

Basic Detail Report

**Title**

Impurities

Artist

Josiah McElheny

Date

1994-2012

Dimensions

Running Length: 188 9/16 in. (478.9 cm) Case 1: 31 5/16
× 43 5/16 × 5 in. (79.5 × 110 × 12.7 cm) Cases 2-5: 22 5

/16 × 32 5/16 × 8 3/8 in. (56.7 × 82.1 × 21.3 cm) Dimensions variable

Medium

Hand-blown glass, wood, low-iron sheet glass, brass mounting hardware, drawings and hand lettered text

Classifications

Glass

Credit Line

Purchased with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott

Object number

2020.23A-U

Published References

do Ceu Baptista, Maria, *Josiah McElheny*, Galicia, Xunta de Galicia / Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2002, pp. 177-181 (repr.), 207.

Neri, Louise and Josiah McElheny (Eds.), *A Prism*, New York, Skira Rizzoli, 2009, pp. 247-251 (repr.).

Josiah McElheny: Towards a Light Club, Berlin, Hatje Cantz / Wexner Center for the Arts, 2013, pp. 46-51 (repr.).

Exhibition History

Santiago de Compostela, Spain, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, *Josiah McElheny*, 2002.

Columbus, OH, Wexner Center for the Arts, *Josiah McElheny: Towards a Light Club*, January 27–April 7, 2013.

Comparative References

See also Dave Hickey and Jennifer R. Gross, "Josiah McElheny," published in conjunction with the exhibition, "Josiah McElheny," January 22–April 25, 1999, at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Label Text

Josiah McElheny's *Impurities* plays with the tensions between fact and fiction to explore how objects can embody—and reinterpret—history. *Impurities* pairs McElheny's own expertly blown glass vessels that replicate ancient Roman forms with hand-written labels to create an installation that imitates historic museum displays. His choice of colors for the glass vessels also references typical ancient Roman functional vessels: amber, blue and green. Within the sterile, wall-mounted vitrines however, his distorted narrative is revealed: while the glass is presented as ancient Roman, the fabrication is clearly contemporary. The perfection in form and quality of the glass itself, seemingly void of any imperfections, undermines the possibility of ancient manufacture. For much of the history of glass, color was dependent on the geographic source of sand, a key ingredient in glass. A label above each set of vessels names the purported impurity and the color it yields. By insinuating that these aesthetically perfect forms are composed of impure material, McElheny encourages our reflection on the notion of purity today and long ago. McElheny's pseudo-archeological installation, complete with hand-written narrative, map, key, and object ID numbers, reinforces the contrived histories of objects found in museums.

On View

Toledo Museum of Art (2445 Monroe Street), Gallery, 02A, Wolfe