

# ARTPULSE

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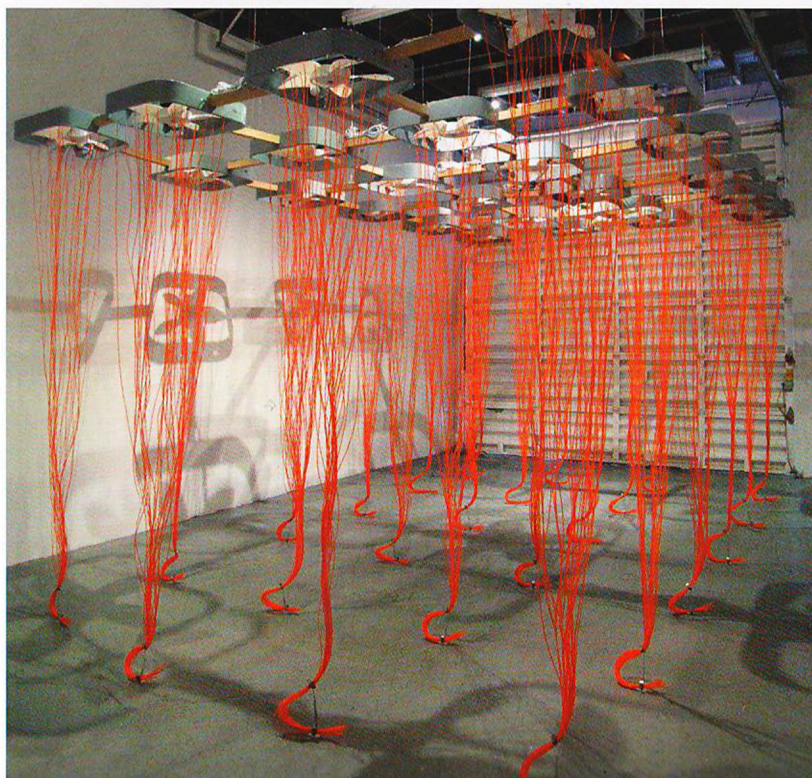
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David B. Jang, *Subjectivity Value*, 2014, window blinds, steel, electric motor and custom circuit board, 105" x 444" x 150" (dimensions variable). Installation view at LA Art Show. All images are courtesy of the artist and TUB Gallery, Miami.



David B. Jang, *Prevaricate*, 2014, electric fan, trimmer line and custom circuit board, 120" x 240" x 156," (dimensions variable). Installation view at Locust Projects, Miami.



David B. Jang, *Prevaricate*, 2012, electric fan, trimmer line, steel and custom circuit board, 86" x 72" x 216" (dimensions variable).

# DAVID B. JANG

## Inventions in Art

David B. Jang eludes classification by genre. He doesn't consider himself a conceptual artist. As an art student, he gathered inspiration from an array of disciplines and theories, including Abstract Expressionism, Color Field painting, Hans Hofmann's Push and Pull and Jackson Pollock's Automatism. He absorbed principles from these and other influences as he continued to evolve, eventually becoming a self-taught inventor who repurposes cast-off consumer objects into layered panels, sculptures and animated installations. Ultimately, his work is the product of a dedicated marriage of art and science. What seems to drive him is a boundless love of problem-solving, an insatiable curiosity and a devoted concern about the human condition.

BY MEGAN ABRAHAMS

*Megan Abrahams - Painting and sculpture, which you studied in art school, were like stepping stones for you, leading you down a path of artistic inquiry until you arrived at serial Minimalism. How would you define the scope of your work today?*

David B. Jang - I work with consumer products and the socially accepted rules and conditions for their performance—what they're meant for and supposed to do. These rules give consumer products their own formal and functional coherence. However, I take these objects from our daily life to examine them, undermine them and raise questions about them.

*M.A. - You are a rule breaker, a kind of creative iconoclast, with a deliberate agenda to make art that opens the eyes of your viewers to a new way of seeing things. You've said part of your life's work is to subvert, dissect, comprehend and redirect materials to expose their potential and truth. Do you ever surprise yourself by what is revealed through the process of subversion and dissection? How is the process revelatory for you, the creator? How do you expect the viewer—the consumer of your art—to react? Are you ever surprised by the reaction of your viewers?*

D.B.J. - The process of subversion and dissection is necessary so that I can explore unexpected accidents. I'm always surprised by the process. It's the best part—like an exciting adventure. Rather than expecting a certain reaction from viewers, I'd rather watch and learn how they interact with my work. I leave my work open-ended, allowing other projects to unfold, maybe incorporating the reactions of viewers and what I've learned from observing them.

