

“Heji Shin: The Big Nudes.” *Ocula* (October 8, 2023) [ill.] [online]

OCULA

David Zwirner

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22 JULY–8 OCTOBER 2023

Heji Shin [+ FOLLOW](#)

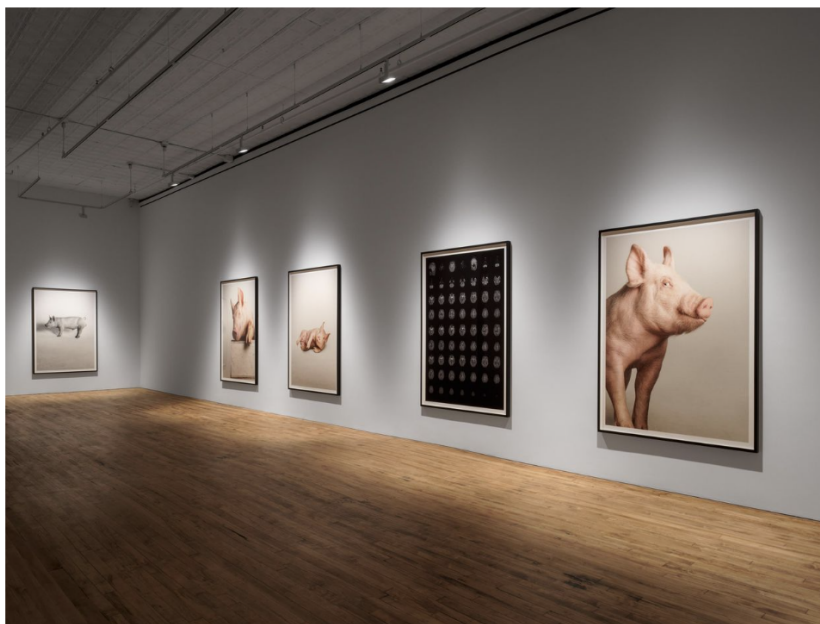
THE BIG NUDES



Exhibition view: Heji Shin, *THE BIG NUDES*, 52 Walker, New York (22 July–8 October 2023). Courtesy 52 Walker, New York.



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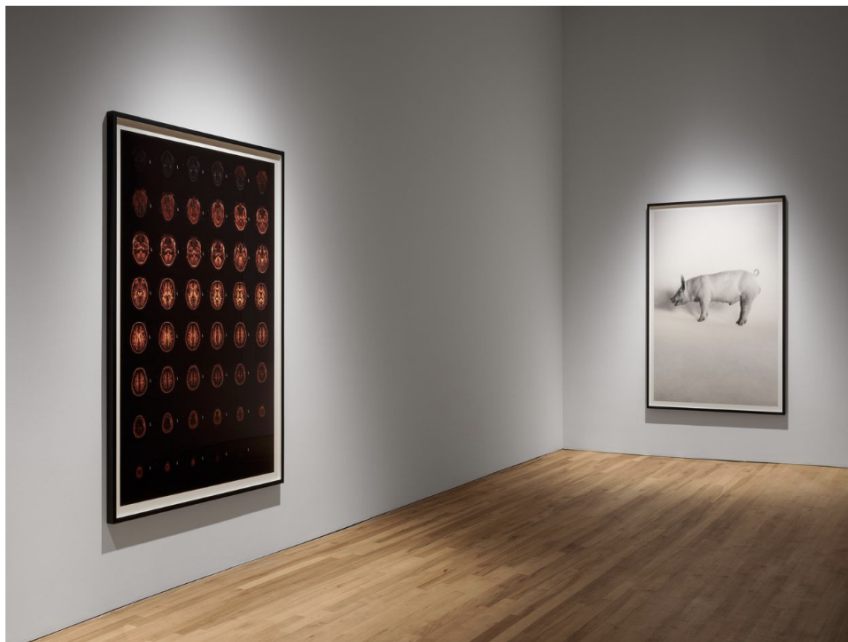
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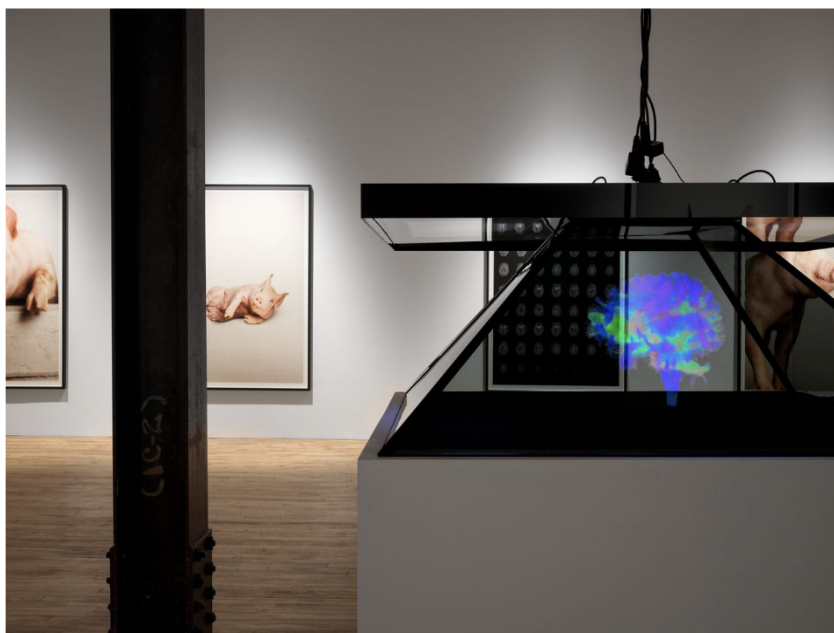
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52 Walker is pleased to announce its eighth exhibition, which will feature the work of New York-based artist Heji Shin (b. 1976). Throughout her photographic practice, Shin has skirted the boundaries of convention, creating images that challenge judgments of taste vis-à-vis fashion, celebrity, and sexuality. In this presentation, the artist will debut a new body of work that continues to reveal stimulating touchpoints of contemporary society and culture. This will be Shin's first solo exhibition in New York since 2020.

Press release courtesy David Zwirner.

Als, Hilton. "The Surreal Nudes of Heji Shin." *The New Yorker* (August 25, 2023) [ill.] [online]

THE
NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON

THE SURREAL NUDES OF HEJI SHIN

Plus: The return of "Oldboy"; the maximalist visionary Pepón Osorio; the folksinger Iris DeMent; and more.

August 25, 2023

Late August is often a cultural doldrums, and without much faith in the new Will Ferrell raunch-com about dogs, I decided, this week, to pitch my friends on an alternative: Park Chan-wook's 2003 drama "**Oldboy**," which has just been rereleased in a 4K restoration. The film follows a businessman who's imprisoned for fifteen years under mysterious circumstances before his anonymous captor abruptly sets him loose, encouraging him to seek answers. What starts as a whodunnit quickly devolves into a psychological horror show—violence, incest, and the consumption of a live octopus ensue. As the credits rolled, a companion who'd managed to avoid spoilers for two decades turned to me in alarm: "Is this your idea of a Sunday night?"

"Oldboy," fortunately, is more than its provocations. A darkly funny neo-noir heightened to the extremes of Greek tragedy, it's both a refutation of and a high-water mark for the revenge thriller. In the years since the movie's release, Park's stature among



Film still from "Oldboy." Photograph courtesy NEON

English-speaking audiences has only grown. The return of "Oldboy" coincides nicely with the latest miniseries of "**Blank Check**"—a podcast about directors' filmographies—which is devoted to Park's body of work. The show is informative but decidedly informal; its hosts, the critic David Sims and the actor Griffin Newman, sift through their own thoughts and feelings as well as films' biographical and social context, interspersing genuine insights with endearingly silly riffs. On an episode with the writer Alison Willmore, they considered "Oldboy" alongside successors ranging from the Keanu Reeves-led "John Wick" franchise to Lynne Ramsay's "You Were Never Really Here," and discussed how Park's approach has evolved over time. Park himself is game for such reassessment—in an interview for "Oldboy" 's twentieth anniversary, he cheerfully described the choice to shoot a now iconic action scene in a single take as a product of laziness. But he also acknowledged a deeper reason: the exhaustion that we see onscreen had to be real. The surest way to elicit a visceral response was to make the actors, and the audience, sweat.

SPOTLIGHT



Photograph © Heji Shin / Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker

Photography

Surrealism is alive and well and getting better all the time in “**Heji Shin: The Big Nudes,**” a wonderful show at 52 Walker, through Oct. 7, that’s not just about its subjects—brain scans, a pig (a detail of “Reclining Nude,” from 2023, is pictured here)—but about photography itself. Working from a palette that includes Irving Penn grays and calling to mind body-scan photography by artists like Kurt Hoerbst, Shin shows and tells what makes a sensibility. The forty-seven-year-old German balances the often self-serious “art” photography of the past fifty years or so (the exhibition’s title refers to the late Helmut Newton’s large-format series of big nude women) with an outstanding sense of humor that takes the piss out of the concept of the nude. Are pigs naked? Are they showing us their emotions? And are emotions a landscape that a brain scan can convey? These are among the many questions raised by the very distinctive artist.—*Hilton Als*

Dafoe, Taylor. "‘I Never Wanted to Be Avant-Garde’: Heji Shin Doesn’t Claim Her Provocative Photographs Are Intellectual, But Many of Her Biggest Fans Are." *Artnet News* (August 18, 2023) [ill.] [online]

artnet[®]news

On View

‘I Never Wanted to Be Avant-Garde’: Heji Shin Doesn’t Claim Her Provocative Photographs Are Intellectual, But Many of Her Biggest Fans Are

You won't find any naked bodies in "The Big Nudes" the artist's new show 52 Walker. Then again maybe you will.

Taylor Dafoe, August 18, 2023



Installation view, "Heji Shin: THE BIG NUDES," July 21–October 7, 2023, at 52 Walker, New York. Courtesy of 52 Walker.

There are no naked bodies in “The Big Nudes,” Heji Shin’s new show at 52 Walker—at least not the kind implied by the title. Instead, what you’ll find are giant pictures of pigs, shot against a studio backdrop, and MRI scans of the artist’s own brain. Both subjects are technically bare, but this is not exactly the stuff of late-night sexts.

For some, Shin inspires “emperor’s new clothes” doubts. Her irreverent, provocative pictures have found fans in bleeding-edge fashion brands and art institutions, but for others, they flummox and inflame. There’s a good chance “The Big Nudes” will generate the same range of reactions.

“I’m not that subtle,” the artist and editorial photographer said, deadpan, during a recent Zoom interview. She was sitting in an old farmhouse in the Hudson Valley, which she recently purchased and is trying to fix up. Born in South Korea, raised in Germany, and now mostly based in New York, Shin exudes a cosmopolitan cool that makes it hard to picture her doing housework in the sticks. “I don’t claim any intellectual approach in my art practice,” she went on. “I never wanted to be avant-garde.”



