

A GUIDE TO
KOREAN
CONTEMPORARY
ART

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1. Biennials in Korea

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There's an equation that's become familiar to the Korean art community: even-numbered year = biennial year. Every even-numbered autumn sees the curtain rise on the country's three premier contemporary art biennials. And when it does, arts professionals from Korea and all over the world set off on a journey to visit the events, held one after the other in Gwangju, Busan, and Seoul. For the opening proceedings in particular, reporters come from arts journals and media at home and overseas, together with attendees from art museums and galleries. The different arts spaces, for their part, work busily to ready their own exhibitions, hoping to profit from some biennial synergy. Because they target visitors from overseas, exhibitions are usually large-scale showings of new work by some of the country's top artists. In short, biennial season is a heated affair, with seemingly everyone in the Korean arts trying to bring their richest content to the party. The city of Gwangju has tried to get in on the arts market action by creating the Art Gwangju fair in time for the 2010 biennial season. Unfortunately, its efforts haven't been seen as very successful. Korea is still a country without a very broad market for art, and the win-win marketing stage for biennials -- where artists with work shown at the Venice Biennale, say, can be seen at Art Basel -- looks a long way off.

The "biennial season" phenomenon in Korea reached high gear at the dawn of the 2000s. The country's first event, the Gwangju Biennale, was launched in 1995; the years since have seen the institution of Mediacity Seoul (the Seoul International Media Art Biennale) in 2000, then the 2002 relaunching of the Busan Youth Biennale as the Busan Biennale. Together, the three of them have become Korea's top international events in the contemporary arts. At one point, a "biennial fever" began sweeping the nation, with one region after the other starting up its own event.

The Gwangju, Busan, and Seoul Biennials and APAP

In Korea, the city of Gwangju is known by the nickname *Yehyang*, meaning "hometown of art." The name comes from a longstanding tradition of landscape art and literati painting, but in recent years it's seemed especially fitting for one main reason: the *Gwangju Biennale*. Last May brought word that the event was selected as one of the world's top five biennials on a Top 20 list compiled by the online art market service provider artnet. Inspirational news, certainly, for the organizers as they prepared for the tenth event in 2014. The Gwangju Biennale started in 1995 with 92 artists from 50 countries exhibiting work on the theme "*Beyond the Borders*." General directors since then have included Oh Kwang-su (for the third event), Sung Wankyung (fourth), Lee Young-woo (fifth), and Kim Hong-hee (sixth). But it was the seventh event in 2008, with the first-ever overseas curator serving as general director, that the real push for international recognition began. Massimiliano Gioni (general director in 2010) and Okwui Enwezor (2008), in particular, produced some Gwangju Biennale synergy with their efforts as Venice Biennale general directors for 2013 and 2015. There was also a new spin in format in 2012, with a team of six Asian women curators (including Kim Sun-jung from Korea) working together on planning. This year's event, organized by general director Jessica Morgan (curator at Tate Modern) under the theme "*Burning Down the House*," invites 106 artists from 35 countries.

The *Gwangju Design Biennale* takes place in odd-numbered years, when the Gwangju Biennale isn't being staged. (It's a similar format to Venice, where biennials alternate between contemporary art and architecture.) It was launched in 2005 to help promote Gwangju's rise as a global contemporary art and design center after the success of the Gwangju Biennale event. General directors have come mainly from the design world: Lee Soon-jong for the first event, Lee Soon-in for the second, Eun Byung-soo for the third, Lee Young-hye for the fifth. The exception was the fourth event, where exhibitions were organized by architect Seung H-Sang and contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, in a reflection of the era's trend toward genre convergence in art. Both the Gwangju Biennale and the Gwangju Design Biennale take place in the city's exclusive Biennale Hall; for the former event, exhibitions are also held in spaces around the city, including markets, temples, and the nearby gma (Gwangju Museum of Art).



While it may have conceded the “first in Korea” title to Gwangju, the *Busan Biennale* actually has origins dating back far earlier. The Pusan Youth Biennale, held seven times between 1981 and 1994, would go on to become the Pusan International Art Festival (PICAF) in 1998 before its 2001 retitling as the Busan Biennale, which held its first event the next year. Every event has had the Busan Museum of Art as its chief venue, and the organizers have tried to make the most of the port city setting by planning and staging installations that incorporate beaches and unused urban spaces, including separate events like the *Sea Art Festival* and the *Busan Sculpture Project*. Korean curators directed the first four exhibitions (Kim Ai-ryung in 2002, Choi Tae-man in 2004, Park Ma-nu in 2006, and Kim Won-bang in 2008), while the fifth event in 2010 was directed by Japan's Azumaya Takashi, and the sixth in 2012 by 2007 Kassel documenta general director Roger M. Buergel. The 2014 event, directed by France's Olivier Kaepelin on the theme “*Inhabiting the World*”, has been in the news lately because of frictions between the Busan arts community and the organizing committee over his selection.

L) Gwangju Biennale, 2014 'Burning Down the House'
© Gwangju Biennale Foundation
R) Gwangju Design Biennale, 2013 Exhibition View
© Gwangju Biennale Foundation



SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul is a media art biennial sponsored by the city of Seoul and organized by the SeMA (Seoul Museum of Art). It was first developed as a way of focusing more on specific genres amid a general wave of attention to new media art that surfaced around 2000. The first event that year was titled “*Mediacity*”; since then, its focus has been on sharing diverse works of contemporary media art based in interchange and consilience between science, the humanities, and technology. Past directors have included Yoo Jin-sang (2012), Kim Sun-jung (2010), Park Il-ho (2008), Rhee Won-il (2006 and 2002), Yoon Jin-sup (2004), and Song Mi-sook (2000), with over 1,000 artists from around the world taking part over the past 12 years. Since the event is organized by the SeMA, that building had also played host each time.

