

**Powerful sculptures crafted from chains express human emotions:
Korean artist Young-Deok Seo at the M.A.D.Gallery**

The M.A.D.Gallery introduces the *LINK* exhibition by Young-Deok Seo, a passionate Korean artist using intriguing sculptures to reveal the complexities of the human character. Through a meticulous and laborious process of welding chain to shape human figures, Young-Deok has created an impressive ensemble of works of art. For him, the intertwined chain conveys the power and fragility of man during a time of chaotic industrialization.

“It is my intention to feel what the audience sees, to reveal emotions directly without avoiding them,” expresses Young-Deok about his 3-D works, “If they feel it’s beautiful, it will be beautiful, and if they think it’s ugly, it will be ugly; my direction is to be as honest as possible.”

Young-Deok’s collection of contemporary sculptures tells people’s stories and expresses human feelings evoking genuine emotions from its observers – it sends our minds spinning here at the M.A.D.Gallery. Young-Deok has immense talent and fervor, which is apparent through his brilliant and unconventional use of the simple link chain to create powerful works of art.

LINK

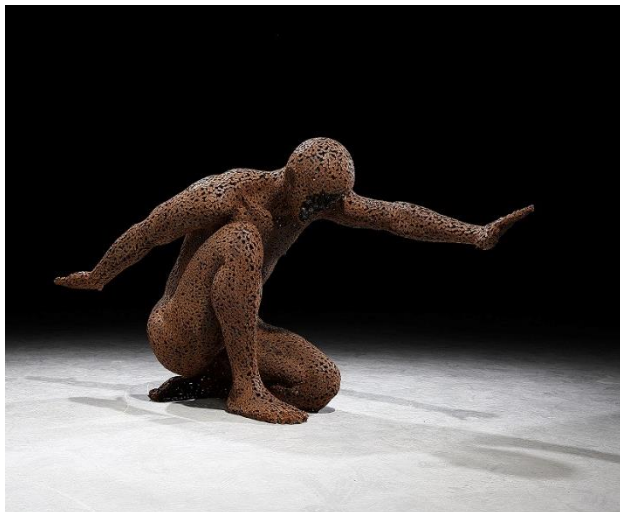
LINK is a relationship between two things. The entangled sculptures in the *LINK* collection connect the relatively harsh medium of metal chain with the softness of the human body, suggesting that the human spirit is repressed by today’s industrial and materialistic civilization.



Poised in the classic position, *The thinker 300* (limited to 8 pieces) is a faceless male figure sitting with his chin resting on his hand and slumped on his knees perhaps contemplating the world’s problems. Made of iron bike chain, each link positioned ever so carefully shapes muscles and appears as skin of the human body. This pondering sculpture, weighing 60 kg and measuring 122 cm tall, is the largest sculpture in the collection.



At first glance, *Anguish 23* (limited to 8 pieces) appears to be a classical bust sculpture; however, a closer look reveals that this is not the case. Stainless steel industrial chain links intertwining and twisting through the work transform into the head, the face left to the viewer's imagination.



The human figure in *Meditation 285* (limited to 10 pieces) is crafted with iron bike chain rusted to evoke an aged feeling, poised in a half-crouched, half-kneeling position with elegantly outstretched arms. This visually powerful art piece measures 164 cm in length and 85 cm tall. Creating a strong human figure using chain is not easy and Young-Deok masterfully executes his artistic vision. In addition, the facelessness of the sculpture generates thought, emotion, and curiosity in the observer.



Meditation 130 (limited to 10 pieces) focuses on peacefulness, the face with eyes gently closed and the lips at rest. The stainless steel bike chain is intricately positioned, creating a 110 cm high by 75 cm wide wall-mounted sculpture. People often say the purpose of meditation is "to still the mind" and this piece reflects a person deep in thought.



Aptly named *Nirvana 37* (limited to 20 pieces), this creation portrays a state of perfect happiness, nirvana, the final goal of Buddhism. Even with the intricacies of the woven stainless steel chain, the face of this sculpture evokes stillness.

Why is there a number in the title of each piece? That number is the length in meters of chain used to create the work. For example, *The thinker 300* uses 300 metres of bike chain! Each work of art includes a signature engraved on the side or bottom of the artwork as well as a letter of guarantee.

Creation Process

“One day, I came across a pile of metal chain dumped on the street,” Young-Deok describes the inspiration for his medium of choice, “It seemed a machine-like thing wriggling as if it had life. I felt like I was looking at a jerking human being lying on the street. At that moment, I thought I might make a human body with this chain, which might be the best material to describe entangled lives of contemporaries. So I started to learn welding techniques and tried to apply them to my artistic work.”

In a workshop filled with welding equipment and plaster models, located in the suburbs of Seoul, Young-Deok and a team of ten dedicated artisans bring the sculptures to life. Imagine a noisy factory space with sparks cascading down from argon gas welding machines, with artisans binding chain together, cranes lifting larger than life sculptures, and equipment such as grinders, cutting tools, chemical products, and plaster throughout – this is a typical scene in the studio. “I enjoy to work alone at the workshop when everybody is gone for the day,” explains Young-Deok, “My artwork is more difficult with larger and more complex shapes and working alone I can solve the complexities easily.”

The creation process begins by disassembling and reassembling the bike or industrial chain so that it is in good condition. Then, after the pose and form are clear to him, Young-Deok creates a 3-D model on his computer, followed by a clay or Styrofoam model which is then covered with plaster to create a mold. After the plaster modeling is complete, the chain is assembled link-by-link around and over the mold. The final step is to treat the piece with a special coating.

Depending on the size of the work, one sculpture takes up to three months, with the disassembling and reassembling of the chain and welding consuming the most time. “This process requires perseverance, so it seems as an ascetic practice,” states Young-Deok, “But I enjoy myself in this process, I think that difficulties are pleasures at the same time.” His family-oriented life-style and quiet disposition seem to play out in his work ethics and sculptures.

About the artist

Born in 1983, Young-Deok Seo grew up in Seoul, Korea and dreamt of becoming an artist from a very young age. Fulfilling his aspiration, Young-Deok graduated from the Department of Environmental Sculpture at the University of Seoul in 2011 and then started a little underground workshop. This workshop is where it all began. His artistic career expeditiously began growing; he presented nine solo and countless group exhibitions highlighting his realistic human sculptures around the world, from Milan and Paris to Istanbul and New York.

The human body has always remained core to his portfolio and perhaps this is due to his father’s impact as a custom tailor perfectly measuring suits for each client. “Most of my work has been influenced by my childhood life with my parents,” Young-Deok recalls, “However, now that I have grown up as an artist, my current life and family affect my artwork. Most recently, my son was born and he inspires me daily.”