*M.A. - You have a diverse, interdisciplinary studio practice, from painting, in which you explore your engagement with color and manipulations of the two-dimensional plane, to sculptural work and complex animated installations that expand on the conventional parameters of Minimalism. A range of disciplines and movements has influenced your work, directly or indirectly, such as Color Field painting, Minimalism, Geometric Abstraction, Conceptualism. What principles of these disciplines do you draw from the most, and how have you assimilated them into your own artistic process?*

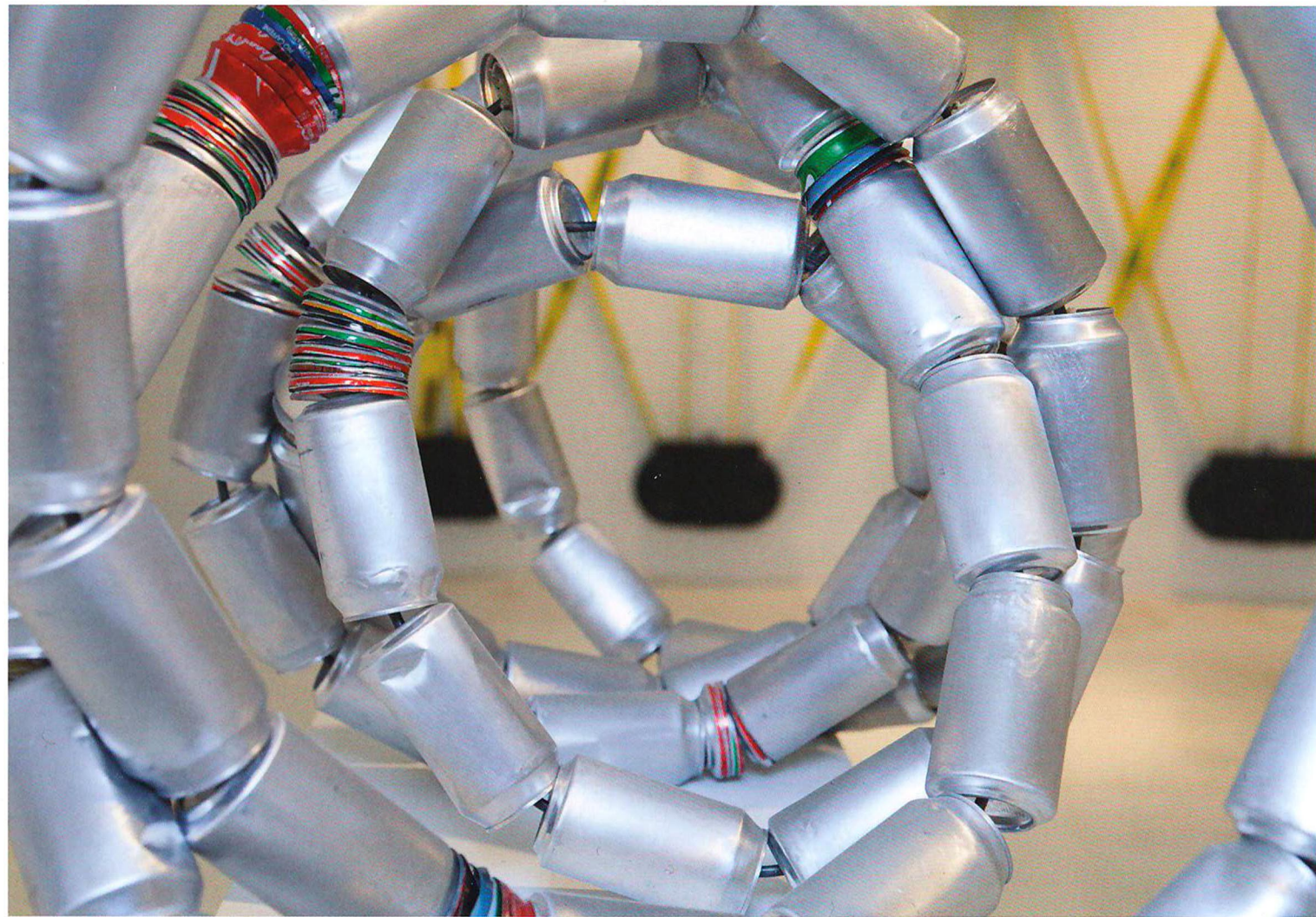
D.B.J. - I'm most drawn to Minimalism and Action in Progress (Action painting and Automatism). I believe almost everything is influenced by Minimalism. Whether it's the straight lines from architecture, simplistic movements or the normal functions of objects from daily life, I assimilate them into my own artistic process.