This year's event, on the theme of “*Ghost, Spies, and Grandmothers*”, has artist, director, and planner Park Chan-kyung serving as general director. Since last year, there has also been a series of *Pre-Biennale* events, which have included talks by the renowned scholar Alain Badiou, artist/theorist matching workshops, and various exhibitions.

Public art projects have been enjoying a boom in Korea in recent years, part of an effort by national and local governments to boost the aesthetic quality of Korea's cities and rebuild their image after years of rampant development. The *APAP (Anyang Public Art Project)* was the first biennial event adopted along these lines. Launched in 2005, APAP has been held every three years since the second event in 2007. With Lee Young-chul serving as general director, the inaugural 2005 APAP featured contemporary artists setting up art installations in Anyang Amusement Park and other less developed parts of the city center. In 2007, the artistic directors were Kim Sung-won, Kim Seung-duk, and Franck Gautherot, with world-renowned artists and architecture transforming sites all around the city with art structures like Daniel Buren's *Passages under a Colored Sky* and Liam Gillick's *Full Scale Model of a Social Structure for a Plaza*, or the Dutch architectural group MVRDV's *Anyang Peak*. In total, some 92 works of art were put up around the city for the two events.

L) Official Busan Biennale logo
R) Official logo for 2014 SeMA Biennale Mediacity Seoul



The event would eventually undergo its own change in format in 2010, as artists began abandoning the limited strictures of an art object focus in favor of “relational public art,” which emphasized resident participation and the process. Programs were designed for citizens, local groups, and institutions to be an active part of their own environment, working under the three subthemes of “*New Community*,” “*Open City*,” and “*Nomadic*.” The artistic director at the time was Park Kyung, a professor of visual arts at the University of California, San Diego. The 2014 event looked back at APAP’s fast-paced history since 2005, with Beck Jee-sook serving as artistic director. It was an occasion for singling out key episodes for new appraisal -- moments of intersection between civil society and Korean history, public and contemporary art, contemporary art and the public.



Local Government Biennials: An Emphasis on Genre

One of the most notable things about Korea is the number of biennial events staged in its different cities to highlight specific genres: pottery, crafts, photography, and more. There's been a proliferation of various genre-centered biennials by the different local governments -- part of a strategy for setting their cities apart with cultural content. Of course, critics have consistently sniped about the “Korean biennial boom” as the same local governments indiscriminately flooding the market with cultural events. The emphasis on genre has been seen as more cultural strategy than anything else, focusing too much on achieving “distinction” from other biennials. Still, at a time when the trend in art is one where the boundaries of media and genre are increasingly meaningless, these efforts should rightly be seen as important attempts to achieve diversity and broaden the base, not just for contemporary art, but for genres like photography, crafts, and pottery. And because they approach important generic links between Korean tradition and modernity in biennial format -- things like craftwork and pottery -- it behooves them to continue seeking out the kind of painstaking design prowess and vision that will help turn them into important cultural content for the country. The following section looks at the genre-based biennials that have emerged over the years.

APAP (Anyang Public Art Project),
2010 Open School © APAP

The *Cheongju International Craft Biennale* began relatively early on in 1999, with the aim of broadening the base for crafts, which were then seen as a neglected area compared to other artistic genres. It was designed to pay closer attention to a field that has continued expanding its boundaries within modern visual culture, looking at it within a scope that now extended to art objects, design, architecture, and the surrounding environment. What set this event apart was the decision to organize separate exhibitions -- Guest Country Pavilions, International Industry Pavilions -- as a way of drawing distinctions from other biennials and exploring possibilities unique to the craft genre. Since 2007, the Guest Country Pavilions have focused on introducing the unique craft arts of specific nations: Italy in 2007, Canada in 2009, Finland in 2011, and Germany in 2013. The International Industry Pavilions offer an experimental showcase for crafts and design by sharing and marketing the craft trends of different countries. The year 2011 marked another step forward with the decision to repurpose the old Cheongju Tobacco Processing Plant -- a cradle of modern Korean industry that had faded into the mists of history -- as an exclusive exhibition venue.

Most Koreans asked to identify a particular item with the city of Icheon in Gyeonggi Province would probably single out its pottery. Its various pottery villages have earned it a name as a leading center in pottery culture, so it's no wonder that a pottery biennial would have started there. The *World Ceramic Biennale Korea* is an event held simultaneously in three different Gyeonggi cities known for their pottery: Icheon, Gwangju, and Yeosu. It boasts a world of contemporary ceramic art, with artists participating from over 60 countries at each event since its 2001 launch. One particular draw is the multitude of workshops for visitors -- a way of taking full advantage of the different interactive possibilities of ceramics.

First held in 2006, the *Daegu Photo Biennale* marks its fifth event this year. It's an opportunity to showcase contemporary global trends in photography and share Korea's photographic arts with the rest of the world, and it's seen major growth over the years, going from 60 artists from 10 countries at the first event to 346 artists from over 20 countries in 2012. Its hallmark is the way it takes advantage of the popular appeal of the photographic medium: events have offered interactive events where members of the public can take part in exhibitions, or a *Portfolio Review* project for discovering new and promising photographers. The 2014 event features another step toward interchange on the global stage with the signing of a business agreement with Fotofest Houston in the US.