Heji Shin, 2023. © Heji Shin. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker.

As with her 2020 exhibition “Big Cocks,” which exclusively featured photos of roosters, Shin uses the title of her new show as bait. “The Big Nudes” also nods to a 1981 portfolio of the same name by the late fashion icon Helmut Newton (which does feature a lot of naked bodies). Tellingly, Shin is an avowed admirer.

Critics of Newton’s work point to its objectification of female bodies. Susan Sontag once called him a “misogynist” who “humiliates women.” But others see genuine affection: “The true subject of his photographs, as rooted as they were in male fantasy, was the awesomeness of feminine power,” Variety critic Owen Gleiberman wrote in 2020, echoing a common—if somewhat flimsy—pro-Newton rebuttal.

Shin shares Newton’s wit and sense of style, and she similarly revels in the thrill of the gaze, even—or especially—if that gaze is a little prurient. But it’s not the space of “male fantasy” that her pictures explore. What she’s interested in is difficult to put a finger on, but it has something to do with the economy of images in the 21st century, where news and products and porn all blur together in the fight for real estate on our screens.

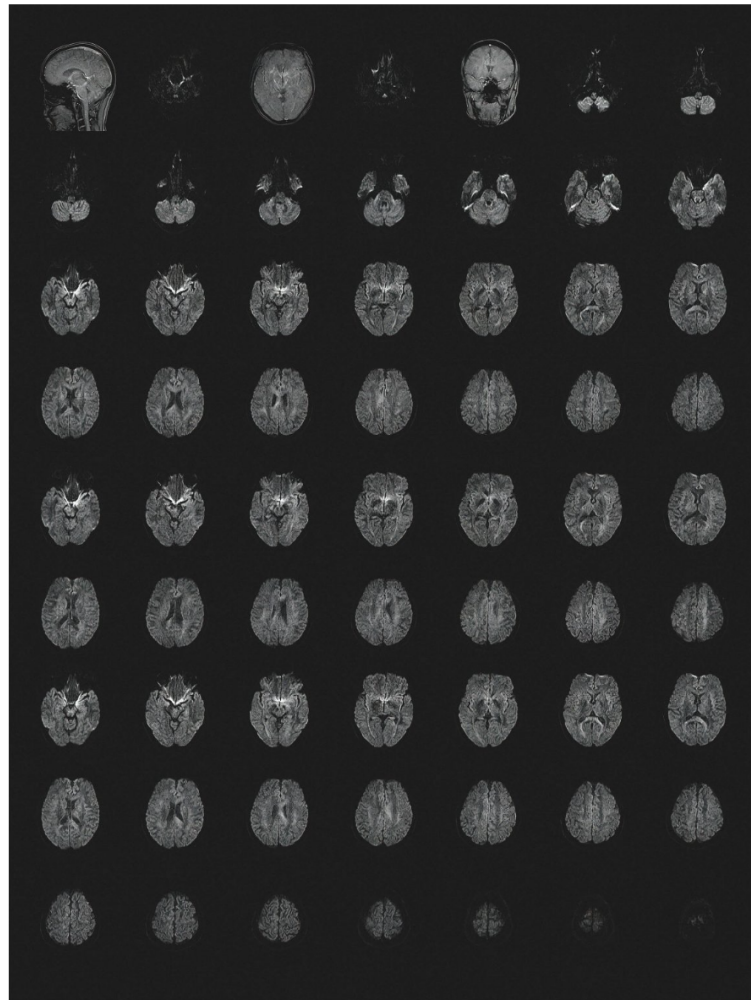
That’s the space where Shin’s work lives. She photographs farm animals like pinup models and lovers like documentary subjects. Her photos twinkle with a commercial polish, but what they’re selling isn’t clear.



Heji Shin, *You've come a long way, baby!* (2023) © Heji Shin. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker.

If punny titles are one of Shin's signatures, so are odd pairings. She's shown appropriated images of the Kardashians next to illustrations of A.I.-generated avatars breastfeeding and pictures of monkeys next to shots of role players recreating war scenes. As with those combos, the ties between the swine and brains of "The Big Nudes" are not obvious. (The MRI scans were generated specifically for this show and did not come from a health scare, Shin pointed out.)

It's easier to map these new pictures as coordinates in the broader constellation of Shin's work, where, say, the "Big Nudes" birds relate to the "Big Cocks" pigs, which in turn point to the NYPD officers penetrating each other in her 2018 exhibition "Men Photographing Men." "I think [they exist in] the same cosmos," she said. "When you're interested in certain archetypes, then one leads to another, one references the other."



Heji Shin, *Big Nude II* (2023). © Heji Shin. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker.

Shin's current exhibition isn't going to inspire the backlash that some her previous efforts have. The "Men Photographing Men" pictures made headlines, as did her [2017 Eckhaus Latta campaign](#), for which she shot real couples mid-coitus. The 2019 Whitney Biennial featured her two most infamous series: "Baby" (2016), which captured shriveled newborns emerging from their mothers, and "Kanye" (2018), for which she documented the eponymous rapper at the height of controversy and on a monumental scale.

In past interviews, Shin deflected questions about taste. "I thought people would have more humor," [she once said](#) of audience responses to her 2018 [Kunsthalle Zurich](#) show, which featured the "Kanye" portraits. "They could really only see one layer of the work."

Whether or not she agreed with the taboos others identified in her work, it's clear Shin knew what she was doing. "There used to be a time when a certain kind of outrage would give meaning, in a certain context, to a work," she said. But more recently, the artist has grown bored of provocation. "Maybe I've just changed," she explained. "Back then, I think it was more interesting to see certain kinds of reactions. Now I don't think it's interesting."



Installation view, "Heji Shin: The Big Nudes," July 21–October 7, 2023, at 52 Walker. Courtesy of 52 Walker.

Shin paused, eyes to the sky. “I think you choose your battles,” she continued. “I think that my battle is definitely more about doing art that interests me than going into a dialogue with people that I’m not interested in.”

If the artist is in dialogue with anybody in “The Big Nudes,” it might be herself. At the center of the show is a freestanding glass pyramid, inside of which floats a 3D hologram of her brain, imaged from the MRI scans. It’s a work unlike any Shin has shown before, and yet it ties everything around it together. The real pleasure of “The Big Nudes,” it turns out, is seeing an artist trust her vision enough to indulge her singular impulses. Literally and figuratively, her mind is on display.

Diehl, Travis. "Galleries." *The New York Times* (August 11, 2023) [ill.] [print]

The New York Times

GALLERIES



"Heji Shin: The Big Nudes," at 52 Walker, plays off the 1980s work by Helmut Newton. From left, "Sloth" and "Matt and Chris" (both from 2023).



"Funk You Too!" with works, from left, by Ruby Neri, Maryam Yousif, Viola Frey, Salvador Jimenez-Flores and Malja Peebles-Bright.



From left, works by Norberto Roldan, Gary-Ross Pastrana and Patricia Perez Eustaquio. At back, from left, a piece by Eric Zamuco and another by Roldan.

'Heji Shin: The Big Nudes'

Through Oct. 7. 52 Walker, 52 Walker Street, Manhattan; 212-727-1961, 52walker.com.

More like "The Pig Nudes." The photographer Heji Shin is known to mix high and low — gigantic studio portraits of Kanye West one minute, hard-core gay cop porn the next; as comfortable in glossy magazines as in scrappy galleries. Fittingly, this show puns on the fine-art and fashion photographer Helmut Newton's 1980s pictures of celebrity skin (called "Big Nudes"). With titles like "Figure Standing" and "Eat Me," several lush large-scale photographs depict fuzzy, fleshy swine in unsettling modesque poses, complete with coquettish rows of tears and flicks of tongue. "Reclining Nude," its peachy subject lying trotters out on a seamless backdrop, is the epitome of porcine soft-core.

Shin's other series is more somber: Three sets of M.R.I. scans show the artist's brain, the layers spread out for analysis. If photographs of faces and postures come with the tantalizing promise to penetrate their subject's essence, Shin's brain scans represent another order of portraiture. But even as a medical imaging machine lays bare the fatty seat of consciousness, the person remains opaque. The scans push the conceit of the pig pictures into comically bleak territory. "The Big Nudes" promises highbrow titillation but delivers mortality. For Newton's exquisite models, Shin substitutes an animal similar enough to lend us its heart valves, smart enough to spice our sausages with guilt. The cosmic pun of the pig nudes, really, is to portray both species as meat, plus magic.

TRAVIS DIEHL

'Funk You Too! Humour and Irreverence in Ceramic Sculpture'

Through Aug. 27. Museum of Art and Design, 2 Columbus Circle, Manhattan; 212-299-7777, madmuseum.org.

As a rule, contemporary art takes itself too seriously, which is why I'm delighted when I see pieces that lampoon society or make me laugh. Such work is increasingly visible today, much of it made with clay — a material whose associations with craft and childhood (and poop) are perfect for upending preconceptions of what "real" art should be.

Few exhibitions have examined the historical context for this current boom in weird ceramics. "Funk You Too!" does, and in doing so, deepened my understanding and appreciation of it. Curated by Angeik Vizcarondo-Laboy, the show departs from a 1967 exhibition that attempted to define a Bay Area-

centered style known as Funk art. What exactly Funk was is still being debated, but based on the terrific examples here, it was strange, funny, lewd and sometimes pointed. Robert Arneson emerges as its godfather; his "Portrait of the Artist as a Clever Old Dog" (1981), the centerpiece of the current show, features a sculpture of his weary face on the body of a dog, surrounded by clumps of colorful turds.

Arneson is better known than the rest of his cohort, whose works — like Patti Warashina's surreal stela "Pitter-Podder" (1968) — are a revelation. The show also includes contemporary artists whose identities and sensibilities are far more diverse than the older generation. From Yvette Mayorga's disarming riff on Polly Pocket to Natalia Arbelaez's terra-cotta sculptures with cartoonish faces, today's artists often use Funk aesthetics for more overtly political ends. They're a testament to how serious silliness can be.

JILLIAN STEINHAUER

'Shrines'

Through Aug. 19. Silverlens Gallery, 505 West 24th Street, Manhattan; 646-449-9400, silverlensgalleries.com.

One of the first artworks encountered in "Shrines" is a rough-hewn wall display made from faded photos, vintage saltshakers and scrap-wood boxes: materials that might bring Joseph Cornell to mind. But it's clear that the work's creator, the Philippines-based artist Norberto Roldan, means to pay homage to a fellow countryman too. The piece is from a series Roldan calls "100 Altars to Roberto Chabet," a venerated pioneer of Conceptual art in the Philippines.

Roldan's work and the other pieces in "Shrines" — a group show featuring 16 Filipino and Filipino diaspora artists — seem to pose two questions: In the secular world of contemporary art, is there any space for reverential artworks? And who, or

what, can be the object of that reverence? Spirits, people, places, memories: The show's answers range. References to specific elements of Filipino culture abound. Still, "Shrines" is accessible to a broader New York audience. It is a show full of feeling.