*M.A. - We are not just a consumer society, but a disposable culture, discarding and replacing enormous quantities of materials every day. One of the striking things about your practice is your use and reinvention of cast-off objects. Not only do you give them new meaning, you also animate them, giving them a new purpose, beauty—in a sense, life! What motivates you to repurpose these found objects? How do you go about finding and harvesting them?*

D.B.J. - I feel economic freedom brings us different levels of consumerism, including conspicuous consumption and invidious consumption. This brings wastefulness and greed and encourages consuming for the sake of consuming, rather than need. I try to explore the diversity of human activity represented by these consumer materials and disposed artifacts. When I need to find and harvest new objects, asking nicely goes a long way. I ask people to collect their aluminum cans or save their broken electronics. I also search online for cheap and used household appliances or send out email requests to companies, like I did for the Mylar chip bags.

*M.A. - What comes first, the consumer product—like the connected soda cans in your piece, Incompatibility—or the concept? Do you find an object and think, 'Wow, I could do something with that!' Or do you have an idea and then seek out the object? Or is it a combination of both? Can you give an example?*

D.B.J. - Both. With *Incompatibility*, while I wanted to make drawings in structural sculptural form, I thought of soda cans as one of the components. While some artists' work starts from scratch and goes into a completed form, I prefer to start with the completed form. By using found materials and consumer materials, I work backwards and look at how I can change their form and matter while still utilizing their basic structure, pattern and texture. Afterwards, I build a concept around it, reflecting a new process. The new structure and pattern is the completed form.



David B. Jang, *Incompatibility*, sanded aluminum cans and steel with reinforced foam, 42" x 30" x 27." Photo: Anselmo Sias. Courtesy of TUB Gallery, Miami.

M.A. - To say your work is multimedia is an understatement. As you've pointed out, your work incorporates all forms of matter—solid, liquid and gas—in the shape of tin cans, inflatable tubes, Mylar bags, hacked circuitry boards, pumps, string, Styrofoam cups, air, wood, leftover industrial paint from construction sites, fluorescent tubing, etc. What have I left out? Of all the materials you've adapted to your purpose, which have led to the most unexpected outcomes for you?

D.B.J. - Right. Multimedia may not be the correct term. However, I think of my kinetic sculptures like segments of video that play continuously, programmed to repeat. I study the replica of normal functions of objects from our daily life and the way we respond to these objects. What's left out is what I still need to discover. When I began experimenting with window blinds for *Subjectivity Value*, I started out small, with only one size of blinds, 18-by-48 inches. At first, I opened and closed them manually. Then I started to add more blinds and set them up like a cubicle and ultimately figured out a way to motorize the controls to open and close the blinds. One surprising discovery led to another, and as it continued, I was able to create a maze-like space that allowed viewers to interact physically with the blinds by walking in and out of the spaces I created.

