

Exhibition: *Josiah McElheny: Island Universe*

Dates: September 12–Ongoing

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 2)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Josiah McElheny: Island Universe*. Installed in the center of the Resnick Pavilion, *Island Universe* (2008) is a large-scale sculpture that embodies the concept of the multiverse, a key element in contemporary cosmological thinking. The concept of the multiverse was first proposed in ancient Greece, then in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and 18th-century astronomy. Josiah McElheny (b. 1966) has long been interested in how scientific inquiry is conditioned by and impacts philosophical, sociological, and political thought. He finds a clear connection to the historical shifts that call for the decentering of Western knowledge, and even human-centric thought. The artist worked collaboratively with astrophysicist David Weinberg in developing *Island Universe*, which he considers “drawings of time,” with “each rod a measure of time—every inch, time doubles.”

This installation is a companion installation to the PST ART: *Art & Science Collide* exhibition *Mapping the Infinite: Cosmologies Across Cultures*, on view from October 24, 2024-March 2, 2025 in the Resnick Pavilion.

During his first visit to the New York Metropolitan Opera, McElheny first encountered the spectacular modernist chandeliers designed by the Austrian design firm J & L Lobmeyr in 1965. As an artist known for his work in glass as well as his deep knowledge of design histories, McElheny had an intuitive sense that the designers of the chandeliers were inspired by discussions instigated by the then nascent theorization of the Big Bang. For McElheny, the Met chandeliers were the perfect representation of a popular understanding of the Big Bang.

But as McElheny's longtime scientific collaborator astrophysicist David Weinberg has written, “the Big Bang is not an explosion of material into space; it is the origin of

space and time itself, initiating an expansion that occurs everywhere and has no center.” While in a residency at the Wexner Center for the Arts, McElheny was introduced to Weinberg and began a long dialogue about how best to represent the complexity of contemporary cosmological theorizations through visual art. McElheny was not interested in a symbolic representation of cosmological origins but rather a translation of thinkers like Andrei Linde who developed the notion of the multiverse in his groundbreaking book *Particle Physics and Inflationary Cosmology*.

LACMA currently owns two works by the artist: *Island Universe* and *Ornament and Crime* (2001-2002), both significant examples from the artist’s oeuvre. *Island Universe* will be presented at LACMA for the first time since its acquisition in 2020. This installation is curated by Stephen Little, Florence and Harry Sloan Curator of Chinese Art and Department Head, Chinese, Korean, and South and Southeast Asian Art, and Rita Gonzalez, Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head, Contemporary Art, LACMA.

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036. lacma.org

Image caption: Josiah McElheny, *Island Universe*, 2008, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by an anonymous donor, © Josiah McElheny, photo © Todd White Art Photography, courtesy White Cube

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