While its title is devotional, no one religion gets singled out. A neon-letter sign by Lani Maestro adapts a quotation from St. John of the Cross, paying heed to a history of local Catholicism entwined with Spanish colonial rule. Southeast Asian spirit houses and prefab apartments alike are evoked in a pair of architectural scale-models by Stephanie Comilang, a talent to watch. In "God to Go," by Eric Zamuco, even modern-day consumerism brushes up against the divine. An ornate, transparent column, on closer inspection, turns out to be a stack of carryout containers: single-use plastic made rapturous.

DAWN CHAN



“Heji Shin: The Big Nudes,” at 52 Walker, plays off the 1980s work by Helmut Newton. From left, “Sloth” and “Matt and Chris” (both from 2023).

‘Heji Shin: The Big Nudes’

Through Oct. 7. 52 Walker,
52 Walker Street, Manhattan;
212-727-1961, 52walker.com.

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TRAVIS DIEHL

Yerebakan, Osman Can. "Heji Shin's Majestic Portraits of Porcine Princes." *AnOther Magazine* (August 7, 2023) [ill.] [online]

AnOther

Heji Shin's Majestic Portraits of Porcine Princes



Heji Shin, *Butch*, 2023 © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

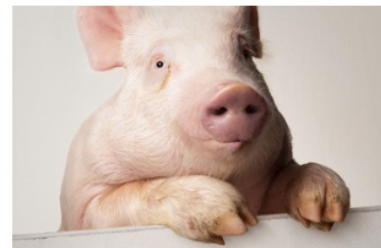
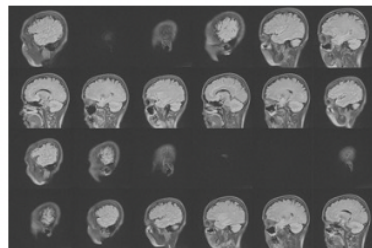
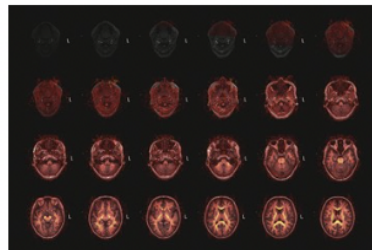
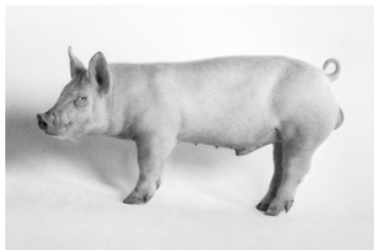
Heji Shin's enigmatic new exhibition in New York features anthropoid portraits of pigs and the artist's own brain scans. "Overall, I don't think necessarily in terms of beauty," she says

AUGUST 07, 2023

TEXT Osman Can Yerebakan

The models in **Heji Shin's** new exhibition, *The Big Nudes* at 52 Walker, are probably all dead now. The photographs of pigs from an upstate New York meat farm capture the chubby mammals playfully at ease, unaware of their impending slaughter. *Butch* (2023) shows a pig with a sweet, almost human grin; the dainty poser in *Derek* (2023) could be auditioning for a remake of the movie, *Babe*. The animals' human-like gestures are not coincidental: they pay homage to Helmut Newton's 1981-dated photography book and Paris exhibition, *Big Nudes*, which showed naked women posing in grandiose postures.

The deceiving wrapping of warmth over a rather hard-hitting punchline is not an unfamiliar trait in Shin's photographic work. The New York-based, Korean-German artist summons beauty, innocence, or sensuality to push the viewer into contemplating disgust, brutality or sometimes simply sex; in other cases, she does the opposite by presenting the normalcy of the gruesome. Shin entered the world of fine art photography (after building a successful career as a fashion photographer) with her series *Baby* (2016) by doing the latter: the blood-drenched images of newborns fresh out of the womb were purely real, but their raw immediacy caused a stir at the 2019 Whitney Biennial.



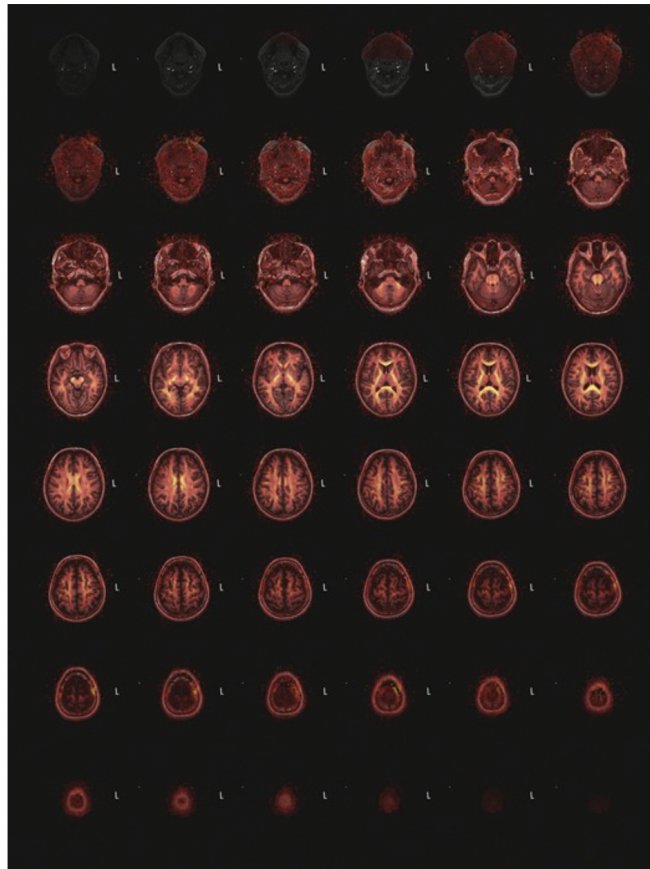
GALLERY / 6 IMAGES

The Big Nudes by Heji Shin

In 2018, Shin cast Kanye West for a series of portraits around the time the rapper was beginning to gain notoriety for his remarks on race and politics. The same year, she also photographed a group of hunky men in NYPD outfits for images that captured them during steamy gay sex. Before photographing pigs at a Brooklyn studio for her current show, Shin did a similar shoot with monkeys, snapping the furry animals playing with random objects, from money-filled wallets to dildos.

Shin's current show at the Tribeca gallery also includes images of her own brain's X-Rays rendered with an MRI examination technique called diffusion tensor imaging. In tandem with her stripping shots of others – celebrities or animals – the scans expose the artist's intellectual inner workings through the cold technicality of medicine and the familiar foreignness of looking at someone's brain scan. Akin to nudes, they too reveal the very depths of a body's intelligence, similar to how the pig portraits unrobe our convoluted notions of mercy, sympathy, and love.

Below, in her own words, Heji Shin talks about the genesis of her latest exhibition, *The Big Nudes*.



Heji Shin, Big Nude III, 2023 © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

"Fashion photography is about a conventional perception of beauty, which is of course a reality that you can bend endlessly. With fine art photography, it is less about a beautiful photograph. There is of course the good picture that makes you say 'this makes sense.' But, overall, I don't think necessarily in terms of beauty.

"There is an unpredictability in working with animals, similar to working with children or babies. What you get at the end may not feel as authentic or real for the right moment. You cannot control them which means there is more work to do during the edit. There is a lot of chaotic energy. I don't necessarily like to be in complete control of what I am doing, so on some occasions I just need to let things happen.

"The brain scans are some sort of self-portrait, but they are not intimate. They are abstract and not personalised. A good portrait is considered to be something close to the surface where some emotions are represented. A brain scan, however, is entirely a technical process and it doesn't deliver anything about the person - it is full abstraction. My brain scans are really not intimate portraits. They have a universal language but as a subject, I don't deliver anything. This is more of an illusion of a self-portrait.



Heji Shin, Matt and Chris, 2023 © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

“When you look through the camera, it automatically disconnects you from the environment. Any other element from your surroundings disappears when things are going well and when you feel focused. On the other hand, photographing outside of the studio is often a challenge, perhaps comparable to the unpredictability of photographing animals. The studio also gives more concentration to the model and allows them to be freer.

“My editorial work has impacted my fine art practice in terms of logistics and showing me how I can professionally approach a project. Fashion photography is much more focused on the model and the clothes so I don’t have to think as much about what I actually want to say. Of course, there is a conceptual approach, but the dialogue is more about the model and the clothes. Fashion photography taught me how to be a little bit more practical and a little bit more professional.”

The Big Nudes by Heji Shin is on show at 52 Walker in New York until 7 October 2023.

Downes, Annabel. "Heji Shin's Reclining Nude Pigs at Zwirner's 52 Walker." *Ocula* (August 4, 2023) [ill.] [online]

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Advisory Perspective

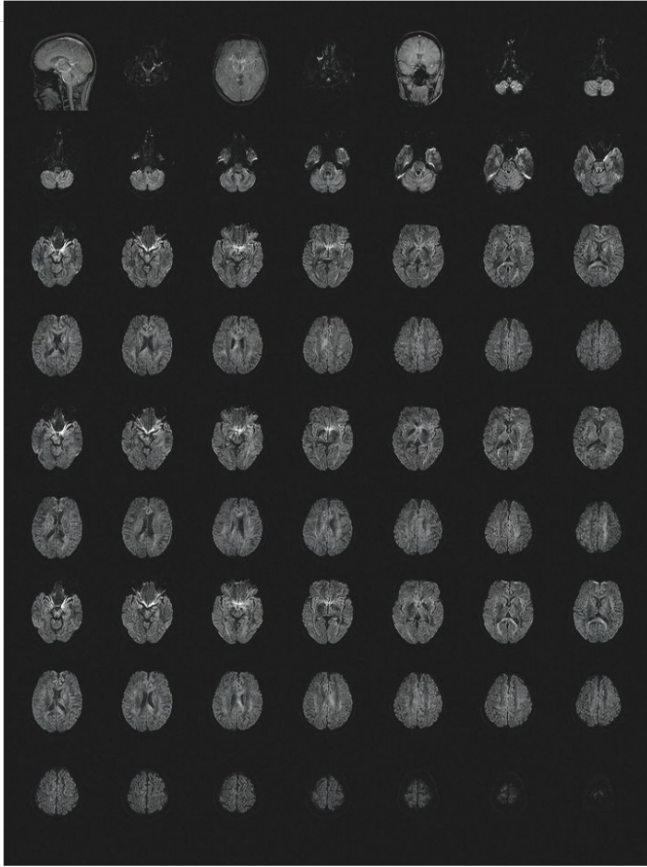
Heji Shin's Reclining Nude Pigs at Zwirner's 52 Walker

By [Annabel Downes](#) | New York, 4 August 2023

I don't really live in a headspace where I have to gauge the public perception of a subject before I allow myself to be genuinely interested,' explains German photographer [Heji Shin](#).

