

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Michael Joo Solo Exhibition *Single Breath Transfer*

Press Conference: November 30 (Thurs.), 2017, 11AM at Kukje Gallery K2

Exhibition Dates: November 30 – December 31, 2017

Venue: Kukje Gallery K2 and K3 spaces

Artist Talk with Michael Joo (moderated by independent curator Hyunjin Kim)

Date and Time: December 1 (Fri.), 2017, 4PM

Venue: Kukje Gallery K3 Auditorium (B1F)

Joo's work manages a complex constellation of connections and associations across aesthetic, scientific, historical, political, and philosophical realms. His is an artistic universe of unusual interpretive density.¹

– Miwon Kwon

Kukje Gallery is pleased to announce *Single Breath Transfer*, a solo exhibition of new work by Michael Joo on view from November 30 to December 31, 2017. This is the artist's first solo show at Kukje Gallery and his first major exhibition in Korea in almost ten years. The comprehensive exhibition will be installed in both the K2 and K3 galleries and consists of discrete but interrelated bodies of work that explore important areas of research that have occupied the artist for many years.

Single Breath Transfer is a title that alludes specifically to Joo's interest in how all materials are in a state of constant change. In medicine, a "single breath transfer" is a test done to gauge the ability of the lungs to exchange gases from the atmosphere to the blood stream. This everyday transfer of energy becomes an analogy for nature at work, illustrating a basic law of physics. For Joo, observing this ontological phenomenon is a fundamental part of his practice, framing broader questions about time and culture and how systems of meaning are in constant flux. This is particularly evident in Joo's multimedia works that relate to the body, energy, and the question of what brings life to things, whether visible or invisible.

Installed on the first floor of the K2 gallery is an entirely new series of sculptures titled *Single Breath Transfer* (2017), consisting of twelve cast glass forms displayed on custom-made pedestals. The glass sculptures are created by literally capturing human breath in various paper and plastic bags. The act of breathing that creates the initial form is then reenacted by the glass blower into the mold of the initial bag—a literal transfer of the role of breathing. Evoking forms of permanence like the rough-hewn geologic formations found in the Western American deserts or the transience of atmospheric or explosive clouds, these mold-blown cast glass sculptures perfectly embody the transitional state of matter—from solid to liquid to solid. The result is a "frozen" idea that balances Joo's interest in the physical and the ephemeral.

¹ Miwon Kwon, "Silver Interference: Michael Joo's Theory of Reflection." *Michael Joo: Radiohalo*. Exh. cat. London: Blain|Southern, 2016.

In *Seven Sins* (2016) Joo continues to explore the space between science and religion. The suite of prints depicts stamped numbers on baking trays, which are calculations of expended calories while performing various actions. As the title indicates, the project quantifies how much energy is used while committing each of the seven cardinal sins—namely pride, envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust—as described in Biblical texts. Images of these trays were then screen printed onto paper with transparent epoxy, later to be treated with silver nitrate and then finally sealed with a urethane coating to stabilize their unique qualities. The series draws the attention to the minuscule chemical processes that happen in fleeting moments throughout one’s day, imbuing physicality to what is normally hidden or not apparent.

From mining operations in Eastern United States, fossil beds submerged in North Africa, to barrier islands off the Georgia Coast, Joo has consistently worked on-site to address the unfathomable nature of deep time and space as they relate to the more familiar scale of human speed and space. Installed on the second floor, Joo’s *Liminus* body of works (2017) rely heavily on process to create a series of works on canvas that bridge printmaking and photography, combining them with sculpture and practices echoing scientific fieldwork. These new works reflect Joo’s commitment to research-based practice as well as emphasize his ongoing interest in addressing liminal spaces and places that possess multiple or fluctuating identities. The first site Joo recorded in this way are floors of an old factory building in Brooklyn, New York. The second site is the unique landscape of the Dokdo Islands, located off the east coast of the Korean Peninsula. A disputed and historically uninhabited string of rock islets currently controlled by South Korea, the complex status of the Dokdo Islands owes to the ongoing discussion of sovereignty between Korea and its neighboring country of Japan. For these works, the artist utilizes a process wherein he arranges the canvas on the ground and layers a coating of transparent resin as a gesture between rubbing and casting to highlight the traces of natural forces and human presence on the ground. The canvases are then left on the site for as long as 72 hours to cure. Joo then subjects each work to a series of chemical processes involving silver nitrate, metallizing the surfaces to increase their reflectivity of both the space and viewer, and thereby bringing life to the inanimate.