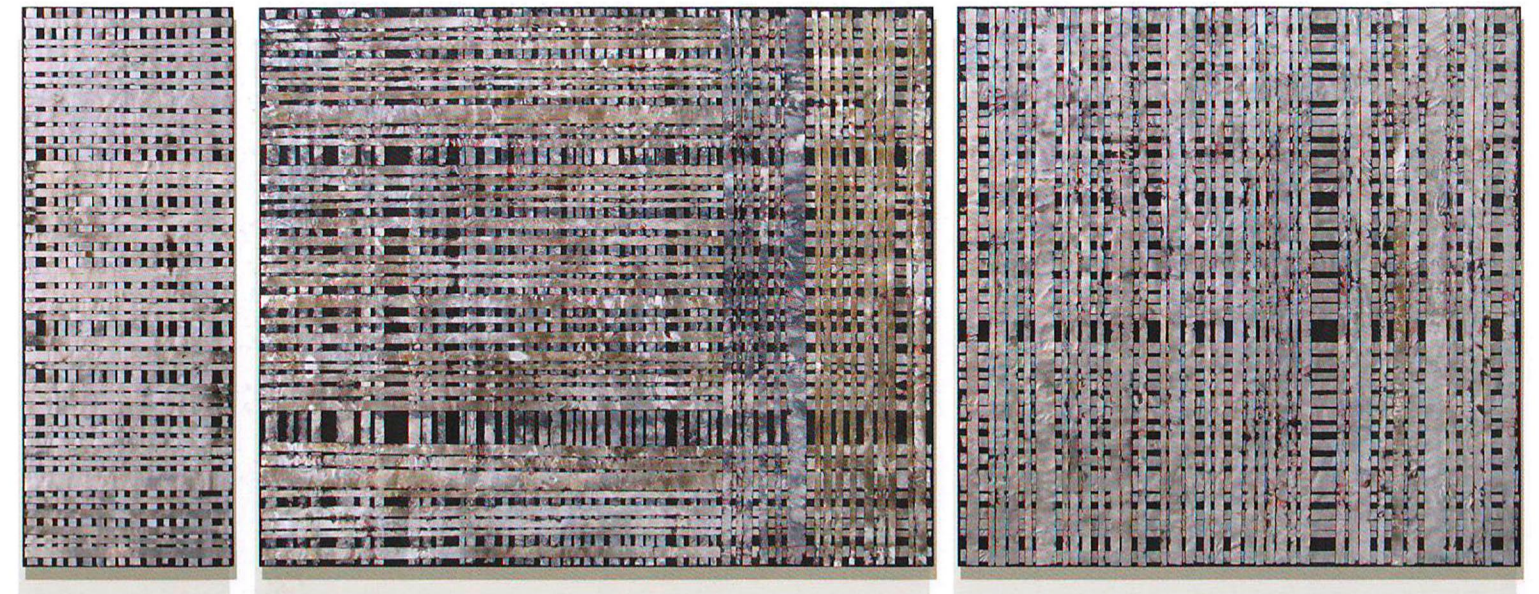
M.A. - To what extent is your finished work what you envisioned at the outset? I gather your process is somewhat organic and that

you allow some leeway for things to happen. How does your concept adapt to the circumstances?

D.B.J. - My work is the result of a series of discoveries made throughout the creative process. I want to discover as much as possible about what my projects reflect regarding life potentiality and truth. Therefore, rather than measuring my finished work against what was envisioned at the outset, what interests me most is what I discovered in the process.

M.A. - Your pieces are performative in a way, inviting the viewer to approach. Part of what makes your work so engaging is its inherent element of whimsy. In your piece, *Subjectivity Value*, blinds open and close at automatic intervals. The outcomes are unexpected, funny and engaging because of the unlikely juxtapositions you make. Clearly, there is a serious underlying motive at work here, but there's also a sense of humor at play. Can you describe the genesis of your pairing these surprising objects? What makes it fun for you?

D.B.J. - It's when tinkering and play interact. Much of my approach is intuitive. I thought about how the human labor of pulling toilet paper out of the dispenser can be replaced by an electric motor. Instead of paper, I used yellow caution tape, which is designed to get people's attention. I don't always try to make my work humorous,



David B. Jang, *Hypothesis*, 2015, aluminum, wood, oil and stain, 40" x 103." Images are courtesy of the artist and TUB Gallery, Miami.

but since it ends up being so, I guess my nature tends to think about it that way. The fun for me is in the process of discovery.

M.A. - You do more than connect interesting objects in surprising ways. You cause these objects to interact, make them relational, as in *Temporize*, your 2011 piece incorporating printers and fax machines spewing Mylar-chip-bag film. Your work is playful, particularly because you're creating unexpected causal relationships. How do you go about orchestrating these causal relationships?

