

BIG IDEAS

Joe Sola is Making Art

Joe Sola (Los Angeles, California, USA)

WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE? Los Angeles-based artist Joe Sola (Born in 1966) created this fluorescent light installation. Sola is an artist who works in a variety of media. Sola received his Bachelor of Art from University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1989 and his Master of Fine Art from Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles in 1999.

He has participated in many solo and group shows internationally and has been granted numerous fellowships and residencies. Sola's paintings and videos feature in private and public collections across the United States. His Most recent group exhibitions include *Hard Targets: Masculinity and Sport* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art 2008-9 and the Wexner Center for the Arts (2010); *Studio*



Sessions, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2009); and solo exhibitions, *Talking About My Drawings with Escorts*, MOT International gallery, London, (2010); *I found some bic pens by the railroad tracks*, The Happy Lion, Los Angeles (2010); and *Male Fashion Models Make Conceptual Art*, Hilary Crisp Gallery, London (2008). He lives and works in Los Angeles.

WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS

SCULPTURE? Joe's work operates in the fuzzy electric space between cinema and the real world. Joe Sola is Making Art is both tongue-in-cheek, part wry humour and part serious social commentary. The work places the artist in a box, which chronicles his time making art. The work, which could be called "switching art making on and off", draws attention to the celebrity status, hunger for the limelight and forced self-promotion inherent in the contemporary art scene. The piece makes visible the idea that making art is a job, which is to "make art" and that it is also a performance, with the artist being "on and off". Joe Sola is captivated by ideas of identity politics. This work addresses the absurdity of celebrity status and how it influences contemporary culture.



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WHAT IS ART MAKING TO JOE SOLA? In *Art Lies Issue 61* Joe Sola wrote, "... I agree that artmaking is the most amazing thing he can do. It gives me so many things I cannot find in other parts of life.

When I am in the zone, whether that's in my car, in the shower, in the studio, teaching, at Costco, walking around my neighborhood with my dog, I get a giddy feeling all over—something that only comes from the free-form pleasure of playing with images and structures in my head, working through details, discovering new meanings and expressions. I am thrilled by the violent possibility of making something that didn't exist in the world before. This is probably what the character Jimmy is so hooked on. It is a great high.

With highs, though, come lows. Artmaking isn't always singing and dancing, swash-buckling one's way through images and materials. Sometimes it pushes me to the edge of depression. Sometimes I end up beating myself up over really stupid moves or ideas. Or worse, there are those times when a little detail grows proportionally or exponentially out of control, consuming me and pulling me down during every quiet space of the day, during every traffic jam, every time I open the medicine cabinet to reach for the dental floss, and again for the toothpaste. Making art is amazing, making art is difficult, making art is simple, making art is complicated! That's why it's called art and not accounting, or engineering or panhandling."



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HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE? Joe Sola is Making Art was “fabricated” using inscription on a fluorescent light box and is characterized as New Media, a catch-all term used for contemporary art work that uses new technologies. The term began to be used toward the end of the 1990’s and is a field that is constantly evolving as new technologies, such as computer and internet programs, emerge for artists to use. Most of the New Media artists use either digital, computerized, or an interactive component in their work. This particular work is considered New Media as it uses light box and is powered by electricity. This New Media work has an interactive component that changes and is “active”. New Media art is connected to conceptual art, performance and installation art.



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HOW DOES THIS WORK CONNECT WITH THIS ARTIST’S OTHER WORKS? Though Sola is well in his 30’s, he still does things that seem reckless. In Studio Visit (2005), he invites people into his studio, makes them comfortable in a cozy chair. Then, unexpectedly, he jumps through a pane of glass, out the window of the studio, and lands amid the glittering shards on the ground below. He has performed this act about twenty times, often discreetly recording the startled reactions of his guests. Sola makes himself vulnerable by jumping through a window (made of breakaway glass from a stunt trainer). He opens himself up to the possibility of actual pain and also illustrating physically the emotional vulnerability of anyone (artist or otherwise) who presents anything they have

made for the consideration and appreciation of others. Studio Visit is in fact conceptually grounded in a critique of a most ubiquitous type of American imagery. Sola believes that many of our culture's deeply held paradigms come from Hollywood cinema, and it is these paradigms that he brings into contemporary art discourse. His source material is the Hollywood action film genre, and he appropriates from it liberally in his artwork. Sola has had a longstanding interest in the relationship of Hollywood cinema to the construction of male identity; that is, to images of masculinity as promulgated by the American film industry. By jumping through the window, Sola seems to be thinking that if he earnestly learns a trick, he will be as macho as a stunt man. But like the teenager that lacks impulse control and succumbs to peer pressure to be cool, Sola's jumping out of a window, "just like in the movies," is a wincing reminder of the very real, human limitations of our efforts, however earnest, to achieve our potential, to feel actualized, powerful, alive. It is this "real-ness," this example of aching human desire to connect with others (in this case, the curators and gallerists visiting the studio), that is the motivating force behind Studio Visit and Sola's work in general.

Source: *Extract of Joe Sola Taking a Bullet*, edited by Erin Wright, 2005

In recent years, literature has begun to play a greater role in Sola's work rather than earlier cinematic influences. Sola feels that fiction writing and paintings will always have value because of the simplicity of the materials and their equal ability to create what does not exist in the world with these relatively simple materials. Sometimes the most original painting operates like literature, not only for its ability to characterize or depict a space, but also in its ability to create an image completely from the imagination, whether that is horror, humor, abject, or benign and at its best, with poetical potential.



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TO LEARN MORE:

<http://blackstongallery.com>

<http://www.thehappylyon.com>

http://www.motinternational.org/Joe_Sola.html

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT NEW MEDIA:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_media



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WHO PUT THIS SCULPTURE ON DISPLAY IN VANCOUVER? This sculpture is part of Vancouver Biennale 2009-2011 Exhibition. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public space. Each exhibition transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, work, play and transit. The Biennale features internationally renowned and emerging Contemporary artists that represent a diversity of cultural perspectives and artistic disciplines including sculpture, new media, performance works and film. The objective is to use great art as a catalyst to transformative learning and social action.

The Vancouver Biennale also creates supporting public programs, events and publications including the award-winning BIG IDEAS Education program, the International Artist Residency Program inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream", the CineFest LIVE documentary film festival and the Tour de Biennale and BIKennale arts & culture cycling events.

TO LEARN MORE you can search the terms **BIENNALE**, **PUBLIC ART** or **OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS** on-line. Also Visit the Vancouver Biennale website at www.vancouverbiennale.com

IMAGE CREDITS:

- 1 Artist portrait; artist
- 2 *Joe Sola is NOT making art*; Dan Fairchild
- 3 *Let's do some watercolour painting*, 2006; Blackston Gallery
- 4 *Taking a bullet*, 2005; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions
- 5 *Self-Portrait Playing Scrabble*, 2008; artslant.com
- 6 *ICA in Ruin*, 2005; artslant.com
- 7 *Why are you here*, 2008; Blackston Gallery
- 8 *Waterfall*, 2008, 2008; Blackston Gallery

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