



## Artists Speak: Josiah McElheny

**Born**  
1966, Boston, MA

**Education**  
BFA, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI  
Apprenticeships with master glassblowers Ronald Wilkins, Jan-Erik Ritzman, Sven-Ake Carlsson, and Lino Tagliapietra

**Lives and Works**  
Brooklyn, NY

**Media & Materials**  
installation, sculpture; Hand-blown glass

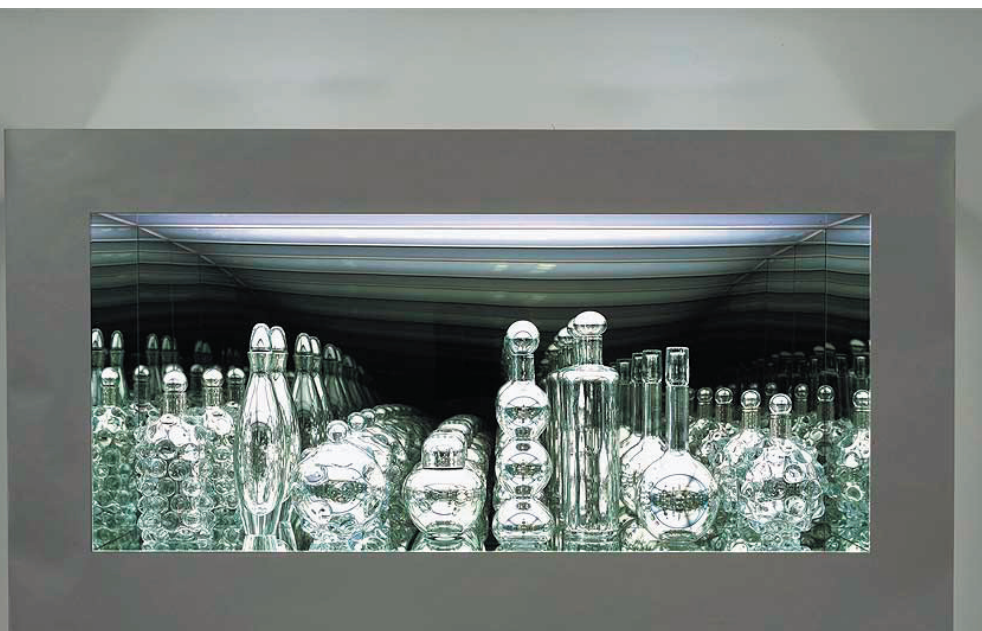
**Biography**  
Josiah McElheny creates finely crafted, handmade glass objects that he combines with photographs, text, and museological displays to evoke notions of meaning and memory. Whether recreating miraculous glass objects pictured in Renaissance paintings or modernized versions of nonextant glassware from documentary photographs, McElheny's work takes as its subject the object, idea, and social nexus of glass. Influenced by the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, McElheny's work often takes the form of 'historical fiction'. Part of McElheny's fascination with storytelling is that glassmaking is part of an oral tradition handed down artisan to artisan.

*"I don't really believe in history. And I think that at some level that's one subject of some of my work — the fact that history is mutable, which is essentially denying history. So either you can believe there is this thing called history which is a linear narrative or in some general sense a linear narrative with a definable kind of thrust to it, or you could say that there's just a lot of different stories. And if you believe that, which I would argue I believe, then you can't really break with them. You could only reassemble them, possibly in some other way. Or you could add your own. I am interested in the past because for me it seems like a very rich thing to try to understand, especially because art is essentially a physical remnant of a moment."*

*"Some people have asked me whether I have any desire to do something original. I often explain that a lot of my work, all of my work, is derived from some previous source at some level and that what I'm doing is re-imagining something or shifting or transforming it slightly but always very much in connection to its source. I'm of the generation that doesn't really believe in originality. It's never occurred to me—this idea of, quote-unquote, originality being important."*



*Modernity circa 1952, Mirrored and Reflected Infinitely, detail, 2004. Mirrored blown glass, chrome metal, glass, mirror, electric lighting, 30 1/2 x 56 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches. Collection Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Photo by Tom Van Eynde. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago*



*"You can have every idea that you want, but when you have to actually create some lasting thing you bump up into reality. So you have to translate your ideas somehow. And that creates art. As an artist I'm interested in how art works—that art has lots of ideas behind it and they somehow get embedded into the object. It's not a question of deciphering what the original ideas are, but it's letting those ideas be useful for me now in another way. That's a big subject in my work—how ideas are contained in objects, and how the idea and the object can't be disentangled. My belief is, there is no such thing as the idea or the object. There is only a kind of fusion of the two."*



*From an Historical Anecdote about Fashion, 2000. Blown glass, wood, metal and glass display case, five framed digital prints; display case dimensions: 72 x 120 x 28 inches, digital prints: 18 x 25 1/2 inches each. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo by Tom Van Eynde. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago*

### Activity Suggestions:

Explore prose and poetry about glass and mirrors and compare them to McElheny's work. For example: the myth of Narcissus; *Through the Looking Glass* and *What Alice Found There* (Lewis Carroll); *The Chinese Mirror* (Mirra Ginsberg); *The Glass Bottle Tree* (Evelyn Coleman and Gail Gordon Carter); *The Glass Palace* (Loung Ung); and *Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap* (Audre Lorde).

Create a view of infinity. Position two mirrors opposite each other and place a small object in between. Write an illustrative paragraph or poem that describes your view of infinity and create a visual accompaniment.



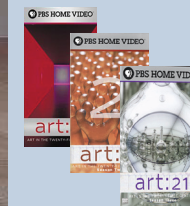
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