D.B.J. - Once you understand the formula, you can start replacing some variables. My father was a professional chef all his life, and I learned to cook from him. At one point, I worked as a head professional chef at our family restaurant. When preparing dishes, you realize you can replace the noodles with rice or substitute the onion or garlic with green onions or ginger. While disassembling the printers and fax machines, I discovered how fast or slowly certain machines can function along with the various sounds they make. I simply replace the common variable with another stronger variable—Mylar film instead of paper. Products like Mylar-chip bags are familiar to most people in a consumer society. Printers and fax machines are also widely used. Therefore, the causal relationship between the two becomes less strange.

M.A. - You're also elevating and redefining utilitarian objects, imposing an aesthetic shift on things formerly viewed as mere disposable industrial objects, into components of works of art. In doing so, you cause us to see these objects differently, opening our eyes to the infinite possibilities inherent in the mundane. What do you hope we'll see when we look at your transformations?

D.B.J. - Utilitarian objects such as aluminum cans, electronics and household appliances made by humans always belonged to the domain of things. Though I believe they function according to a certain given purpose, through my discovery and transformation I strive to further continue the reproduction of new entities. Again, I don't expect a certain reaction from viewers, but if there is a reaction, as you say, it'll be for their eyes to be opened to the

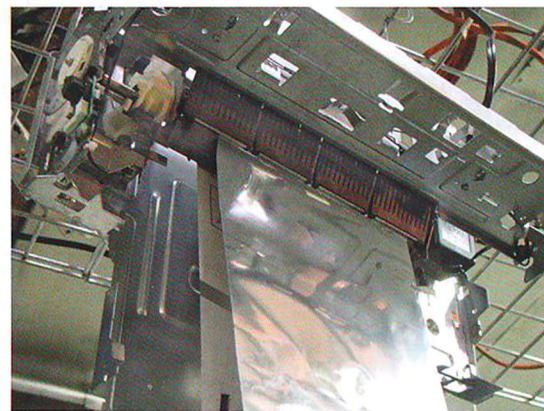
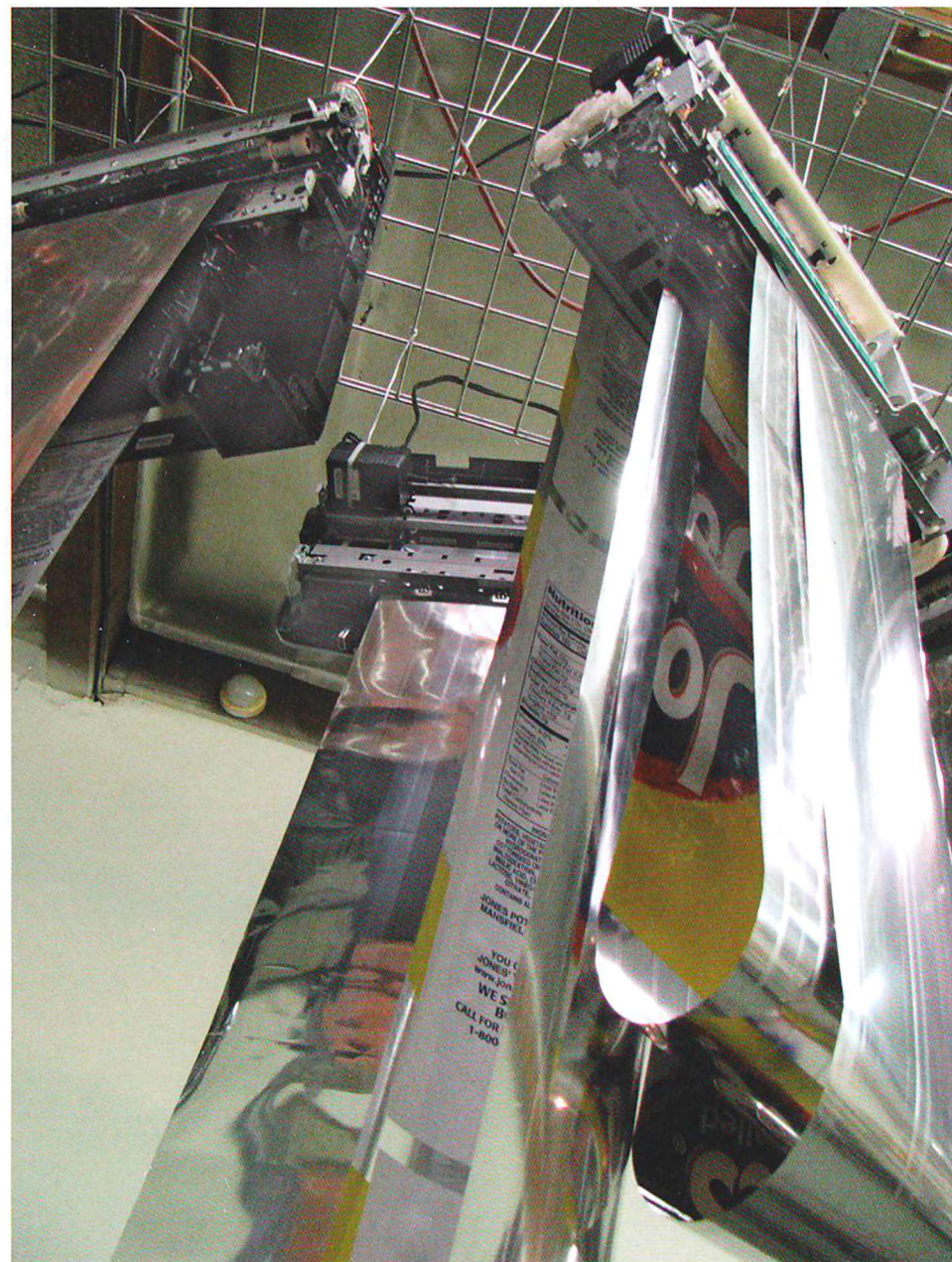
infinite possibilities. I would hope they will be able to grasp the transformations and what I've discovered about life potential and truth, along with being more aware of our society, living environments, fast-paced lifestyle, science, technology and the effect of art on life.