Daegu Photo Biennale,
2012 Exhibition View
© Daegu Photo Biennale

Other biennials have a nature-friendly focus, with installations set up not in art galleries, but in parks or riverside ecozones. The standout example is the *Geumgang Nature Art Biennale*, held in the city of Gongju and South Chungcheong Province. Since its inaugural event in 2004, the event has been organized by Yatu, a group of artists working in nature. Participating artists have a three-week production period in which they set up their own work at Yeonmisan Nature Art Park and an ecopark on the banks of the Geumgang River. Visitors are treated to works in a natural setting that transform naturally over the passage of time.

Most biennials around the world take their official names from the cities that host them. Korea is scarcely different in its aim of using the city as a foundation for achieving development and coexistence. Biennials in Korea have also followed the precedent of other major events around the world by staging exhibitions in various city locations besides exhibition halls, broadening the stage to incorporate every part of the urban area.

It's now been over two decades since the dawn of Korea's biennials. Some have grown to become major events that draw attention from the global art community; in other cases, there's been a debate over whether to keep them going at all, raising questions about the very identity of the format. The quantitative growth of the past twenty years has had its share of light and darkness. What has become clear is that greater efforts for qualitative growth are a lifelong assignment, and something that needs to be a top priority for all of Korea's biennial events.

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It's true everywhere you go: the art world starts with the galleries. They're the places where artists reach out to the world through their work -- sometimes an interaction of criticism, sometimes one of audience reaction. The institutes listed here are the places that are working on the ground today to present art to Korean audiences.

Most of Korea's galleries are congregated in the capital city of Seoul. A megalopolis of over 10 million people, Seoul is widely recognized as a political, economic, and cultural hub. Its alpha city status is a simple fact for Koreans, and an issue that has drawn its share of criticisms. For sheer spatial reason, it's impossible to introduce all the different spaces operating in such a complex city. But cities in the "provinces" -- the region of the country outside the Seoul metropolitan area -- also have their share of galleries operating, each with their own local color and identity. It would require a huge amount of time and effort to visit them all. Here, at least, is a brief written introduction.

First on the list are the galleries located in central **Seoul** around Gyeongbok Palace, a royal residence from Korea's last royal family, the Joseon Dynasty. Visitors looking down toward the gate of Gwanghwamun can see galleries lining either side of the road. Our first stop is on the right side, at the entrance of a neighborhood called Sagan. It's home to Gallery Hyundai, one of the country's leading commercial galleries. Established in 1970, the gallery has present work by numerous modern and contemporary artists in the years since. Its exhibitions have also focused on such widely-talked-about international artists as Ai Weiwei, Bernar Venet, and Julian Schnabel. Next door to the main building is Dugahun Gallery, which occupies a converted traditional Korean *hanok* home. The next building along the way is the Kumho Museum of Art. Open since 1989, its main focus over the years have been on presenting work by prominent

Korean artists. It also holds a yearly Young Artist Festival to support emerging talents, as well as various feature exhibitions by artists from overseas.

Standing at the pinnacle of Korea's public and state-run art museums is the Seoul branch of the MMCA (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art), Korea, which marked its historic opening on November 13, 2013. Building a national museum in the heart of the capital had long been a dream of the Korean art community, and in 2009 a surprise decision was made to finally erect it on the onetime site of the Defense Security Command. Traditionally the home of numerous private museums and galleries, the area transformed into a marquee cultural destination with the Seoul branch's arrival. Visitors have opportunities for encounters and activities in a whole host of genres with the museum's inner and outer exhibition spaces, screening areas, and performance venues.

The term "yBa," or "young British artists," is fairly well known by now. Arario Gallery president Kim Chang-il -- a.k.a. C Kim -- is one of the leading collectors of yBa work, as well as an artist himself. Located right next to MMCA Seoul, Arario has its main gallery in Cheonan, together with the Seoul branch in Sagan and another gallery set to open in Shanghai. Hakgojae, which features a main gallery in the traditional *hanok* style and another gallery building behind it, has a name that expresses the "communion between traditional and contemporary art," and that is indeed its major focus. Exhibitions include works of old Korean art, as well as pieces by modern artists who have established themselves in the contemporary scene. Kukje Gallery is also emerging as one of the country's major galleries. Consisting of three separate galleries, Kukje presents works of Korean conceptual art and exhibitions by notable international artists. It also works to introduce international audiences to Korean artists through its participation in the Basel Art Fair. Just behind MMCA Seoul is the Art Sonje Center, where exhibitions by

L) MMCA (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) Seoul © MMCA
R) Gallery Hyundai © Gallery Hyundai



local and overseas artists -- along with various different art projects -- take place throughout the building. Visitors can also take in a variety of art symposia and art films. Like Kukje Gallery, Gallery PKM also takes part in the Basel Art Fair, and it's a must-visit for any art enthusiast. While its main building is situated on the emerging "culture street" of Seoul's Samcheong neighborhood, PKM also has galleries in the tourist neighborhood of Insa and the Chinese capital of Beijing. Between Insa and Sagan, Savina Museum is a privately run facility that shares work by prominent Korean artists and well-received international artists, along with a wide assortment of education programs. At Insa Art Space, visitors can find exhibitions by the young artists who will be taking over Korean contemporary art in the future. Profoundly experimental in nature, their work leaves behind the conventional art grammar for a range of expression that is broader and more diverse.



