

Frieze Seoul Returns for Its Second Edition

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Yirui Jia, Cocoon, 2023. Acrylic and coffee on canvas, 53 by 46 in. 134.6 by 116.8 cm. © YIRUI JIA. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MITCHELL-INNES & NASH, NEW YORK

Over the past few years, Seoul has become a red-hot global art hub. Home to successful galleries exhibiting local and international art stars since the late 1980s, when the city hosted the 1988 Summer Olympics, it's more recently developed into an "art-mad city," as art critic Andrew Russeth aptly described South Korea's capital in a January 2023 article for *The New York Times*.

In the past six years Pace, Lehmann Maupin, Perrotin, Thaddaeus Ropac, Esther Schipper, König, Peres Projects, Tang Contemporary Art and Various Small Fires have opened galleries in the city and they have been recently joined by Gladstone, White Cube and Whitestone. With such an international presence—and local favorites like Arario Gallery, Cylinder, Gana Art, Hakgojae Gallery, Gallery Hyundai, Kukje Gallery, One and J. Gallery and PKM Gallery—it's no wonder why Frieze chose the city in 2022 for its first Asian art fair.

Featuring more than 120 galleries from 30 countries worldwide, Frieze Seoul (September 6-9, 2023) returns to the dynamic Convention and Exhibition Center (COEX) in the city's acclaimed Gangnam district for its second edition, which will be Frieze Seoul's first fair in the post-pandemic world. Taking place alongside K1af SEOUL (September 6-9, 2023), which is operated by the Galleries Association of Korea, the two fairs are working together to celebrate the city's flourishing creative community.

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“The growing international gallery presence in the city demonstrates Seoul’s status as a global arts destination.,” Frieze Seoul Director Patrick Lee told Art & Object. “We know that many galleries who had been considering opening a space in the city — or had recently done so — were very keen to participate in the fair as a way to broaden their network with Korean audiences. As such, we are proud to play a part in the city’s cultural calendar, bringing together leading galleries from Korea, Asia, and beyond.”

Marking its initial year as the Official Headline Partner of Frieze Seoul, Korean electronics giant LG OLED is presenting BOREALIS, a nightly celestial light installation (through September 10) by Swiss artist Dan Acher, which seeks to replicate the experience of the Northern Lights in the urban skies above Seoul’s Dongdaemun Design Plaza. Within the actual fair at COEX, the special exhibition “We Meet Again in Seoul” by Whanki x LG OLED, offers 12 paintings by Korean artist Kim Whanki—a pioneer of Korean abstraction who later lived in Paris and New York, where he became an influential modernist painter—on loan from the Whanki Foundation, which maintains an eponymous museum in Seoul.

In the fair’s main Galleries sector, standout solo booth presentations include figurative silk paintings on custom-made, shaped stretcher bars and wooden sculptures by Incheon-born, New York-based artist Cindy Ji Hye Kim that reference ancient Korean funerary and ritual objects to reflect upon the process of mourning; surreal ceramic, bronze and wood sculptures and paintings that explore home as a space where time and personal history are anchored by Woody De Othello, a Miami-born artist of Haitian descent, at Jessica Silverman; and Los-Angeles-based Mary Weatherford’s gestural canvases, which often incorporate neon to add a different kind of light and materiality to Abstract Expressionism.

Some of the highlights in the Galleries group presentations are Tracey Emin’s classic 2008 red neon text piece, *Open Me Again*, at White Cube, which is featuring the artist’s new paintings and drawings in a striking curated selection of works by women artists at its newly opened Seoul gallery space; Wendy Park’s representational paintings of everyday objects and familial routines that pay homage to her Korean-American upbringing at Various Small Fires; Robert Nava’s new action painting of an angelic airborne creature at Pace, that’s related to his colorful canvases of wild sharks and mythological dragons at the gallery’s Seoul site; George Condo’s arresting 2022 sculptural head, *Constellation II*, that’s cast in aluminum and covered in 24-karat-gold-leaf at Sprüth Magers; and emerging Chinese artist Yirui Jia’s lively paintings of figures in flux at Mitchell-Innes and Nash.

The Frieze Masters section brings together different periods of art—ranging from antiquities to rare manuscripts and books to 20th-century masterpieces. Rare book dealer Peter Harrington, participating in Frieze Seoul for the first time, is exhibiting a collection of exceptionally rare works that illustrate the artistic and aesthetic elements of manuscript and print culture, from its beginnings in East Asia through to the present day.

Gallery Hyundai has a solo booth show covering a six-decade span of works by Rhee Seundja, a Korean abstract artist who began her artistic career in post-war Paris. Skarstedt and Gray Gallery are offering group presentations of contemporary and modern masters, with the former showing a late Willem de Kooning luminous abstract painting—pared down to the essentials—with undulating lines in bright, translucent colors on a toned white ground, while the latter has an Alex Katz painting, from 2002, of three formally rendered figures enjoying a leisurely Saturday afternoon at the beach.

The Focus Asia portion of the fair features ten solo artist presentations from galleries in the region that were founded in or after 2011. Highlights include G Gallery’s exhibition of mysterious fabric sculptures and metallic assemblages by Woo Hannah, the recipient of this year’s inaugural Frieze Artist Award in Seoul; German painter Mevlana Lipp’s vibrant renditions of fantastical flora and fauna, on view at Capsule Shanghai; and a series of flower studies, as well as a marvelous mountainous landscape, all made with marble inlay, a decorative art form that involves the use of carefully cut and fitted colored stones to create intricate images, by Pakistani artist Hamra Abbas at Lawrie Shabibi.

And with surveys of two Korean contemporary artists, Kim Beom and Suki Seokyeong Kang, at the Leeum Museum of Art and solo and group shows opening at galleries across the city this week, Seoul in September is definitely one of the best places to be in the art world.