Judging by her latest run of projects, that's probably for the best. In recent years, Shin has exhibited photographs of controversial rapper Kanye West, babies being born, and couples engaged in sex acts for an ad campaign for American fashion label Eckhaus Latta.

In her exhibition at [David Zwirner's 52 Walker](#) gallery, *[THE BIG NUDES](#)* (22 July–8 October 2023), however, Shin takes a more subtle, sideways approach to the full frontal.



Heji Shin, *Big Nude II* (2023). Inkjet print on paper. 185.4 x 139.1 cm. Framed: 200.7 x 153.7 x 5.4 cm. Edition 1 of 3, 2 AP © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York.

Humorous photographs recast Helmut Newton's 'Big Nudes' (1980–9) series of semi-clad fashion models with fleshy pink pigs and MRI scans of Shin's brain. What could be more revealing?

Speaking with Ocula Advisory, Heji Shin discusses her curiosity about photographing the 'unexplored realm' of the brain, the German photographers that inform her practice, and why scuba diving could be next on her agenda.

This exhibition takes its name from Helmut Newton's 1980s series 'Big Nudes'. What inspired you about that show?

The reference to Helmut Newton's 'Big Nudes' (1980-9) series came after I had photographed the pigs and scanned the brains. I liked the title in relation to what the photographs were turning into.

It does work in the sense that technically the show contains nude subjects presented in a way that makes them seem large. And the nude is an art historical genre that is usually a warrior or a woman not wearing clothes. I'm proposing an expanded definition here.

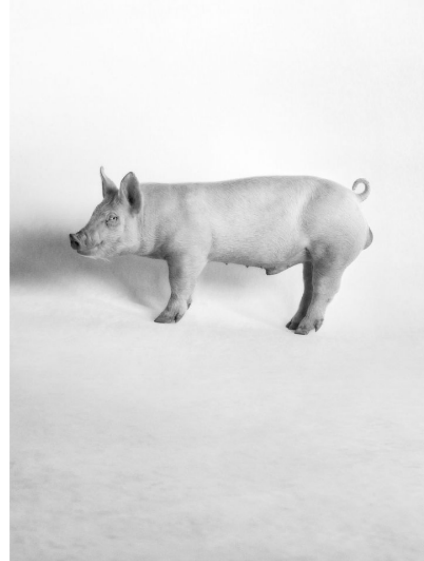
In a conversation you had with the artist Jordan Wolfson for *Interview Magazine* ahead of this

show, you mentioned that you wanted to do a head scan of Mike Tyson. Why?

Mike Tyson seems like he would have an interesting brain and I was curious to see what it looks like. It's a whole different set of parameters when you think of photographing someone that way—an unexplored realm—because we only really know people by their outward appearance, which is superficial and probably a product of men ruling over the art world for so long. As a woman, I want to use my voice to go deeper.

Like Kayne West, who you photographed for your Kunsthalle Zurich (2019) show, Tyson is a controversial figure. You've said you like taking risks with your subject matter. Why?

Unless it's something that has such hot, intense controversy attached to it that completely sucks the oxygen out of the room, I don't really live in a headspace where I have to gauge the public perception of a subject before I allow myself to be genuinely interested. I feel like if I did that it would be difficult to make work that I liked personally.



Heji Shin, *Eat Me* (2023). Inkjet print on paper. 185.4 x 139.1 cm. Framed: 200.7 x 153.7 x 5.4 cm. Edition 1 of 3, 2 AP. © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York.



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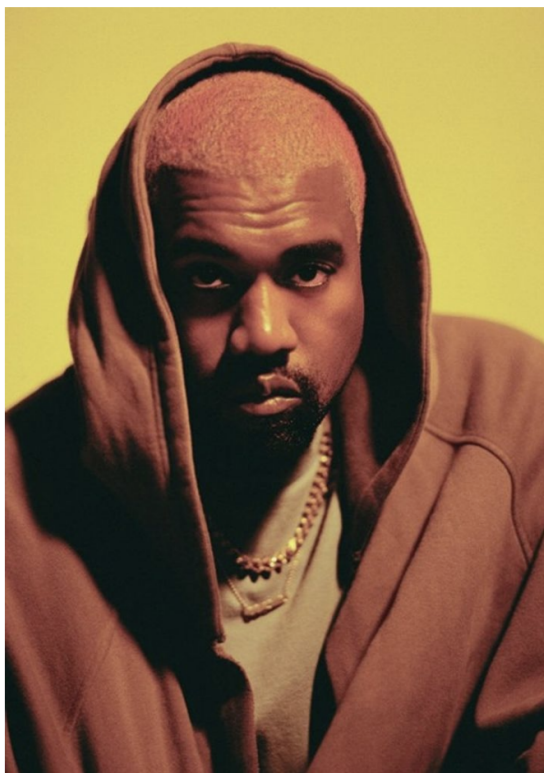
Exhibition view: Heji Shin, *THE BIG NUDES*, 52 Walker, New York (22 July–8 October 2023). Courtesy 52 Walker.



Exhibition view: Heji Shin, *THE BIG NUDES*, 52 Walker, New York (22 July–8 October 2023). Courtesy 52 Walker.

***THE BIG NUDES* comprises two discrete bodies of work—brain scans and pig portraits. This is common in your shows—the Whitney Biennial featured your Kanye West portraits alongside your 'Baby' series (2016), and a similar approach taken at Kunsthalle Zurich. What appeals to you about bringing together such distinct bodies of works?**

The Kanye West portraits and 'Baby' series were actually two separate bodies of works completed in different times that I decided to juxtapose with a very specific curatorial intent.



Heji Shin, *Kanye II* (2018). Courtesy Heji Shin and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York.

Back then the curators of the Whitney Biennial did not want to show them together. The portraits of Kanye ended up in the basement between the bathrooms and the wardrobe, whereas the babies were officially part of the Biennial.

Whereas, the pig portraits and brain scans in *THE BIG NUDES* are meant to be read together. Each time this has happened, it's a series I worked on simultaneously in the months leading up to the exhibition, and to that extent I think they are related genetically.

Like Newton and other German photographers such as Wolfgang Tillmans and Juergen Teller, your work straddles the line between art and fashion. As a photographer from Germany, what influence have these figures had on your practice?

No doubt a pretty huge influence. Juergen Teller is as good as ever today, both in an art and in a fashion context.

As for Wolfgang Tillmans, he is a friend and I admire the fact that his work has really transcended the possibilities of photography itself and become something more spiritual and immaterial. His musical project 'Fragile' is something people should check out; it's completely underrated, especially the song 'me naive'.

What have you got in mind for your next project?

I've been looking into taking scuba diving lessons as I'd like to explore the incredible flora and fauna under the sea like my fourth favourite German photographer, Leni Riefenstahl.

Main image: Heji Shin, *Reclining Nude* (2023). Inkjet print on paper. 185.4 x 139.1 cm. Framed: 200.7 x 153.7 x 5.4 cm. Edition 1 of 3, 2 AP. © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

Diehl, Travis. "What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in August." *The New York Times* (August 3, 2023) [ill.] [online]

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in August

By **Martha Schwendener, Max Lakin, Jillian Steinhauer, Holland Cotter, Seph Rodney, Travis Diehl, Will Heinrich, John Vincler and Dawn Chan**

Published Aug. 3, 2023 Updated Aug. 11, 2023

Want to see new art in New York this weekend? Check out the photographer Heji Shin's porcine play on Helmet Newton's "Big Nudes" in TriBeCa. And don't miss the funky show of weird ceramics shows at the Museum of Arts and Design.

Newly Reviewed

TRIBECA

'Heji Shin: The Big Nudes'

Through Oct. 7. 52 Walker, 52 Walker Street, Manhattan; 212-727-1961, [52walker.com](https://www.52walker.com).



Installation view of "Heji Shin: The Big Nudes" at 52 Walker in Manhattan. At left, "Sloth," 2023; and right, "Matt and Chris," 2023. via 52 Walker

More like “The Pig Nudes.” The photographer Heji Shin is known to mix high and low — gigantic studio portraits of Kanye West one minute, hard-core gay cop porn the next; as comfortable in glossy magazines as in scrappy galleries. Fittingly, this show puns on the fine-art and fashion photographer Helmut Newton’s 1980s pictures of celebrity skin (called “Big Nudes”). With titles like “Figure Standing” and “Eat Me,” several lush large-scale photographs depict fuzzy, fleshy swine in unsettling modelesque poses, complete with coquettish rows of teats and flicks of tongue. “Reclining Nude,” its peachy subject lying trotters out on a seamless backdrop, is the epitome of porcine soft-core.

Shin’s other series is more somber: Three sets of M.R.I. scans show the artist’s brain, the layers spread out for analysis. If photographs of faces and postures come with the tantalizing promise to penetrate their subject’s essence, Shin’s brain scans represent another order of portraiture. But even as a medical imaging machine lays bare the fatty seat of consciousness, the person remains opaque. The scans push the conceit of the pig pictures into comically bleak territory. “The Big Nudes” promises highbrow titillation but delivers mortality. For Newton’s exquisite models, Shin substitutes an animal similar enough to lend us its heart valves, smart enough to spice our sausages with guilt. The cosmic pun of the pig nudes, really, is to portray both species as meat, plus magic. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

Orr, J. Scott. "At 52 Walker, A New Show From the Mind of Heji Shin." *Whitehot Magazine* (August 1, 2023) [ill.] [online]



At 52 Walker, A New Show From the Mind of Heji Shin

By J. SCOTT ORR, August 2023



Installation view, Heji Shin: THE BIG NUDES, July 21–October 7, 2023, 52 Walker, New York. Courtesy 52 Walker, New York.

Heji Shin: Big Nudes

52 Walker

Through October 17, 2023

The 3D rainbow-hued brain is spinning silently inside its tinted glass pyramid-like vault, which offers this naked cerebrum the protection more commonly afforded by a human skull. Meanwhile, some pink hairy pigs are affording the thing due consideration from various points around the room. One is giving it the side-eye, one seems to be laughing, one looks a bit anxious, another, which is lounging lazily on its side, looks completely nonplussed.

Humanized pigs and a human brain. The human brain and humanized pigs. You can toss those two things around in your head for a while and not understand how they fit on the same bingo card. And maybe that's the point, or part of it.

Big Nudes, the latest solo show by New York–based artist/photographer Heji Shin, opened July 21 at 52 Walker, the David Zwirner satellite location in downtown Manhattan near Broadway and Canal. It is a stunningly complex examination of humanity, vulnerability, doubt, precarity and wonder. It pairs the ultimate nudity, an un-skulled human brain, with expressive adventures in porcine pulchritude, high fashion photography on the huff. Ask why and there you have it.

The brain that is the cynosure of *Big Nudes* is Shin's; well, it's a representation of her gray matter created using diffusion tensor imaging, or DTI, a type of MRI that creates very pretty and colorful images of brains and other internal stuff, but offers no real insights into their function.