Now that we've seen Sagan and Samcheong, it's time to move on to Tongui. Once called Seochon, or "west village," this neighborhood of Seoul was historically home to the middle-class artists and technicians of old. Today, it's begun a transformation into another gallery village. Located right across the street from each other, Gallery Simon and Gallery ARTSIDE are two venues offering experiences with a wide range of Korean artists. Visitors can duck down one of the side streets to find Ryugaheon, a gallery specializing in photography. Occupying a converted traditional *hanok* residence, it offers the opportunity to admire the work of Korean photographers over a cup of tea beside a small courtyard. Next up is the more mass audience-oriented Daelim Museum. Dedicated mainly to sharing works by designers and contemporary artists from Korean and overseas, this museum is run by a major corporation. The Sarubia Dabang promises to offer something a bit different from the commercial galleries: this alternative project space for introducing art and artists is poised to become a platform for unique new types of aesthetic encounters. Kunstdoc has a similar focus on greeting viewers with work of a more noncommercial and experimental bent. Tongui is also home to a new Seoul branch of Daegu's well-known commercial LEEAHN Gallery, a venue that has mainly exhibited work by foreign artists.



L) Kukje Gallery © Kukje Gallery
R) Hakgojae © Hakgojae

Itaewon is one of Seoul's most well-known neighborhoods for international residents, and it too is home to many notable galleries. The biggest draw of all is Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Korea's single biggest private museum. Boasting the country's biggest collection, spanning works of art both ancient and modern, Leeum worked up a host of exhibitions and programs to mark its tenth anniversary this year -- an excellent opportunity to spotlight traditional Korean works of art, as well as art history in Korea and the West. The building itself is an artistic attraction in its own right, jointly designed by world-famous architects Mario Botta, Jean Nouvel, and Rem Koolhaas. Nearby is Gallery BK, where visitors are treated to work by some of Korea's emerging young artists. The space's main focus is on painting, but it also has an artist residency facility operating next door.

Korea is one of the few countries in the world to have a national park located within the borders of its capital city. The galleries of Pyeongchang, a neighborhood just below Bukhansan National Park, offer another unique experience to visitors. Gana Art Gallery is one of the country's major commercial galleries, offering a year-round parade of work by some of the most important players in contemporary Korean art history. Total Museum of Contemporary Art, situated next door, is another recommended stop. With its focus on video and media art, its main interest is in sharing the work of local and domestic media artists with decidedly experimental leanings. Its yearly "Up-and-Comers" exhibition is another opportunity to encounter rising young Korean artists. Kim Chong Yung Museum, established by the family of the late leading Korean sculptor Kim Chong-yung, stages frequent exhibitions centering on sculpture. It's a chance to see work by artists in a genre that remains relatively neglected in Korea, alongside year-round experiences with Kim's own unique artistic vision. ArtSpace Pool also offers up a diverse look at the state of artistic experimentation in Korea today, with solo and feature exhibitions focusing on conceptual and experimental art.

The streets around Hongik University (Hongdae) in Seoul are some of the famous art avenues in Korea -- a symbolism heightened by the presence of the university's College of Fine Arts, one of the country's top institutions of art education. This is the home of Gallery Loop, a leading alternative space that is a part of a tight-knit network of Asian counterparts, with yearly media exhibitions to share the fruits of its exchanges. Exhibitions also highlight the work of young artists with strongly experimental leanings. Other recommended stops include Gallery Zandari and Choi Jung Ah Gallery, which offer encounters with up-and-coming and established artists. The corporate-established LIG Art Space serves up a diverse range of feature exhibitions, along with group exhibitions by artists of similar slants.

In addition to the different neighborhoods mentioned above, Seoul has art galleries in other areas, which can be divided into the regions of Gangbuk (north of the Han River) and Gangnam (the southern bank). North of the river, the SeMA (Seoul Museum of Art) offers feature exhibitions at a larger scale. Blockbuster exhibitions are held during the summer and winter vacations, presenting work by some of the top artists of East and West alike. The main complex is in the Seosumun neighborhood, but the museum also organizes exhibitions at its North Seoul and South Seoul branches, along with another at historic Gyeonghui Palace, and residency programs are on offer at SeMa Nanji Art Studio. Ilwoo Space, Sunggok Museum, and OCI Museum are located close together, representing two of Gangbuk's top corporate-established art centers. A steady line of feature exhibitions also chugs through Culture Station Seoul 284, a gallery that occupies the now-disused house of the old Seoul Station.

For those hoping to take in older examples of Korean art, the obvious choice is a visit to the National Museum of Korea. With a collection running the gamut of Korean art from ancient times to the Joseon era, it is a repository for the country's most cherished relics and works of art. Over in the Seongsu neighborhood north of the river, Gansong Art Museum boasts one of the most comprehensive collections of ancient Korean art around. Exhibitions are restricted to certain periods in the spring and fall, so prospective visitors should make sure to check the schedule. The recently opened DDP (Dongdaemun Design Plaza) has a unique exterior, and a wide range of sights to see. Designed by world-famous architect Zaha Hadid, it holds exhibitions on everything from ancient Korean art to various works of design and the recently surging Korean Wave of cultural exports. Plateau and Doosan Gallery are other venues set up by some of the country's biggest corporations. Plateau's gallery features some of the major sculptures of Auguste Rodin, including *The Burghers of Calais* and *The Gates of Hell*. Doosan Gallery's focus is chiefly on solo and feature exhibitions by more experimentally inclined artists.

