

Joo transforms breath into artwork

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Humans breathe and feel every day, even if such things are hard for an outsider to observe. Artist Michael Joo visualizes the concepts into artworks at his solo exhibition "Single Breath Transfer" at Kukje Gallery in central Seoul.

Joo, a Korean-American born in 1966 in Ithaca, New York, is a conceptual artist whose work ranges from sculpture and installation to video art and performance.

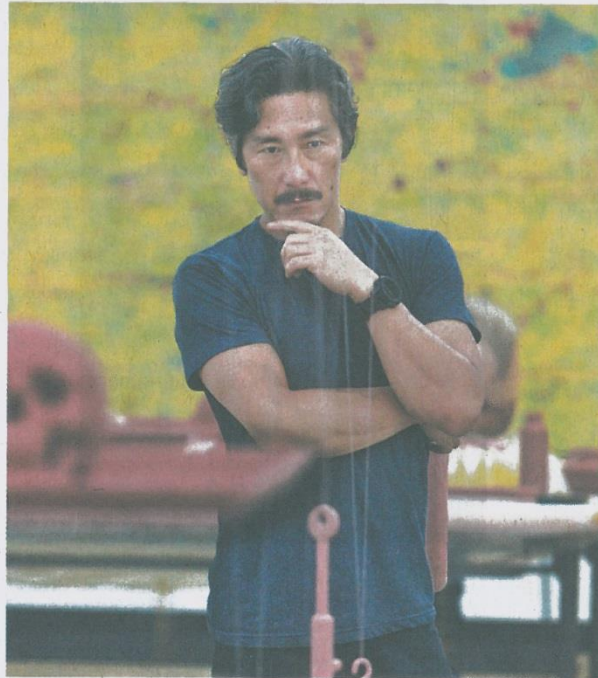
He has been engaged lately with the 2016 Anyang Public Art Project and his work was featured in the exhibit "30 Years 1986-2016: As the Moon Waxes and Wanes" at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Gwacheon in 2016. But this is Joo's first solo exhibition in Korea in 10 years.

The titular work "Single Breath Transfer" explores the energy between inhalation and exhalation. The term is derived from a medical test, but Joo visualized breathing by freezing the moment and casting it into glass.

Joo breathes into paper and plastic bags, captures the shape by freezing it with wax or liquid nitrogen. Then the glass blower breathes into the glass in the initial bag to fill the space, literally transferring the role of breathing.

The delicate forms — some look like layers of rock while others look like a mushroom cloud from a nuclear explosion — showcase Joo's interest in the balance between the physical and the ephemeral.

"My breath is transferred to different materials and the conflict in the materials is an ultimate com-



Michael Joo

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

munication," Joo said.

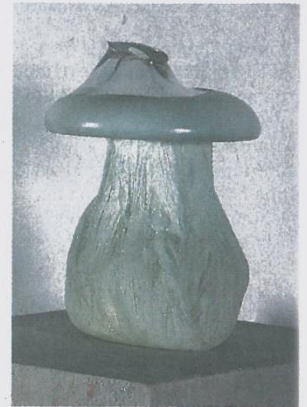
Another group of work attempts to visualize human energy used when committing a sin. In the "7 Sins" series, Joo calculates energy used for committing the seven deadly sins — pride, envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust — and screen-prints the numbers onto paper then adds a glossy surface.

"It happens in a very small amount of time and in the end what we have is a very very small number, different for each sin," Joo explained. "It's in the portrait format as if making a mirror of myself. It also reminds how quickly decision-making happens."

The "Liminus" series reflects Joo's geopolitical interests on in-between and liminal spaces by creating rubbings of the floor or ground. A canvas of fluctuating transparent resin is placed on the ground and records the traces of natural forces and human presence, which are metalized with silver nitrate.

He intentionally uses a mirror-like finish, which is not shiny enough to amplify things, but enough to reflect the exhibition space and viewers there.

His previous works were created on the floors of old factory sites in Brooklyn, New York, and this time he headed to Dokdo, the disputed



Michael Joo's "Single Breath Transfer (Marshall)" (2017)
Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

islets located off the east coast of Korea.

Joo took interest in the mixed identity of Dokdo and captured the traces of the people there.

"Dokdo is a place of strong identity. The characteristics of the East and West Islands of Dokdo are very different and I was interested in the differences," Joo said.

"The eastern island, where the police base is located, is calmer, while the western is wilder with a strong wind. I am interested in ownership, especially how we sign property ownership. For instance, who can claim dominion over fossils underground?"

Another suspension work is created with a specimen collected from the Civilian Control Zone between South and North Korea as their origin could be either South or North.

The exhibit is on view until Dec. 31. Admission is free. Visit kukjegallery.com or call 02-735-8449 for more information.