

**PERROTIN**

---

**MSCHF**

*Fast Company,*

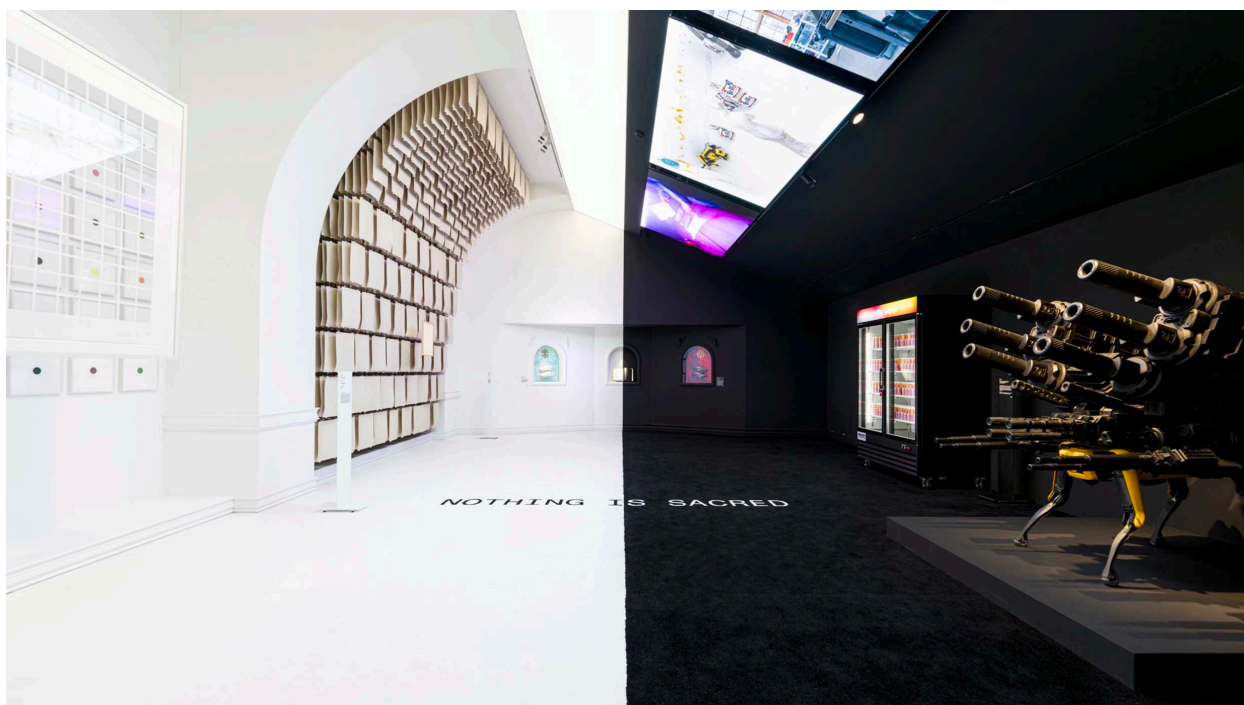
*Mschf's first museum retrospective is bigger than a Big Red Boot*

*November 2023*

11-20-23

## **Mschf's first museum retrospective is bigger than a Big Red Boot**

The provocative art collective's first museum show, "Nothing is Sacred," proves the internet's favorite pranksters deserve your serious consideration IRL.



[Photo: Daelim Museum]

BY MARK WILSON

The Zweihänder sword looks deadly. It's six feet of razor sharpness, swirling with stormy Damascus patterning from a dozen or more layers of hand-forged steel that's been folded and hammered again and again to generate maximum lethality and an eerie beauty.

What could be a perfectly preserved ancient weapon unearthed from a ruined castle is, in fact, a contemporary product, created by the Brooklyn-based art collective Mschf for a novel gun buyback program that it launched in 2021. “If Americans demand the right to bear arms, perhaps a cooler-looking and less destructive arm is our answer,” says the Guns2Swords website. The site asked people to send in guns, which Mschf then reforged into swords and sold in the Mschf shop. In a past life, this Zweihänder was literally an RPG.