A huge selection of corporate-established venues can be found south of the river in Gangnam, including Space K, SongEun Art Space, the HITE Collection, space*c: coreana art&culture complex, Posco Art Museum, the Museum of Photography, Seoul, and the 63 Sky Art Gallery. Space K has galleries in a number of other cities, including Gwacheon, Daegu, Daejeon, and Gwangju. SongEun Art Space holds competitions to support emerging and established artists, while the HITE Collection offers both feature exhibitions and a glimpse at the work of Kwon Jin-kyu, one of Korea's top sculptors. space*c organizes solo and feature exhibitions for local and international artists, and Posco Art Museum is home to a broad and historically diverse range of work, with a focus on pieces using steel as a material or subject matter. 63 SkyArt Gallery is located on the 60th floor of the landmark 63 Building on Seoul's Yeouido, making it the highest gallery in Korea, and the Museum of Photography, Seoul, is, as its name suggests, focused on the photographic genre. Also to be found south of the river are state and public museums like MMCA Gwacheon, SOMA (Seoul Olympic Museum of Art), and the MoA (Seoul National University Museum of Art). MMCA Gwacheon is one of the country's leading national museums, its quiet setting offering the perfect environment to view the state of contemporary Korean art. SOMA holds frequent exhibitions on sports-related themes, and the MoA, designed by Rem Koolhaas, is another recommended visit.



L, above) ArtSpace Pool © ArtSpace Pool
 L, below) SeMA (Seoul Museum of Art) © SeMA
 R) Culture Station Seoul 284 © Culture Station Seoul 284



Once you've finished touring the galleries of Seoul, it's time to head off to other reaches of the country. North of the city in Paju, **Gyeonggi Province**, is Heyri Art Village, a kind of art community organized by lovers of culture and the arts. Its various galleries and cultural spaces all boast their own unique architectural charms. Prime examples include BSSM (Baik Soonshil Museum), White Block, and Gallery Sosa. Before you get to Heyri from Seoul, another place worth visiting on the way is Mimesis Art Museum in the Paju Publishing Village. South of the city, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art in Ansan is a venue run by Gyeonggi Province, sharing a variety of feature exhibitions and work by artists with ties to the province, along with education programs for children and art education for the general public. The port city of Incheon is home to IAP (Incheon Art Platform),

which offers a slice of Korean history alongside the art: it occupies an almost perfectly preserved modern facility, from which it operates a creative space and gallery. In Bucheon, Artforum Rhee is another place to visit to glimpse the diversity of contemporary Korean art. Namyangju is home to Moran Museum of Art, which boasts varied indoor and outdoor examples of Korean sculpture. There's also Yangju City's Chang Ucchin Museum of Art, highlighting the warm and uniquely Korean lyricism of the eponymous artist's work. The Woljeon Museum of Art in Icheon takes its name from Chang Woo-sung, one of Korea's most admired painters, and is a place where visitors can see both Chang's work and the overall trends of Eastern painting in Korea.

It's also worth heading to Yongin to see the Nam June Paik Art Center, built in honor of one of the world's most unique media artists. In addition to its works by Paik, a leading Fluxus artist who helped establish the video medium in contemporary art, it also offers various feature exhibitions for artists influenced by him or offering a modern take on his pieces. Another recommended visit here is the Youngeun Museum of Contemporary Art, which houses an artist residency and exhibits works by a full range of Korean artists.

L) Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art
© Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art
R) IAP (Incheon Art Platform) © IAP



When you plan your itinerary, make sure it includes some of the exhibition venues outside the Seoul area. Many have commented on Seoul's central place in art trends as an issue Korea needs to contend with in the days ahead. But the "provinces" certainly offer their own local color, with a unique and independent assortment of exhibitions and programs. The next section focuses on venues in major cities like Busan, Daegu, and Gwangju.

Korea's chief port city of **Busan** is home to two renowned commercial art venues, Johyun Gallery and Kongkan Gallery. Both contribute to the local opportunities for cultural experiences by offering exhibitions featuring work by some of the pivotal figures in contemporary art currents in Korea and abroad. The BMA (Busan Museum of Art), in addition to hosting the Busan Biennale, also stages ongoing exhibitions to spotlight trends in contemporary art. It's also a place to encounter the emerging and established artists based in the region. The Centum City branch of Shinsegae Gallery, operated by the largest department store in the world, is an exhibition space located in one of Busan's "New City" neighborhoods, with yearly exhibitions organized to present the city's up-and-coming artists. Visitors to Busan should also

stop in nearby **Changwon**, home of South Gyeongsang Province's GAM (Gyeongnam Art Museum), and **Gimhae**, home of GASC (Gimhae Arts and Sports Center) and Clayarch Gimhae Museum, both of which offer glimpses at what Korea's municipal and provincial museums have been accomplishing in recent years.

Daegu has long been associated with traditional textiles and industry, but it's also home to Korea's largest concentration of exhibition spaces outside of Seoul. Located near World Cup Stadium, Daegu Art Museum stages exhibitions with some of the biggest names in Korean and international contemporary art; past events have featured participation from Kusama Yayoi and Tadashi Kawamata. Gallery Bundo focuses mainly on solo exhibitions by new and established contemporary Korean artists. Since its recent opening, Wooson Gallery has already staged exhibitions by such contemporary art luminaries as Jannis Kounellis and Chung Sang-hwa. A number of commercial galleries are located nearby on the city's Bongsan Culture Street.

