

## Michael Joo: Single Breath Transfer

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### Michael Joo: Single Breath Transfer

Kukje Gallery K3, Seoul

Thu 30 Nov 2017 to Sun 31 Dec 2017



Visit



Kukje Gallery presents *Single Breath Transfer*, a solo exhibition of new work by Michael Joo. This is the artist's first solo show at Kukje Gallery and his first major exhibition in Korea in almost ten 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. Spread across both the K2 and K3 galleries, Joo's multimedia works illustrate his ideas about how energy, vested in materials, shapes the physical world and human consciousness.

Installed throughout the K2 gallery are Joo's silver nitrate works on canvas that bridge printmaking and photography, combining them with sculpture and practices familiar to scientific fieldwork. These new works reflect Joo's commitment to research as well as emphasize his interest in addressing liminal spaces and places that possess multiple or fluctuating identities. Joo carefully chooses locations that possess evidence of cultural and ecological time, framing the way belief and nature intersect to create a dynamic hierarchy of meaning. Put another way, Joo's recordings are imprinted with a place's *anima*.

The first site Joo recorded in this way are factory floors in and around New York City where the artist lives and works. 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. Joo journeyed to the site, notoriously difficult to reach and buffeted by severe weather, in order to create his works, capturing a haunting evocation of a lonely but beautiful place that embodies the shifting definition of sovereign territory. For these "paintings," the artist utilizes a process wherein he coats a canvas, arranged on the ground, with a resin medium and leaves it outside for as long as 72 hours to cure. The artist then subjects each work to a series of chemical processes involving silver nitrate, thereby reinvesting the static object with hints of the energy and life that animates them in situ.

Presented together with the paintings in K2 is another entirely new series of sculptures titled *Single Breath Transfer*, consisting of approximately fifteen cast glass forms displayed on custom-made pedestals. The glass sculptures are created by literally capturing human breath in various paper and plastic bags that are then cast in blown glass, accompanying a lengthy transfer act that contrasts the fleeting nature of breath. The result is a "frozen" idea that balances Joo's interest in the physical and the ephemeral. The vivid forms evoke fragments of body parts or rough-hewn geologic formations from the American deserts that hover between meticulous Platonic solids and something more basic, like handmade fetishes invoking a science fiction. Cast glass perfectly embodies this transitional state of matter—from solid to liquid to solid.

K3 presents 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, landscape, and the way cultures create constructs with which to interpret this passing of time. While found in today's South Korea, these remnants are theoretically from ancient volcanic activity 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 *Migration* (2016) at the Freer | Sackler, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Similar to that work, Joo has again used the migratory patterns of the Korean red-crowned crane as a basis from which to compose the mobile's structure, consisting of narrow brass rods. Moving according to their own shifting equilibrium, these delicately choreographed works depict the strength and vulnerability of the highly symbolic crane. An endangered species, the crane's survival has ironically been assisted by the preserved habitat in the unpopulated wilds of the DMZ and it remains a powerful symbol of unity in the tumultuous region.

For *Single Breath Transfer*, Joo has expanded on this compelling series with a never-before-seen mobile sculpture consisting of found materials sourced from Dokdo Islands. Instead of brass, the artist has used discarded rebar from an abandoned structure on the islet. He has also composited charcoal to sculpt an enlarged doppelgänger of a volcanic stone—effectively making the sculpture into a mark-making tool. The work is 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, becoming a kind of drawing tool for recording 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 and process 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.

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, 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: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015), Sharjah Biennial 12 (2015), 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012), Haunch of Venison, Berlin – a two-person show with Damien Hirst (2010), MoMA PS1, New York (2008), 6th Gwangju Biennale (2006), Serpentine Gallery, London (1994, 2005), and Whitney Biennial, New York (2000). Joo's work is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Walker Art Center, Brooklyn Museum, Moderna Museet, M+, MIT List Visual Arts Center, UCLA Hammer Museum, among others.

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