Like most Mschf projects, Guns2Swords crossed my path somewhere, somehow, within the haze of the internet, and it certainly seemed funny and provocative, but almost too absurd to be real. *No, someone isn't actually turning guns into swords!* Not until I was staring at that Zweihänder at point-blank range did I internalize the amount of effort that went into producing this \$35,000 object.



[Photo: courtesy of the author]



The Zweihänder is one of 111 items that are part of the 35-person collective's first museum retrospective, *Mschf: Nothing is Sacred*, which opened this month at Seoul's Daelim Museum and will run through March of 2024. For people lucky enough to see the show in person, it'll recontextualize how they think of the internet's favorite rascalian hypebeasts. For everyone else, it's proof that the edgy, somewhat mysterious art collective that gained worldwide fame last winter for its viral Astro Boy-style Big Red Boot isn't just in the business of buzzy stunts. Behind the scenes, there's a craftsmanship and an editorial perspective that's museum-worthy. With this show, the art collective is claiming its place as one of the most astute social commentators today.



[Photos: courtesy of the author]



Mschf may be best known for its outlandish, inventive shoes. In addition to the Big Red Boot, the group has produced the Lil Nas X

Satan Shoe (filled with real blood); the Gobstomper, which reveals color underneath when its suede is scratched; and the recent Mschf Reebok Omni Zone XII, with a ridiculous nine pumps strewn around the upper. (The collective sells shoes through its Mschf Sneakers app.) But Mschf also creates a broad range of artifacts for its art projects and social commentary-minded product drops. And as it turns out, the internet's favorite commerce-meets-art troll looks even better IRL.

“I think we have created a lifetime of work in four short years,” says Gabriel Whaley, Mschf founder and CEO, during a press event on the show's opening night.



[Photo: Daelim Museum]

Making my way through the museum's five stories of exhibits, which are divided into themes, was a journey through those four productive years. With every corner turned, another viral stunt came to life. (The internet made tangible!)



[Photos: Daelim Museum]

The editorial flow of the space—created by Daelim Museum’s curatorial director Sabina Yewoon Lee—deftly navigates the viewer through the mind of Mschf, starting with interactive games and campaigns in a section called Multiplayer. This area includes a The Free Movie, a pirated film assembled legally from crowdsourced sketches, and Children’s Crusade, a machine that rewrites letters to congressional representatives about gun control laws in a childish Crayola marker scrawl, simultaneously pulling on heartstrings and mocking the ineffectiveness of legislators to protect even their most vulnerable constituents.

Next up is *Fraud for One, Fraud for All*, which collects Mschf’s attempts to enlist the populace into illegality with projects such as Netflix Hangouts, a chrome extension that turned a single Netflix account into

a group video chat, and Donate 2X, a site that bundled donations from individuals to exploit corporate donation matching. The show continues with *For Everything Else, There's Mastercard*, a tour through Mschf's consumer goods, including high art gag gifts like hand-blessed spiked Sacred Seltzer (Get Crunk with Christ!) and a Footlocker's worth of Big Red Boots and other footwear.



*Children's Crusade* [Photo: Daelim Museum]

The exhibition culminates in *Nothing is Sacred* on the top floor. *Nothing is Sacred* is Mschf at its most aspirational in terms of making blue chip gallery art. It houses work like *Severed Spots*, a Damien Hirst spot print that Mschf dissected into 108 individual dots (this is the second *Severed Spots* in a series; previously, each of the dots sold for \$480 apiece).



[Photo: Daelim Museum]



Severed Spots [Photo: courtesy Daelim Museum]

As disparate as these items may seem, there are certain themes and motifs that appear again and again, primarily born from Mschf's three-person creative team: CEO Gabe Whaley, and co-chief creative officers Kevin Wiesner and Lukas Bentel. In their hands, religion is just



another brand and cease-and-desist orders are objects of art unto themselves.