So, while Shin's spinning 3D scan offers a snapshot of her brain and an apt suggestion of human consciousness at its most vulnerable, it sheds no light on her thought processes. Still, she said a few months ago that brainwise, she's just fine: "I don't know much about disorders," she said, "because I don't think I have any."



Heji Shin, Reclining Nude, 2023, © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York.

And yet here we are, with the brain as consciousness at the center, surrounded by the surreal humanized pigs looking on with expressions that range from uncertainty to glee. Is this a dialogue, the consciousness considering the surreality and vice versa? “Maybe,” Shin says. One of the bovines, Derek, seems a bit frightened by it all, yet he can’t look away. “I see Derek as a soul in need of rescue,” Shin said.

But what of this unusual pairing of a human brain and pigs, two things that go together about as well as, say, giant Waholesque portraits of Kanye West and x-ray images of a woman holding a dog. Oh, right, that was another of Shin’s shows, a 2018–2019 Kunsthalle Zürich solo exhibition that, like *Big Nudes*, brought together seemingly unrelated elements. On the surface both presentations would seem to suggest simply that Shin is comfortable with random duality, but is it random or is there intent to escort viewers somewhere?

“I don’t think about those juxtapositions with a precise effect in mind, or a specific place I want to take the viewer,” Shin told *WhiteHot Magazine*. In fact, she said she prefers to empower viewers to be their own pathfinders.

The exhibition's title, *Big Nudes*, is drawn from 1980s work by the German-Australian photographer Helmut Newton, which included life-sized prints of nude or semi-nude models, and which was later issued as a book. Like Newton, Shin has ably negotiated the parallel career paths of commercial and fine art photography.



Heji Shin, You've come a long way, baby!, 2023 © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York.

Newton's commercial work was edgy, while his fine art, especially the urban-erotic portfolios *Big Nudes*, *Naked and Dressed*, and *Domestic Nudes* pushed the boundaries further. Shin's fashion photography is hardly normative, but her fine artwork, like the seductively posed pics, or doggy skeletons, is far more provocative and transgressive.

Still, her provocations have at times been misleading, which has itself been a teasing commentary on contemporary mores. Take for example her 2021 series *Big Cocks*, which had nothing at all to do with the size of anyone's manhood, but instead was a remarkable collection of photographs of colorful, manic roosters in ninja-like poses. And witness *Big Nudes*, which sounds like it could offer the erotica that was contained in its namesake work by Newton, but delivers only nudity of the porcine kind.

Her 2016-17 show that carried the anodyne title “Baby,” was in fact a collection of newborns emerging angrily from birth canals, their alien-like faces all bloody and smushed by the violence of the birthing event.

In a conversation with the artist Jordan Wolfson, transcribed and published by Interview Magazine in June, Shin said she was still working out the details of the brain scan project, but noted that it would “be about consciousness and the brain and physicality.”

“I have a very, very good brain scan. The brain surgeon I was working with is a leading neurosurgeon,” she said, after sharing earlier in the conversation that bit about how she has no disorders. “A brain scan,” she told Wolfson, “is just an interpretation. The brain doesn’t look this way, of course. I looked at my brain scan and thought, why are they using these colors?”

Ebony L. Haynes, director of 52 Walker, said she had hoped to feature Shin’s work even before 52 Walker opened less than two years ago. This is the space’s eighth exhibition.

“I’d been following her and speaking to her at length, as her practice grew, about what she’s interested in and where the concepts are going. So, I planned this show a long time ago,” Haynes said. “Big Nudes consists of the nude bodies of pigs with brain scans; the brain is Heji’s, the pigs are not,” she said.

Born in South Korea, Shin was raised largely in Germany. She started taking photographs at age 20, after receiving a camera as a birthday gift. Her early goal was to become a fashion photographer, but her fine art ambitions would not always yield, so her practice has two sides to it, like a brain.

She has created edgy fashion photography for Tom Ford, Givenchy, Supreme, Goomheo, Gentle Monster, Adidas and other brands and her work has appeared in Vogue, Frieze, Harper's Bazaar and other magazines.

Big Nudes runs through Oct 17 at 52 Walker, 52 Walker Street, New York. The gallery is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday: 10AM–6PM and Thursday: 12–8PM **WM**

“August 1–7: What We’re Doing Next Week.” *The Paris Review* (July 27, 2023) [ill.] [online]

the PARIS REVIEW

August 1–7: What We’re Doing Next Week

By The Paris Review July 27, 2023

HAPPENINGS



CHARLIE SAIKLEY SIX-MAN VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT. COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, LICENSED UNDER CC0 3.0.

Soon it will be August in New York City, a period when everyone is theoretically out of town—they’re always saying this, anyway, in books like *August* by Judith Rossner. This is mostly a fiction, that everyone’s at their country house and everything is shutting down, but it’s sort of fun to imagine; who doesn’t secretly enjoy having fun while others are away? For the month of August, the *Review* is trying a little experiment—highlighting some things that *are* going on during this supposedly quiet month. Every week, we’ll be compiling roundups of cultural events and miscellany that the *Review*’s staff and friends are excited about around town. (And maybe, occasionally, out of town.) We can promise only that these lists will be uncomprehensive, totally random, and fun.

Heji Shin's *The Big Nudes* at 52 Walker, open all August: *The Big Nudes* is the photographer Heji Shin's first solo exhibition in New York since the 2020 show *Big Cocks*. The cocks in question, by the way, were a series of roosters photographed in shocking detail. *The Big Nudes*, meanwhile, will include photographs of pigs posed to evoke fashion models. This show comes recommended by our contributing editor Matthew Higgs, who says, "This relatively rare gallery presentation promises to be something of a midsummer event." It opened recently and will be up through October 7.

Duray, Dan. "Five Things to Do in New York's Art Scene July 17-22." *Observer* (July 17, 2023) [ill.] [online]

OBSERVER

Five Things to Do in New York's Art Scene July 17-22

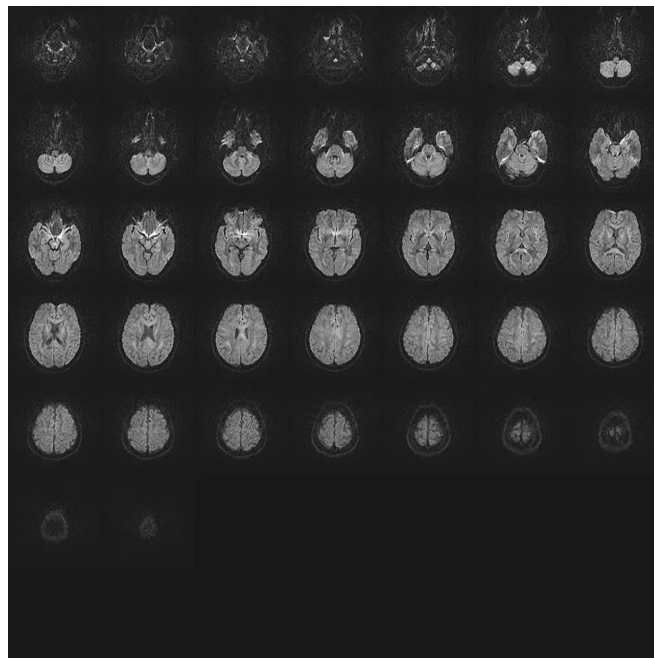
From a round-trip bike ride to Edward Hopper's birthplace to one of MoMA PS1's celebrated EDM events, there's a lot going on this week.

By [Dan Duray](#) • 07/17/23 12:05pm

Welcome to Things to Do, our weekly roundup of happenings in the ever-buzzing New York art scene. Here, we present an expertly curated list of the best goings on that don't require an invite—but might require that you reserve a spot in advance.

Friday July 21

Opening: Heji Shin, *The Big Nudes*



Heji Shin, *Work in progress*, 2023. © Heji Shin

52 Walker Gallery, 52 Walker, 6 to 8 p.m.

The eighth show at David Zwirner's 52 Walker space celebrates the photographic practice of the New York-based Heji Shin, who creates "images that challenge judgments of taste vis-à-vis fashion, celebrity, and sexuality." A recent series of hers, Big Cocks, captured screaming roosters with such care that you almost forget the whole thing was obviously conceived as a bit. The best art is made this way, though... as a bit.

Bradford, Phoebe. "5 Must-See Summer Exhibitions in New York." *Ocula* (July 13, 2023) [ill.] [online]

OCULA



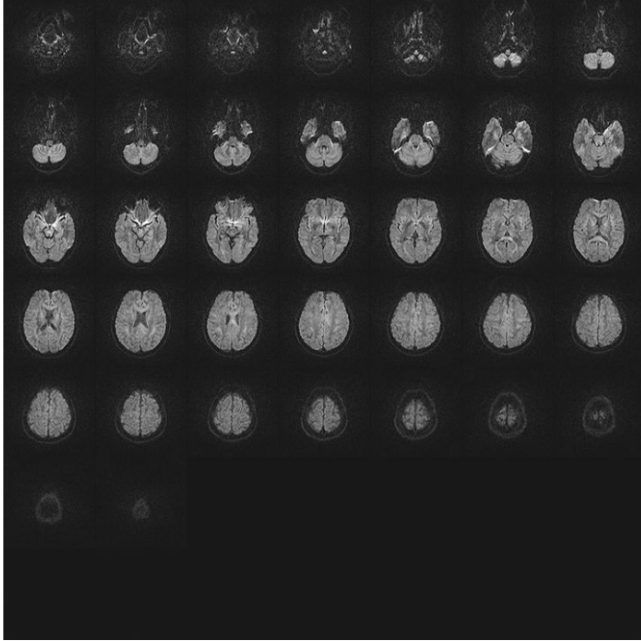
Advisory Perspective

5 Must-See Summer Exhibitions in New York

By *Phoebe Bradford* | New York, 13 July 2023

New York's art scene is thriving this summer, despite long days and hot nights across the northern hemisphere, a typically quieter time in the arts calendar.

Ocula Advisory shares a selection of five exhibitions to see, from a provocative group show of 'ugly' paintings at Nahmad Contemporary and the ceramic wonders of [Doyle Lane](#) at [David Kordansky Gallery](#) to [Heji Shin](#)'s striking imagery at 52 Walker and [Maureen Dougherty](#)'s curious portraits at [Cheim & Read](#).



Heji Shin, *Work in progress* (2023). © Heji Shin. Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York.

4. Heji Shin at 52 Walker (21 July–7 October 2023)

Photographer Heji Shin presents a new body of work at David Zwirner's 52 Walker gallery for the artist's first solo exhibition in New York since 2020.

THE BIG NUDES (21 July–7 October 2023) explores consciousness, the brain, and physicality. The Seoul-born German artist introduces recent works, including a series of MRI scans that document sections of her own brain.

Interested in turning the camera inwards, on ourselves and each other, Shin's exhibition reveals the physical inner workings of her brain, alongside a presentation of work that intrigues and provokes her audience.

Her striking, and at times, challenging imagery considers the stimulating effects that various encounters and interactions in contemporary society and culture have on us.