M.A. - Although you went to art school, you are a self-taught inventor. For your kinetic installations, you reconfigure the circuitry of consumer electronics, repurposing these products for your own devices. It seems there are no limitations to your ingenuity. In terms of the technical aspect of your installations, what kinds of challenges do you confront in the process of bringing your visions to life?

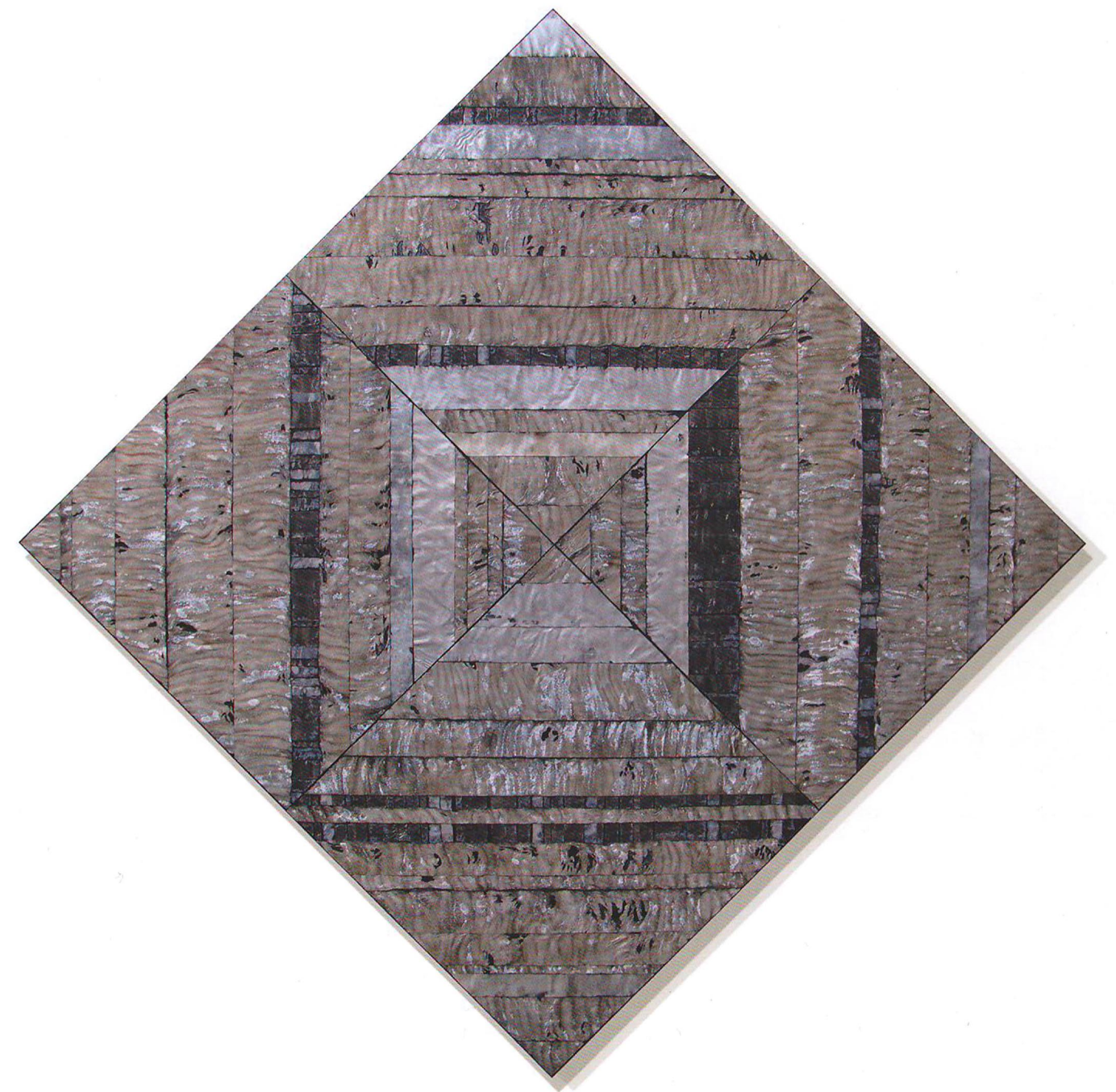
D.B.J. - The fact that I am a self-taught inventor is a challenge. I've been learning through books, the Internet and YouTube videos. I want to challenge myself and see how much I can transform and learn as a human being. Just like a circuit board, I am programmable. When I feel strongly about a certain project or get excited about new concepts, I have to constantly teach myself new skills and learn whatever is necessary. The challenge also includes understanding how far I can push myself.