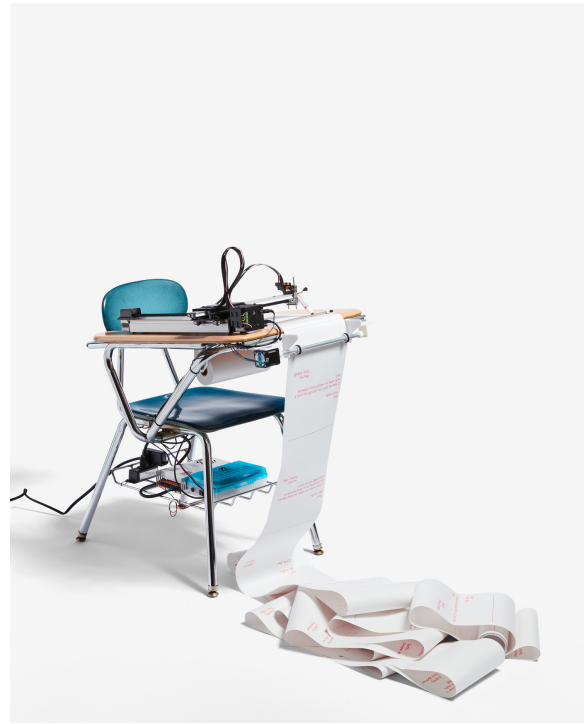
“We’ve been looking at Mschf’s output as a digitally mediated performance art practice, basically from day one,” explained Wiesner in an interview weeks before the gallery launch. “The objects are the anchor point for a lot of these projects, but the enterprise is more holistic than that. There’s a lot of different ways we think about that, a basic heuristic that asks, Does every additional viewer-participant of a project make the concept better?”



From left: **Lukas Bentel** (CCO), **Kevin Wiesner** (CCO), **Emma Howard** (Lead Engineer), **Liz Ryan** (Lead Producer), **Stephen Tetreault** (COO), **Gabriel Whaley** (CEO). [Photo: Daelim Museum]

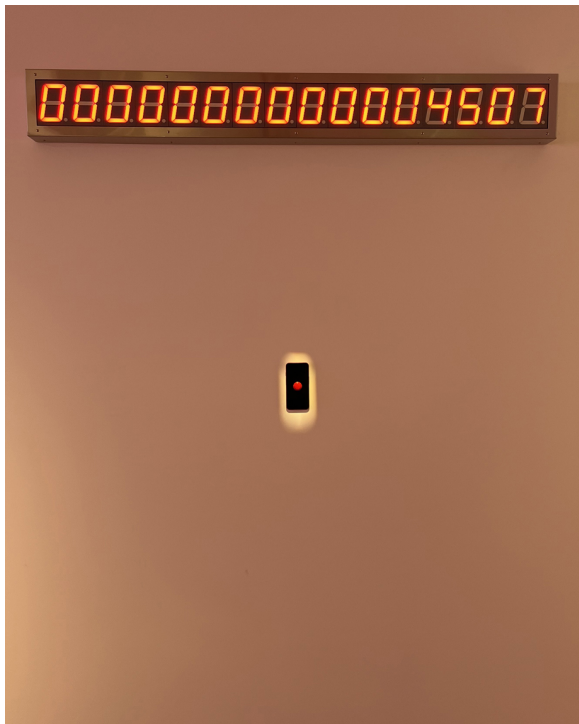


[Photos: courtesy of the author, Daelim Museum]



Or, as Whaley added: “It’s kind of like, virality is a means and not the end. That’s the distinction between us and literally everyone else online: whether people can see it or not.”