Artnet News. "Art Industry News: Artist Takashi Murakami Worries He Will Be 'Replaced' by A.I. Someday + Other Stories." *Artnet* (June 20, 2023) [ill.] [online]

artnet

Art World

Art Industry News: Artist Takashi Murakami Worries He Will Be 'Replaced' by A.I. Someday + Other Stories

Plus, the Berlin Biennale gets postponed, and the Kunstmuseum Basel names its new leader.

Artnet News, June 20, 2023



Takashi Murakami. Photo by FRANCOIS GUILLOT / AFP via Getty Images.

Art Industry News is a daily digest of the most consequential developments coming out of the art world and art market. Here's what you need to know on this Tuesday 20, June.

NEED TO READ

Jordan Wolfson Speaks to Photographer Heji Shin – In a wide-ranging back and forth, the two artists discuss therapy, karma, and the wise words of Jeff Koons before pondering which character traits tend to push someone toward expressing themselves through art. (*Interview*)

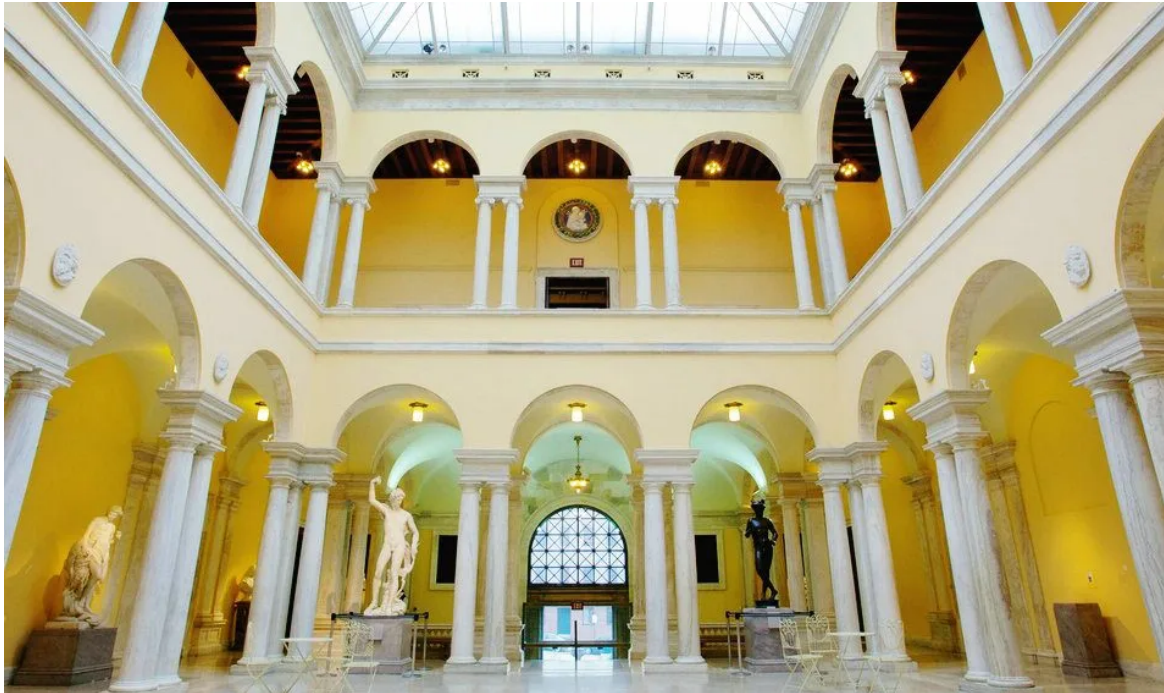
Editors of ARTnews. "Walters Art Museum Staffers Vote to Unionize, Ann and Gordon Getty Sale Nets \$21.9 M., and More: Morning Links for June 19, 2023." *ARTnews* (June 19, 2023) [ill.] [online]

ARTnews

Walters Art Museum Staffers Vote to Unionize, Ann and Gordon Getty Sale Nets \$21.9 M., and More: Morning Links for June 19, 2023



BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS  June 19, 2023 7:35am



The interior of the Walters Art Museum.
THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM

The Headlines

THE TOP JOB. The **Sheldon Museum of Art** at the **University of Nebraska** in Lincoln **tapped Susan Longhenry** to be its new director. Longhenry is currently the director and chief curator of the **Haggerty Museum of Art** at **Marquette University** in Milwaukee. • The **El Paso Museum of Art** in Texas **named** a new director, **Edward Hayes, Jr.**, who was previously exhibitions senior manager at the **McNay Art Museum** in San Antonio, Texas. • Last but not least, **William Griswold**, the director of the **Cleveland Museum of Art** since 2014, **got a contract extension**, *Cleveland.com* reports. Originally set to expire in 2024, it now runs through January 2027.

The Kicker

ALL GLORY IS FLEETING. A new *Interview* magazine **conversation** between artists **Jordan Wolfson** and **Heji Shin** is nominally about the latter's upcoming show at **David Zwirner's 52 Walker** space in New York, but it really goes places. One topic: success. "Success is as good as being in a fancy hotel room," Wolfson said. "The first 15, 20 minutes of it, you get excited, you can turn the shower on, you jump on a nice bed. Then after a while, you're still just consciousness inside of yourself and susceptible to whatever experience you're having." **[Interview]**

Wolfson, Jordan. "Heji Shin and Jordan Wolfson on Virtue Signaling and Eternal Art." *Interview Magazine* (June 16, 2023) [ill.] [online]

Interview

Heji Shin and Jordan Wolfson on Virtue Signaling and Eternal Art

By **Jordan Wolfson**

Photographed by **Richard Kern**

Styled by **Mel Ottenberg**

June 16, 2023



Heji Shin wears Sweater and Pants Bottega Veneta.

Heji Shin's daunting, risk-seeking photographs capture a rabid humanity, from her series of bloody heads of **babies emerging in childbirth**, to giant portraits of **Kanye West**; from male porn stars dressed up as NYPD officers, to feral priapic roosters in "**Big Cocks**." The German artist, who was born in Seoul and now lives and works in New York City, is one of the wildest experimentalists working in photography today. This summer, she's staging her biggest show yet, at David Zwirner's **52 Walker gallery**. Among the array will be her recent series of brain scans. As a preview to the inner workings of her own brain, she spoke with her friend, the artist **Jordan Wolfson**, about compulsions, disorders, and why some art lasts for eternity.

SATURDAY 4:30 PM APRIL 8, 2023 NYC

JORDAN WOLFSON: Sorry I'm late. I'm at my friend's house and my computer dropped.

HEJI SHIN: I thought you were at your studio.

WOLFSON: Right. With a big Nate Lowman painting behind me. A friend of mine gave me his house because he lives in Florida, and I have to be on the west side of L.A. a lot, so here I am.

SHIN: Why aren't you home?

WOLFSON: Because I have this doctor that I go to. I've been getting treated for my OCD every morning.

SHIN: I see. A neurologist?

WOLFSON: It's a psychiatrist, but it's a special treatment called theta burst TMS [transcranial magnetic stimulation]. It puts serious depression, OCD, PTSD, and addiction into permanent remission. For the rest of your life.

SHIN: It's not a behavioral therapy?

WOLFSON: No, it's like an electromagnetic stimulant.

SHIN: Oh, yeah. I just went to a brain surgeon in L.A. and he was talking about that kind of treatment. It's very, very successful.

WOLFSON: It's crazy successful. I've done over a hundred treatments because I was exposed to VOCs at my studio, the paint chemicals. And every time you do that, it sets you back a couple of weeks.

SHIN: That's a really rough case of OCD you have.

WOLFSON: It's crazy. I have thousands of years of epigenetic Ashkenazi trauma. People are like, "Jews are so neurotic." Well, we've been chased down in Europe for thousands of years. You'd be pretty neurotic too.

SHIN: You mean that it's genetically inherited trauma from all the last centuries?

WOLFSON: I believe I suffer from OCD because it's very typical for Ashkenazi Jews to suffer from this. And yeah, because it's potentially epigenetics. Despite the last hundred years or less of Jewish prosperity, we were being persecuted as a minority through Europe for hundreds and hundreds of years.

SHIN: And you think that trauma is responsible for your OCD?

WOLFSON: It's probably the foundation of it. But isn't this conversation about you, not me?

SHIN: Maybe you're the more interesting subject. I don't know much about disorders, because I don't think I have any. Do you worry with your recovery you'll stop making art?

WOLFSON: No. That's a myth. In my experience I've never made art when I was feeling afraid. It never was helpful to me, feeling afraid or anxious. When I made art, it was always from a very clear space when I was letting my consciousness flow through me, and I was a conduit for its frequency. I would rather quit art than continue to suffer the way I have been. I would have no problem making that choice.

SHIN: Yesterday, I watched Jeff Koons's MasterClass.

WOLFSON: I watched that too. He's fantastic.

SHIN: It reminds me of what you're saying. He claims that art-making is an act to remove anxieties and feelings of shame and guilt.



Shirt ERL. Jeans The Vintage Twin.

WOLFSON: I believe that making art is a spiritual practice. I won't touch my work unless I've meditated.

SHIN: How often do you meditate?

WOLFSON: Every day for over a decade.

SHIN: Is it TM? Or what kind?

WOLFSON: It's a type of South Korean Won Dharma-style meditation.

SHIN: I've never heard of it. I'm South Korean.

WOLFSON: There's this place near my house in upstate New York called the Won Dharma Center. I kind of became part of the community and learned their style of meditation. That's why I was late today. I was meditating.

SHIN: You sound very New Age-friendly these days.

WOLFSON: I've always been New Age-friendly. Ever since I was a little boy. Are you New Age?

SHIN: I like that stuff.

WOLFSON: What do you practice?

SHIN: I don't practice anything. I know how to meditate, but I don't feel I need it at the moment. I don't do therapies, I never go to doctors.

WOLFSON: You're probably one of those people who are lucky to have good brain chemistry.

SHIN: Maybe. Brain chemistry can always be destroyed by modern contemporary life. But you're more spiritual, or religious.

WOLFSON: I'm not religious.

SHIN: Do you believe in some sort of order in things, or some higher meaning? Or a divine inspiration or intuition?

WOLFSON: When I was meditating just now, I opened my eyes a couple times and was looking at this library of art books. I started seeing the names of these artists, like Richard Prince, or Steven Shearer. I saw my own name. I saw Laura Owens. I started thinking, these names are different people who've had different karma, and their career is part of their karma. It's like looking at different people and rather than being like, "Oh, that person's an asshole," or, "That person's amazing," being like, "Wow, that person is living out some type of really specific karma." Jeff Koons is living a karma. You are living a karma.

SHIN: Do you externalize your art practice in terms of your aura?

WOLFSON: I'm saying that all the good and bad things that happened to you in your life are potentially part of your karma, and might have been decided before you were born. And now you're in this life, being challenged by karma. And that karma is the lesson. It's like a wave that comes and knocks you down, and if you aren't able to surrender and let the wave flow through you and then stand up again, you haven't learned the lesson.

SHIN: In Jeff Koons's MasterClass, he says, "Everything is as important as another thing. There's no difference. There's no hierarchy between things." I was wondering, what does he mean by "there's no hierarchy in things"?

WOLFSON: I can explain that. Eckhart Tolle talks about it. It's a story about how people reach enlightenment. Say that a man walks into the butcher and says, "Give me your finest cut of meat." And the butcher says, "All my meat is the finest cut. There's not a single piece that isn't the finest cut." What he's saying is that this experience you had, that you thought was good or bad, it was all the best experience, it was all equal in its lesson. At my studio, different employees come to me because they're having a bad time, or someone's communicated with them in a way they didn't feel good about, or they're feeling burnout. And my attitude is, every team member is the most important team member. The intern is as important as the roboticist artist. Can you hold on a minute? I'm going to use the restroom. [Wolfson leaves, returns after a minute] As a teenager, I made these paintings that I entered into competitions, and I would lose because people thought the paintings were really dark. And then at a certain point in my twenties, I was having all these ideas for artworks, and I was sick of feeling ashamed of them. I was like, "I just need to trust this thing inside of me." It's interesting because it's just the shadow, and the shadow is showing itself.

SHIN: The shadow is the uniting principle of the work?

WOLFSON: Some of the kindest artists I've ever met make some of the most dark, disturbing, or challenging work. And a lot of the most hostile people I've ever met are trying to put an artwork into the world that's potentially a propaganda for the good part of themselves. You see this as well with art dealers, that there's certain art dealers who are making a projection of themselves as a type of moral savior. And then other people who are just doing their work and following their passion.

SHIN: It's interesting the ways a person sublimates their shadow, or represses their shadow—especially when it comes to art. Art is the sublimation of some sort of shadow if you will.

WOLFSON: It's like every artist is a trumpet, and every trumpet is different. And then the air that moves through the trumpet is consciousness. That's what I believe: Art is like consciousness flowing through us.

SHIN: What does it mean in concrete terms? What qualities do we need to have to be a good artist?

WOLFSON: There's a couple of subjective factors to being a good artist.

SHIN: Whether you're considered a good or bad artist, I don't much care. I'm wondering what the vessel you mention needs to have in order to make art. I believe that the obsessive trait is very conducive to making art, because you need to have so much conviction and commitment to ridiculous ideas.

WOLFSON: You're right. It also helps to be detail-oriented. I was talking more about a kind of fear.

SHIN: I've always thought that the art world is actually a container of tons of interesting people who couldn't do anything anywhere else. They couldn't make it any other place, and they have to do a very certain thing. These are often the best people, but also the most dysfunctional.

WOLFSON: The reality is, if you choose a life where you're basically amplifying your good quality and you're also a public figure in some degree who will receive an enormous amount of individual attention for your output, there's also this huge tendency to develop really narcissistic qualities that continuously isolate you from other people. And when you're quirky, plus you've got narcissistic tendencies because you've received an abundant amount of attention, and you did this thing to kind of save your life, and it starts in adolescence and it goes into your adulthood, then yeah, it creates a lot of really dysfunctional patterns and behaviors in people's lives. And a lot of times you end up not being a great parent or a good romantic partner, or even a good business partner.

SHIN: Do you think that narcissism occurs more now than ever before?

WOLFSON: I think narcissism has been a human quality since humans have been producing other humans.

SHIN: Of course.

WOLFSON: But being narcissist can also develop from being neglected or overlooked when you're a child.

SHIN: Don't you think success makes you feel a little bit better, even for a second?

WOLFSON: I got to a point in my career where it was like, I'm having these museum shows, I'm in this magazine, I'm represented by this gallery, or sold a piece of art for this much money. And none of it brought me peace or joy or made me feel better about myself. Success is as good as being in a fancy hotel room. The first 15, 20 minutes of it, you get excited, you can turn the shower on, you jump on a nice bed. Then after a while, you're still just consciousness inside of yourself and susceptible to whatever experience you're having.

SHIN: I think a lot of work artists do is about overcoming anxiety, because everyone feels a little bit neurotically anxious about doing it at the end of the day. You and I have known each other for a really long time.



Top Cou Cou Intimates. Jeans The Vintage Twin. Earrings and Bracelet Heji's own.

WOLFSON: Maybe almost 20 years? From Berlin? It's weird that we're having this conversation today because eventually someone with opinions about us is going to be reading it. It's like making something in the art studio. It's this energy coming through you, this consciousness that goes into the object, and then suddenly you're sharing it. And that's terrifying.

SHIN: Especially in the discipline of art, because art has theoretically no boundaries. You can do whatever you want.

WOLFSON: What's incredible is if you see a Caravaggio painting, that painting is still trembling with Caravaggio's incredible frequency, and it just lives on forever.

SHIN: There's a promise of eternity in art?

WOLFSON: Here's my theory—do you have a dog?

SHIN: No, but I want one. Do you?

WOLFSON: Yeah. He's a German shepherd mix. He's really smart. One of the great joys is seeing your dog do something that you would've done, or react in a way that you would've reacted, like shame, guilt, joy, nervousness, anxiousness, embarrassment. Like when a dog expresses impatience, something that people express all the time. What you're really seeing is the expression of consciousness through a life-form, and that's the same for an artwork. You're seeing a radiant consciousness. It's the same when people talk about little kids saying crazy things. The thing about great art is that it's a portal or a vessel that holds the frequency of consciousness. And consciousness is the most amazing, most important stuff in the whole universe. And so Caravaggio or Michelangelo or Rembrandt or artists today, are basically a conduit of consciousness. Hold on, I have to pee again. [Leaves, returns]

SHIN: Jordan, you should do a MasterClass.

WOLFSON: Do you know what you're going to do for your show in July? Have you decided?

SHIN: It's going to be something related to what you're talking about. It's about consciousness and the brain and physicality—how you actually transform one thing into the other. I'm working on brain scans, and I'm going to show them in a very specific way, which I'm still figuring out.

WOLFSON: Aren't you going to try to do Mike Tyson's?

SHIN: I'm going to try. But I have to rely completely on myself. I notice that certain kinds of people who I'm interested in, they're not loving to be objectified, and that's what you would do if you scan their brains. I wanted to scan your brain and you were all for it for a second, but then you went, "Oh no, another artist is objectifying me."

WOLFSON: The reason I didn't want to do it is because I have brain scan images and I wanted to use one for a cover of a book.

SHIN: But it's not the same thing.

WOLFSON: I know, but it's so weird. I was looking at my brain scan today, and I saw my profile and my brain. There's a little piece in my brain that looks like a flower or piece of cauliflower. It's very vulnerable to see.

SHIN: A brain scan is just an interpretation. The brain doesn't look this way, of course. I looked at my brain scan and thought, why are they using these colors?

WOLFSON: I'm going to show you my brain scan because I'm wondering if we have the same kind.

SHIN: I have a very, very good brain scan. The brain surgeon I was working with is a leading neurosurgeon.

WOLFSON: Is it from an MRI?

SHIN: Yeah, of course, it's from an MRI. [Wolfson holds up his brain scan] Oh, okay. This is the outer brain. Wow, it looks crazy.

WOLFSON: I want to do a book cover that says, "I'm real." But also it's really a monster.

SHIN: That one looks monstrous. Mine looks very different, much more colorful. Mine looks like this. [Holds up a brain scan]

WOLFSON: Oh, that's so different from mine. Let me ask you, is this upcoming show bigger than any you've had before?

SHIN: It might be a little bigger. People have more expectations. I've noticed I get more invitations to openings and galas at the moment. But besides that, I don't think it's different. At the end of the day, I have to do the show and it all depends on the work.

WOLFSON: Instead of thinking about the viewer, I'm always like, "What do I think?" I imagine that the viewer is going to see things via proxy of how I see them. It's almost like you make this mask of your face and the viewer gets to see from behind your eyes. So in a way it's a collaboration with the viewer.

SHIN: Absolutely. Like an agreement. The viewer completes the artwork. You can think anything about your own work, it doesn't matter. Your intentions are great, but in the end, the viewer is completing it. The next time you encounter it, it might have completely transformed into something else that you didn't even think about, and that's beautiful.

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SHIN: It really doesn't matter what an artist says about their work. I always thought, "Oh, the babies are not a feminist artwork." But then a lot of feminists and art critics were very excited about that aspect of it. So I have to let them take it and do whatever they want to do. That's fair enough. Of course, it would be great if you could just hypnotize people to think about your work in certain ways.

WOLFSON: Ultimately, we're making the kind of art that we want to engage with. Today, if someone wants to make identity-politic art that's going to be beneficial to the community they live in or to their personal expression, I'm all for it. I think everyone should have the space they want. But what I ask is, I get my space too.

SHIN: I think most artists have good intentions, but there's a difference between virtue signaling and real artistic efforts. You can flatten something down to, like, "I'm the moral authority here to tell you what's right and wrong." But that is not necessarily art. For me, art is much more open.

WOLFSON: I would never tell someone something's not art, but I get to decide what I like.

SHIN: Something can be perceived as stupid at first, but then actually it's smart. That's what I meant about arranging or rearranging hierarchies of meaning as an artist. You can say, this is as important as the other thing. Even if the majority says it's not important. No, it is important. As an artist, you can decide if a Caravaggio is as good as something you made today. You can elevate yourself by saying, this is good. You gain control over giants from history, in that moment of experiencing it.

WOLFSON: I remember when I was a kid, there was a lot of figurative painting of people with funny faces and I had a strong reaction to it. And then I grew out of that. And I look at all that work and I don't see it the same way. People are seeing things in different ways at different times. Then there are artworks I'm still responding to just as I did when I was younger. Like Félix González-Torres.

SHIN: I don't respond to him at all, to be honest. But yes, sometimes you look at a piece of art and process it and then it's completely different after you've had time with it. And then some artworks really do stay the same. And I think that's what you look for when you look at art, the things that promise this eternity. I can't tell how many contemporary artworks will have profound principles that will last.

WOLFSON: I think it'll always be the expression of consciousness, and that's what makes art timeless, because consciousness is timeless.

SHIN: Yes, but art is also so contextually attached to time. And that expression of consciousness makes sense only in this time and space. If it moves you, it's justified.

WOLFSON: I've got to go, Heji. This was good. Are you happy?

SHIN: Yeah. Of course I'm happy.



Top Loro Piana. Earrings Heji's Own.