Gwangju is both a symbol of South Korea's democracy movement and host city for the world-famous Gwangju Biennale. The gma (Gwangju Museum of Art) stages exhibitions focusing on the unique culture of Korea's southern provinces, along with a variety of feature events. It also holds exhibitions of the Ha Jung-Woong Collection, with pieces donated by Korean-Japanese Ha Jung-Woong to spotlight the work of modern and contemporary Korean artists. The Art Museum of Woo Jae Gil is privately operated by Woo Jae-gil, himself a working artist. In addition to Woo's own work, the museum holds various exhibitions of pieces by other local artists.

Off in the foothills of Mt. Moak, the Jeonbuk Museum of Art is a venue built to honor the region's heritage as a "home of the arts," with events held to exhibit ancient local art as well as more contemporary pieces and Western paintings. A visit here is a chance to witness the context of tradition and contemporary art in Korea's provinces.

In **Daejeon**, visitors can encounter the DMA (Daejeon Museum of Art), as well as the Lee Ungno Museum right next door. Organizer of the Project Daejeon biennial and various feature exhibitions, the DMA also stages projects to share the different cultural and historical spaces of the region. The Lee Ungno Museum is a chance to see the lifetime labors of Lee Ungno (also known as "Goam"), one of Korea's leading artists.

Also worth a visit is Geumgang International Nature Art Center, where you can view various works of sculpture installation designed for a natural environment. It's an exhibition viewing as a nature walk, and every two years the center hosts the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale. Wumin Art Center, a private venue in **Cheongju**, stages feature exhibitions on contemporary Korean art trends, as well as other events to introduce young, locally based artists. It's especially focused on offering exhibition opportunities to emerging planners.

The island of **Jeju** is perhaps Korea's single biggest tourist draw, and it's also the setting for the Wal Chong Art Museum, established by artist Lee Wal-chong. Lee has earned recognition for his affectionate depictions of everyday life and the way he applies familiar elements to the canvas.

The final destination on this tour is the steelmaking city of **Pohang**, home of the poma (Pohang Museum of Steel Art). With a focus on steel sculpture, it's a venue for sharing works of art that carry on the identity of city and museum alike.

The above places are just a few of the many galleries and museums in South Korea. Simply by visiting, we are showing our desire to bring ourselves closer to art and make its inspiration our own. Why do we do it? There may be as many answers to that question as there are people who go to galleries. None of these places is an absolute representative of art, but hopefully this list can offer a little help to people seeking out the profound experiences they offer.

L) Daegu Art Museum © Daegu Art Museum
R) Lee Ungno Museum © Lee Ungno Museum



writer
Hwang Suk-kwon

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3. History of Korean Modern and Contemporary Art

Kim Yi-soon

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3. History of Korean Modern and Contemporary Art

Writer

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During the 20th century, an era far from traditional art began to spread with a flourish of Western culture in Korea. It saw the emergence of the term *misul* ("fine art"), which had not existed in traditional society, along with the concept of "genre" in areas such as painting, sculpture, and craft arts. Terms such as "Western Painting" (*Seoyang-hwa*) and "Eastern Painting" (*Dongyang-hwa*) began entering the parlance. Art institutes were established to educate professional artists, and public art museums and galleries began operating as places where people could freely appreciate works of art. Meanwhile, a growing number of professional artists were graduating from art institutes and making their debuts at the art competitions or solo exhibitions. Korean art in the 20th century can be divided into two periods: the first a "modern art" period and second a "contemporary art" period. Because of Japanese control during the first half, the histories of Japanese and Korean modern art are inextricably linked.

Korean modern art began after the country's 1945 liberation from Japan. As the government began establishing art institutes and reorganizing its various systems, artists made an effort to break free of any influence by Japanese art and to develop their own style that would reflect Korean identity. Unfortunately, the 1950 outbreak of the Korean War put a halt to these changes. The country was divided into North and South Korea, causing upheaval in the art world. As many artists fell victim to the war, Kim Yong-jun, Yi Kwae-dae, Gil Jin-seop, Bae Un-seong, and Cho Gyu-bong defected to North Korea while Lee Jung-seob, Park Soo-Keun, and Choi Yong-lim defected to the South. It was not until the mid-1950s that artists became active again. Lee Joog-seop's use of expressionism was appealing to the

society that had just gone through the experience of the war. In addition, as Park Soo-Keun's work depicted the everyday lives of people from lower classes with a granite-like texture, it was very popular among foreigners for its modernity and representation of Korean sentiments. The transition in Korean modern art was developed by a generation who had received their education from the art institutes established after liberation. This paper will examine changes in the art world by decades.

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1950s: The Beginnings of Korean Modern Art

After the Korean War, many artists working in Korea began to experiment with Western art. For example, there were several senior artists who stayed and worked in Paris for either two to three years or more than ten years; these include Kim Whan-ki and Nam Kwan. Although they had previously attended art institutes in Japan, they decided to move to Paris, a city with a reputation as a "home of the arts," to develop and deepen their artistic styles into something more modern. Though Kim forged a concept of Western abstract language, he adopted traditional

Korean subjects like the crane, apricot flower, moon, and ceramics as ways of representing Korean sentiments characteristically. Nam practiced *cubism* early in his career before he was engaged in the work that combined atypical elements from *Art Informel* and abstracted alphabetical characters. *Cubism*, which had been practiced by a number of modern artists, became very popular in the 1950s. Han Mook, Chung Chang-sup, Choi Yong-lim, Kim Ki-chang, and Park Re-hyun all used elements of *cubism* of its simplifying and dividing of objects to modernize their work. Even a traditional ink painter like Lee Ung-no moved to Europe to explore and work freely beyond the boundaries of art genres.