Viewer-as-complicit-participant is key to capitalism, and it’s key to MsCHF’s approach, too. Walking through the gallery, I was struck by how many of MsCHF’s projects are literally buttons that do nothing. These are new aged riffs on the classic Trammel of Archimedes, often called a Do Nothing Machine. There’s the Chair Simulator, a meticulously built arcade cabinet where sitting on a chair causes your avatar to sit on a chair, and Celebrity Phones, a series of locked iPhones that offer you the chance to crack the code to get phone numbers for celebrities like the Weeknd. In the case of the sculpture Push Party, MsCHF created a big red button that feeds a counter that reaches to a quadrillion. It’s a button that exists simply to be pressed.



[Photos: courtesy of the author, Daelim Museum]

Instead of offering utility, these are honeypots, luring you in against your will. They are momentarily amusing before they leave you with the dissatisfaction of consumerism itself.

Other projects are more firmly aimed at prodding and poking holes in powerful global brands. The museum contains an entire floor of wonky consumer goods, including a wall of Only Bags, which for \$40 apiece, offered shoppers the performative thrill of consumerism without the cost. These reproductions of shopping bags from stores like Supreme, Kith, and Hermés came without any of the products that usually go in them. “If you can’t consume—and you know you can’t, not on the level you crave...you can at least attain the aesthetic of consumption,” Mschf wrote of the project.



[Photo: Daelim Museum]

You can peruse the logo'd-up race car uniforms that Mschf created for its Cease & Desist Grand Prix, which unwittingly trapped companies including Tesla, Disney, Amazon, and Coca-Cola in a race to send the Mschf the first cease and desist order to stop using their logo. (Spoiler: Subway won.) And, then there's the pièce de résistance of spectacle-meets-brand pwn: Mschf's grain of rice-sized LVMH handbag, a brand moment made so small and functionless that the only way to experience it is squinting through the lens of a microscope. I had laughed at this stunt when I saw it online earlier this year. But experiencing it IRL—the fluorescent green bag appearing in the lens of a microscope—was uncanny.



[Photos: Daelim Museum, courtesy of the author]

The most surprising moments, however, are on the show's top floor, in *Nothing is Sacred*, where the gags transcend into high art moments—and where Mschf snickers in its most grownup voice. In *Severed Spots*, Damien Hirst's disembodied artwork is spread across the museum wall, delivering more impact than even the original artwork might have. Nearby, a wave of Fairies prints—reproductions of an original line drawing by Andy Warhol—swell above viewers, challenging viewers to consider what makes the the original better than the duplicates, spurring a debate about scarcity and the value of art that has waged for 60 years now.



[Photo: courtesy Daelim Museum]

However, the star of this room is *Spots Revenge*—a modified version of the four-legged Boston Robotics robot that’s been one of the internet’s top viral stars for years. MsCHF debuted the project in 2021, in a silly participatory video that had people taking remote control of Spot, retrofitted with a paintball gun, and crashing it around a room. That Spot robot has now been transformed into a wargasm of a sculpture, topped with a payload of 20 barrels aimed straight at your face.



[Photos: courtesy of the author]

Stand in front of that dog for a few minutes, as I did, and the hyperbole slowly melts away. You forget that the physics of all those cannons sitting atop four measly robo legs couldn't possibly work. Instead, as you stare down the robot, an elemental symbol of late-stage capitalism, it's hard to see any other prize or payoff awaiting us in this grand button-pushing machine we call earth.

Mschf knows a lot about capitalism. Shoe drops, after all, drive its business. Practically speaking, they subsidize the more head-on art projects that the collective pursues.



Like an antique penny bank, Mschf's fans drop in cash via shoes and other goods simply to watch chaos ensue. But the collective wants people to see the bigger picture. *Nothing is Sacred* "recontextualizes how people look at Mschf [from] 'Oh, they're a sneaker company,'" said Bentel at the opening. "Putting it in this setting will help to convey the thought process about the work."

It's telling that, in Seoul, a city that puts sneakers front-and-center in every hip clothing store, Mschf isn't selling its own. The Daelim Museum gift shop is full of Mschf bibles and other keepsakes from the event. The Gobstompers and other footwear on display are the only items that aren't marked for sale.

Don't worry, though. When you get home, you can still buy them online.