M.A. - Art can play a profound role in raising social consciousness. In placing commonplace objects from the everyday into new contexts, you alter the perspective of those who encounter your work. In an indirect way, you let us know we need not be controlled by materials that dominate our lives. Your work suggests we are free to reconsider these everyday objects, and in doing so, you prod us to reevaluate our habits as consumers. There are powerful messages encrypted in your art. If the viewer could only take away one message from encountering your pieces, what would you hope that message would be?

D.B.J. - Rather than giving a specific message, I want my work to instill a desire in the viewer to question reality and potentially see reality in a different way. Eventually, this will lead to a chain reaction, which will open doors to other possibilities. My art puts



David B. Jang, *Temporize*, 2011, disassembled printer, fax machine and chip bag Mylar, 106" x 30" x 264" (dimensions variable).



David B. Jang, *Reify*, 2015, aluminum, wood, oil and stain, 60" x 60" diam.

my discovery in the spotlight. The message will depend on the viewer's own perspective and thoughts on reality. I want my work to encourage undermining and questioning. As I reify categories of identity, my practice with installations and consumer materials shows how things are not as they appear. My discoveries can offer alternatives to the original and the norm.

**M.A. - What is the overriding motivation that pushes you forward? What are you working on now? What's coming up for you next?**

**D.B.J. -** I'm pushed forward by my desire to define my objective value in life. My motivation is based on my belief that a person has the task of finding and exercising a path that harmonizes his own value and spiritual improvement while advancing the value and spiritual improvement of others. I seek a path that can maximize

both. Art can increase the depth of consciousness. While others may spend their energy struggling at the level of subsistence, I see art as a necessity to the human condition, not a luxury.

I have several projects in mind for the future, including further development of my foam-cup paintings, additional aluminum cans and wood panels and an architectural installation involving refrigeration and frost. I also have a collaboration in the works with engineering and architecture grad students for a 2018 project at Cal Poly Pomona, involving solar-energy panels or wind-power generators in an outdoor electronic, kinetic installation.

**M.A. - Thank you David. I see you have shows coming up in South Korea, Toronto and San Francisco and an installation at LAX. Looking forward to seeing what you will be showing next. ■**