The younger generation, whom attended the art institutes that were established after the liberation, not only rejected preconceived concepts, but also tried to break from the styles of senior artists'. They refused to take part in government-sponsored events like the *Korean National Art Exhibition*. Instead, artists who shared the same beliefs began to organize groups and seek for the new forms of art. They even rejected governmental art exhibition style of realism and lyrical abstraction, which had been popular at the time. They learned about Western modern art through documents and magazines, and it was the *Art Informel* which they accepted as a new avant-garde form. As it was a movement developed by artists who had experienced the brutality of World War II, *Art Informel* was especially appealing to a generation who had lived through the Korean War. The atypical structure, with its thick layers of pigments, aggressive brush strokes, and intense and heavy color tones, was well-suited to expressing the brutality of the conflict and the resistance against it.

Its characteristics were adopted not only in paintings but also in sculpture, particularly the welding techniques of iron work. Examples of *Art Informel* painters include Park Seo-bo, Jang Sung-soon, Ha In-doo, and Youn Myeung-ro, while Song Yung-su, Park Chong-bae, and Park Suk-won are all examples of *Art Informel* sculptors. By using the *Art Informel* style, the artists expressed the postwar mood and the consciousness of being, helping to guide the development of Korean modern art. In addition to its role in oil painting, *Art Informel* was also adopted by ink painters, who formed the society known as *Mungnimhoe* which means "Ink Forest Group."

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1960s: International Exhibitions and the Search for 'Korean Identity'

Korean art had adopted the Western approach of *Art Informel* as a way of modernizing after the Korean War. Starting in the 1960s, however, the importance of "Koreanness" began coming to the fore. A growing sense of nationalism in Korean society provided a major impetus for these artists in their pursuit of Korean identity. At a time when Koreans were forging their own ethnic culture,

society as a whole had become very interested in Korean tradition. At the same time, artists who participated in the Paris Biennale and San Paulo Biennial perceived a need to establish a global competitive edge by developing a differentiated, distinctive style that did not simply follow Western artistic approaches. Developing something that combined the elements of modern art and with things that were characteristically "Korean," they felt, would help Korean art to become globally competitive. Moreover, people began declaring that "ethnic is global." Therefore, artists began adding traditional elements such as the "five cardinal colors" (*obangsaek*) to geometrical abstractions of *Op Art* that emerged in the wake of *Art Informel* and abstract expressionism. Meanwhile, genres of modern art such as performance, "happening," conceptual art, installation, and land art were also introduced although they were not popular.

Printing is a genre that became popular as international exhibitions were established. In traditional art, engraving had simply been a printing medium, however by the late 1950s, the heavy presence of printed work among the pieces by foreign artists who were introduced to Korea brought about a change in perceptions about engraving. Young and progressive artists began showing an interest in printing medium; Kim Jung-ja and Yu Kang-ryol studied in America then trained younger artists after their return. Chung Kyu and Lee Hang-sung had already been working in printing since the 1950s, and local interest began to rise the following decade as artists like Youn Myeung-ro, Kim Bong-tae, Kim Jong-hak, Suh Seung-won, Kim Ku-lim, and Hwang Kyu-baik all participated in international biennials with works of printing. This continued an interest, and

helped expand a base for the medium, which culminated in hosting the International Print Biennial in Seoul. By the 1980s, printing was established as an important genre of Korean art, with Hongik University setting up its own art department.

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1970s: 'Korean' Modernism

The 1970s is seen as the era of "Korean" modernism in Korean modern art history. It was during this time that the interest in "Korean identity" from the 1960s became truly visualized. The term Korean modernism connotes an artistic style containing both Western modernism and characteristically Korean elements. Artists of the time focused mainly on monochrome painting; although they recognized the importance of the flat surface - the key element of modernism espoused by Clement Greenberg - they wanted a style that would reflect Korean sensibility and emotion. The flat surface in particular was seen as encompassing a kind of spirituality, in contrast with the Western style of flat surface which was perceived as too mechanical and cold. It was with the *Five Hinsaeck* (Whites) exhibition at Tokyo Gallery in 1975 that Korean

modernism became embodied visually. The exhibition was part of an overall trend of looking at white as a "Korean color." But the focus for Park Seo-bo, Ha Chong-hyun, Choi Myoung-young, Chung Chang-sup, Seo Seung-won, and other artists known as monochrome painters was not simply on the color white. They favored the use of natural, achromatic colors; paintings that ruled out any possibility of reproduction were interpreted as basic, original, and spiritual. In addition to non-representational expression, they also put great emphasis on repeated strokes of the paint on canvas, considering this to be a kind of process of emptying out worldly desires and capturing the heart.

The use of monochrome first became popular among oil painters, but by the 1980s it had spread to Korean ink painters. Some of the leading ink painters including Song Su-nam, eliminated the use of color entirely, opting to paint only in ink. They chose to depict landscapes by only using ink, or to compose artworks of utter abstraction, focusing simply on manipulating the concentration levels and spreading of the medium. These artists, too, sought spirituality through the use of ink.

Moreover, non-representational style and complete rejection of objectivity became popular among sculptors with their own abstract pieces. Park Suk-won and Shim Moon-sup, two leading abstract sculptors, made use of traditional materials such as wood, stone, and iron. Rather than being carved into specific forms, natural materials like wood and stone were used as a representation of their own inherent properties; if they created any specific shape, this was seen as indicative of an anthropocentric approach to nature. The sculptors' focus was on revealing the true

properties and characteristics of the material. By showing these essential attributes, results were seen as capable of representing the basic condition of nature, as opposed to the anthropocentrism or artificiality of Western modernism. Referred to as "Korean minimalist sculpture," these works adopted something of a Western modernist style in the idea of abstraction, but the artists' ultimate goal was to de-Westernize the art and achieve something characteristically "Korean" or "Oriental."