Hair: Kabuto Okuzawa *using* Oribe *at* Walter Schupfer Management

Makeup: Romy Soleimani *at* The Wall Group

Nails: Megumi Yamamoto Using Chanel Le Vernis *at* Susan Price NYC

Makeup Assistant: Brenda Garcia Jaramillo

Wolfson, Jordan. "Heji Shin." *Interview Magazine* (April 8, 2023):80-85 [ill.] [print]

Interview



Photographed by
RICHARD
KERN

BRAINIAC

Styled by
MEL
OTTENBERG

HEJI SHIN

by Jordan Wolfson

Heji Shin's daunting, risk-seeking photographs capture a rabid humanity, from her series of bloody heads of babies emerging in childbirth, to giant portraits of Kanye West, from male porn stars dressed up as NYPD officers, to feral priapic roosters in "Big Cocks." The German artist, who was born in Seoul and now lives and works in New York City, is one of the wildest experimentalists working in photography today. This summer, she's staging her biggest show yet, at David Zwirner's 52 Walker gallery. Among the array will be her recent series of brain scans. As a preview to the inner workings of her own brain, she spoke with her friend, the artist Jordan Wolfson, about compulsions, disorders, and why some art lasts for eternity.

SATURDAY
4:30 PM
APRIL 8, 2023
NYC

JORDAN WOLFSON: Sorry I'm late. I'm at my friend's house and my computer dropped.

HEJI SHIN: I thought you were at your studio.

WOLFSON: Right. With a big Nate Lowman painting behind me. A friend of mine gave me his house because he lives in Florida, and I have to be on the west side of L.A. a lot, so here I am.

SHIN: Why aren't you home?

WOLFSON: Because I have this doc-

tor that I go to. I've been getting treated for my OCD every morning.

SHIN: I see. A neurologist?

WOLFSON: It's a psychiatrist, but it's a special treatment called theta burst TMS [transcranial magnetic stimulation]. It puts serious depression, OCD, PTSD, and addiction into permanent remission. For the rest of your life.

SHIN: It's not a behavioral therapy?

WOLFSON: No, it's like an electromagnetic stimulant.

SHIN: Oh, yeah. I just went to a brain surgeon in L.A. and he was talking about that kind of treatment. It's very, very successful.

WOLFSON: It's crazy successful. I've done over a hundred treatments because I was exposed to VOCs at my studio, the paint chemicals. And every time you do that, it sets you back a couple of weeks.

SHIN: That's a really rough case of OCD you have.

WOLFSON: It's crazy. I have thousands of years of epigenetic Ashkenazi trauma. People are like, "Jews are so neurotic." Well, we've been chased down in Europe for thousands of years. You'd be pretty neurotic too.

SHIN: You mean that it's genetically inherited trauma from all the last centuries?

WOLFSON: I believe I suffer from OCD because it's very typical for Ashkenazi Jews to suffer from this. And yeah, because it's poten-

tially epigenetic. Despite the last hundred years or less of Jewish prosperity, we were being persecuted as a minority through Europe for hundreds and hundreds of years.

SHIN: And you think that trauma is responsible for your OCD?

WOLFSON: It's probably the foundation of it. But isn't this conversation about you, not me?

SHIN: Maybe you're the more interesting subject. I don't know much about disorders, because I don't think I have any. Do you worry with your recovery you'll stop making art?

WOLFSON: No. That's a myth. In my experience I've never made art when I was feeling afraid. It never was helpful to me, feeling afraid or anxious. When I made art, it was always from a very clear space when I was letting my consciousness flow through me, and I was a conduit for its frequency. I would rather quit art than continue to suffer the way I have been. I would have no problem making that choice.

SHIN: Yesterday, I watched Jeff Koons's MasterClass.

WOLFSON: I watched that too. He's fantastic.

SHIN: It reminds me of what you're saying. He claims that art-making is an act to remove anxieties and feelings of shame and guilt.

WOLFSON: I believe that making

BRAINIAC

art is a spiritual practice. I won't touch my work unless I've meditated.

SHIN: How often do you meditate?

WOLFSON: Every day for over a decade.

SHIN: Is it TM? Or what kind?

WOLFSON: It's a type of South Korean Won Dharma-style meditation.

SHIN: I've never heard of it. I'm South Korean.

WOLFSON: There's this place near my house in upstate New York called the Won Dharma Center. I kind of became part of the community and learned their style of meditation. That's why I was late today. I was meditating.

SHIN: You sound very New Age-friendly these days.

WOLFSON: I've always been New Age-friendly. Ever since I was a little boy. Are you New Age?

SHIN: I like that stuff.

WOLFSON: What do you practice?

SHIN: I don't practice anything. I know how to meditate, but I don't feel I need it at the moment. I don't do therapies, I never go to doctors.

WOLFSON: You're probably one of those people who are lucky to have good brain chemistry.

SHIN: Maybe. Brain chemistry can always be destroyed by modern contemporary life. But you're more spiritual, or religious.

WOLFSON: I'm not religious.

SHIN: Do you believe in some sort of order in things, or some higher meaning? Or a divine inspiration or intuition?

"I DON'T DO THERAPIES, I NEVER GO TO DOCTORS."

WOLFSON: When I was meditating just now, I opened my eyes a couple times and was looking at this library of art books. I started seeing the names of these artists, like Richard Prince, or Steven Shearer. I saw my own name. I saw Laura Owens. I started thinking, these names are different people who've had different karma, and their career is part of their karma. It's like looking at different people and rather than being like, "Oh, that person's an asshole," or, "That person's amazing," being like, "Wow, that person is living out some type of really specific karma." Jeff Koons is living a karma. You are living a karma.

SHIN: Do you externalize your art practice in terms of your aura?

WOLFSON: I'm saying that all the good and bad things that happened to you in your life are potentially part of your karma, and might have been decided before you were born. And now you're in this life, being challenged by karma. And that karma is the lesson. It's like a wave that comes and knocks you down, and if you aren't able to surrender and let the wave flow through you and then stand up again, you haven't learned the lesson.

SHIN: In Jeff Koons's MasterClass, he says, "Everything is as important as another thing. There's no difference. There's no hierarchy between things." I was wondering,

what does he mean by "there's no hierarchy in things"?

WOLFSON: I can explain that. Eckhart Tolle talks about it. It's a story about how people reach enlightenment. Say that a man walks into the butcher and says, "Give me your finest cut of meat." And the butcher says, "All my meat is the finest cut. There's not a single piece that isn't the finest cut." What he's saying is that this experience you had, that you thought was good or bad, it was all the best experience, it was all equal in its lesson. At my studio, different employees come to me because they're having a bad time, or someone's communicated with them in a way they didn't feel good about, or they're feeling burnout. And my attitude is, every team member is the most important team member. The intern is as important as the roboticist artist. Can you hold on a minute? I'm going to use the restroom. [Wolfson leaves, returns after a minute] As a teenager, I made these paintings that I entered into competitions, and I would lose because people thought the paintings were really dark. And then at a certain point in my twenties, I was having all these ideas for artworks, and I was sick of feeling ashamed of them. I was like, "I just need to trust this thing inside of me." It's interesting because it's just the shadow, and the shadow is showing itself.

SHIN: The shadow is the uniting principle of the work?

WOLFSON: Some of the kindest artists I've ever met make some of the most dark, disturbing, or challenging work. And a lot of the most hostile people I've ever met are trying to put an artwork into the world that's potentially a propaganda for the good part of themselves. You see this as well with art dealers, that there's certain art dealers who are making a projection of themselves as a type of moral savior. And then other people who are just doing their work and following their passion.

SHIN: It's interesting the ways a person sublimates their shadow, or represses their shadow—especially when it comes to art. Art is the sublimation of some sort of shadow if you will.

WOLFSON: It's like every artist is a trumpet, and every trumpet is different. And then the air that moves through the trumpet is consciousness. That's what I believe: Art is like consciousness flowing through us.

SHIN: What does it mean in concrete terms? What qualities do we need to have to be a good artist?

WOLFSON: There's a couple of subjective factors to being a good artist.

SHIN: Whether you're considered a good or bad artist, I don't much care. I'm wondering what the vessel you mention needs to have in order to make art. I believe that the obsessive trait is very conducive to

"I HAVE A VERY, VERY GOOD BRAIN SCAN."

"BRAIN CHEMISTRY CAN ALWAYS BE DESTROYED BY MODERN CONTEMPORARY LIFE."

making art, because you need to have so much conviction and commitment to ridiculous ideas.

WOLFSON: You're right. It also helps to be detail-oriented. I was talking more about a kind of fear.

SHIN: I've always thought that the art world is actually a container of tons of interesting people who couldn't do anything anywhere else. They couldn't make it any other place, and they have to do a very certain thing. These are often the best people, but also the most dysfunctional.

WOLFSON: The reality is, if you choose a life where you're basically amplifying your good quality and you're also a public figure in some degree who will receive an enormous amount of individual attention for your output, there's also this huge tendency to develop really narcissistic qualities that continuously isolate you from other people. And when you're quirky, plus you've got narcissistic tendencies because you've received an abundant amount of attention, and you did this thing to kind of save your life, and it starts in adolescence and it goes into your adulthood, then yeah, it creates a lot of really dysfunctional patterns and behaviors in people's lives. And a lot of times you end up not being a great parent or a good romantic partner, or even a good business partner.

SHIN: Do you think that narcissism occurs more now than ever before?

WOLFSON: I think narcissism has been a human quality since humans have been producing other humans.

SHIN: Of course.

WOLFSON: But being narcissist can also develop from being neglected or overlooked when you're a child.

SHIN: Don't you think success makes you feel a little bit better, even for a second?

WOLFSON: I got to a point in my career where it was like, I'm having these museum shows, I'm in this magazine, I'm represented by this gallery, or sold a piece of art for this much money. And none of it brought me peace or joy or made me feel better about myself. Success is as good as being in a fancy hotel room. The first 15, 20 minutes of it, you get excited, you can turn the shower on, you jump on a nice bed. Then after a while, you're still just consciousness inside of yourself and susceptible to whatever experience you're having.

SHIN: I think a lot of work artists do is about overcoming anxiety, because everyone feels a little bit neurotically anxious about doing it at the end of the day. You and I have known each other for a really long time.

WOLFSON: Maybe almost 20 years? From Berlin? It's weird that we're having this conversation today, because eventually someone with



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Top
COU COU
INTIMATES
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HEJI'S
OWN

BRAINIAC

opinions about us is going to be reading it. It's like making something in the art studio. It's this energy coming through you, this consciousness that goes into the object, and then suddenly you're sharing it. And that's terrifying.

SHIN: Especially in the discipline of art, because art has theoretically no boundaries. You can do whatever you want.

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WOLFSON: Here's my theory—do you have a dog?

SHIN: No, but I want one. Do you?

"IT WOULD BE GREAT IF YOU COULD JUST HYPNOTIZE PEOPLE."

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WOLFSON: I've got to go, Heji. This was good. Are you happy?

SHIN: Yeah. Of course I'm happy. ●

Hair KABUTO OKUZAWA using ORIBE at WALTER SCHUPFER MANAGEMENT. Make-up ROMY SOLEIMANI at THE WALL GROUP. Nails MEGUMI YAMAMOTO using CHANEL LE VERNIS at SUSAN PRICE NYC. Make-up Assistant BRENDA GARCIA JARAMILLO.