K3 will present a new body of hanging sculptures made with volcanic rocks sourced from South Korea’s Civilian Control Zones (near the DMZ). Joo has chosen the rocks based on his interest in the geologic as it relates to time, transformation, and landscape. While found in today’s South Korea, these remnants are theoretically from ancient volcanic activities in mountains located in the North or the DMZ itself. In this way, they mirror a more contemporary sociopolitical drift and evidence the ways in which the natural world is in constant flux. Joo has used these symbols of metamorphosis before, in his installation of the mobile *Migrated* (2016) at the Freer | Sackler, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.. Similar to that work, Joo has again used the mapping of the migratory flight patterns of red-crowned cranes as they pass through the liminal space of the DMZ as a basis from which to compose the mobile’s structure. As the narrow brass rods move according to their own shifting equilibriums, these delicately choreographed mobiles depict the strength as well as the contradicting ecological vulnerability of the highly symbolic crane.

In *The Story of Us* (2017), the artist has made the second mobile with discarded rebar from an abandoned structure on a Dokdo islet and counterbalanced by numerous weathered specimens from its foundations. He has also composited charcoal to sculpt an enlarged doppelganger of a volcanic stone, which is then suspended over a prepared canvas that has been affixed to the floor of the gallery space in the same manner as when Joo works in the field; in this way the sculpture collapses site and referent, and becomes a kind of precarious drawing tool for recording the traces of its circular path through its environment.

Michael Joo's curiosity and intellectual precision has pushed the boundaries of visual art for more than three decades, returning again and again to research, process, and documentation as mainstays of his practice. Utilizing cross-disciplinary methods that combine art and science, Joo's work balances complex vocabularies of religion and psychology with the physical sciences of biology and geology, layering observation and material to ask important questions about contemporary social values and how we define the world in which we live.

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Michael Joo profile image
Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

MICHAEL JOO (b. 1966, Ithaca, New York) received his MFA from the Yale School of Art, Yale University, New Haven, in 1991, and his BFA from Washington University in St. Louis, in 1989. The artist currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Joo has held solo shows at numerous institutions including Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, Georgia (2016), Freer | Sackler, part of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (2016), The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2014), The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Connecticut (2014), Rodin Gallery, Seoul (2006), and the Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Florida (2004). Joo exhibited at the Korean Pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale together with Do Ho Suh (2001). Selected group exhibitions include: Anyang Public Art Project (2016), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015), Sharjah Biennial 12 (2015), Art Basel Unlimited organized by Kukje Gallery (2013), Glasstress 2013, Venice (2013), the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012), Haunch of Venison, Berlin – a two-person show with Damien Hirst (2010), MoMA PS1, New York (2008), the 6th Gwangju Biennale (2006), Serpentine Gallery, London (1994, 2005), Whitney Biennial, New York (2000), and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1994).

In 2006, Joo was awarded the grand prize of the 6th Gwangju Biennale and was the recipient of the United States Artists Fellowship (2006) and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1999). Joo's work is housed in numerous public and private collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Walker Art Center, Brooklyn Museum, Moderna Museet, M+, MIT List Visual Arts Center, and Hammer Museum at the UCLA, among others.



Michael Joo (b. 1966)

Production still (Dokdo)

2017

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Michael Joo (b. 1966)

Liminus (West Landing 3)

2017

Silver nitrate and epoxy ink on canvas

135 x 135 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Michael Joo (b. 1966)

Single Breath Transfer (Marshall)

2017

Mold-blown glass

34 x 26 x 24 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery