY*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Glasstress 2015 Gotika*, Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Franchetti, Venice, IT; *Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, the possible*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, AE (all 2015); *The Space Where I Am*, Blain|Southern, London, UK (2014); *White Light/White Heat*, The Wallace Collection, London, UK; *Come Together: Surviving Sandy*, curated by Phong Bui, Industry City, Brooklyn, New York, US; *Indivisible*, Art Basel Unlimited, Organized by Kukje Gallery, Basel, CH; *White Light/White Heat*, Glasstress 2013, Venice, IT (all 2013); *Freedom Not Genius*, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin, IT; *Transforming Minds: Buddhism in Art*, works from the Rockefeller Collection of Asian Art, Asia Society Gallery, Hong Kong, HK (both 2012); *Have You Ever Really Looked at the Sun*, Haunch of Venison, Berlin, DE; *The Infinite Starburst of Your Cold Dark Eyes*, PKM Gallery, Seoul, KR (both 2010); P.S.1 MoMA, New York, US (2008); *In The Darkest Hour There Will Be Light*, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2005); The Whitney Biennale, New York, US (2000); Institute of Cultural Anxiety, ICA, London, UK and *Some Went Mad, Some Ran Away*, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (both 1994).

Michael has participated in the EVA International Biennale, curated by Koyo Kouoh in Limerick, Ireland and will mount major solo exhibitions at SCAD, Savannah, Georgia and Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution, later this year. Joo's work is in numerous public and private collections, including FNAC, Paris; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Samsung Centre for Art and Culture, Seoul and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.