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1980s: Social Engagement and Feminist Art

The 1980s was the decade in which artists began to reject conformity of the preceding decade. First, the *Korean National Art Exhibition* ended its 30-year run in 1981; in its place emerged private exhibitions sponsored by newspaper companies. The number of art museums and galleries began to grow, with more well-known galleries beginning to participate in international art fairs. Satellite installations like *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984) and *Bye Bye Kipling* (1986) by Nam June Paik became a source of inspiration for the Korean art world.

As artists were breaking away from the conformity of modernism, early 1980s society in general was pervaded with the idea of anti-Westernism and de-Westernization. Instead, people began emphasizing the importance of national consciousness, and even expressing their hopes for the unification of North and South Korea. In both aesthetical and ideological terms, *Minjung Art* (*minjung* being a Korean word for "the masses") was the opposite of 1970s modernism. Just a few years earlier, the focuses of art were on purity and autonomy, and on the importance of the artist's subjective and personal approach. The younger generation of the 1980s emphasized an artist's engagement with the real world through a collectivist approach. Modernist artists had also been interested in tradition and ethnicity, but where their attention was focused more on spiritual heritage such as ideas of Lao Tzu, *Minjung* artists sought to carry on traditions that were linked to the lives of the people. *Minjung* artists revealed the absurdity of the capitalist world by depicting farmers and workers in a realistic style, deliberately chosen so that people could easily grasp its artistic language. The realist style of *Minjung* artists ultimately did not have a great impact, but it remains significant in art history as an attempt to overcome Western modernism.

In mid-1980s, art groups that supported de-genre art but rejected both the formal aesthetics of modernism and the excessive engagement of *Minjung* art began to appear. Groups like *Nanjido*, *MetaVox*, *Logos and Pathos*, and *Museum* pursued the idea of deconstructive genre by offering a new methodology for installation art. It was a way of differentiating themselves from previous generations with a post-modern sensibility, while rejecting the ideological approach and realist style of *Minjung*

art in favor of a new alternative incorporating objects. *Museum*, a group developed by artists like Choi Jeong-hwa, Kho Nak-beom, and Lee Bul, deconstructed traditional concepts of painting and sculpture not only in conceptual terms but also in formal ones.

Another significant movement of the 1980s was the emergence of feminist art. Although Korean feminist art began later than its Western counterpart, it became a platform for female artists such as Kim In-soon and Yun Suk-nam to critique issues of social inequality of Korean society in the late 1980s. They were especially interested in the gender inequalities that arose from the country's deep-seated Confucian beliefs. Kim's works showed the twofold oppression faced by female workers, while Yun Suk-nam depicted women suffering under the society's traditional preference for sons over daughters, and showed the artist's respect for mothers who sacrificed themselves on the altar of patriarchal male ideology.

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1990s: Diversification, Internationalization, and the Rise of Art Discourse

In the 1990s, dynamic cultural changes were taking place as the conflict between ideologies died away. These changes were closely linked not only to the fall of the Eastern Bloc and the international environment, but also in domestic conditions, including the liberalization of overseas travel after 1988 Olympics and an increase in the number of people studying abroad. The generation who had gone overseas to study dismantled deep-rooted "school ties" system in Korean art. This new cohort disinterested the ideologies of nationhood and statehood that their predecessors had believed in, but rather focused on the global art movements, in their own interests and individuality. Their focus was on how to connect with the world, and how to live as a member of the global community in an information-oriented age. Members of the so-called "Generation X" were unabashed about expressing their materialist and consumerist desires - an approach that led to a rapid shift toward kitsch and cult. The materials used for the artworks also changed. Instead of traditional materials such as paint, rocks, and wood, artists used technology: photographs, computers, videos, and so forth. Development of high technology in Korea and Nam June Paik's retrospective exhibition *Nam June Paik: Video Time, Video Space* held in 1992 at the National Museum of Contemporary Art further spurred these changes.

Paik's work during the 1990s excited great interest in Korean art among international curators, helping to lay the groundwork for other professionals to work on a global stage. Furthermore, Korea became host to its own major international exhibition in 1995 with the establishment of the Gwangju Biennale; the inclusion of a Korean pavilion at the Giardini for the Venice Biennale was another noteworthy

development. The global work of artists like Lee Bul, Kim Soo-ja, and Suh Do-ho was also instrumental in building the country's prestige. Rather than focusing on conveying "Koreanness" through their art, Korean artists kept up with global trends, working under the concepts provided to them by curators when they were invited for international exhibitions. It was a sign that the artists of the day were members of a global community, communicating with the rest of the world in an information-driven age.

The time when art was dominated by college professors had passed; the new emerging leaders are the artists committed to creativity. It was a change stemming both from the growing financial support of the central and local governments and from a newly revitalized art market. Moreover, as large corporation began to support creative activities and run their own art museum, methods of artist sponsorship has also changed; if they were previously more interested in purchasing finished products, now the corporations started offering the support to cover the funds as artists put high technology to use in their artwork.

An outpouring of post-modernist discourse began to place new significance on the roles of the art theorist and art critic. Once they were responsible for simply introducing the work of artists, in the 1990s they began to assume a new role as creators of discourse, altering the very trends of art as a field. It would also be remiss not to remark on the role of exhibition curators. The Korean art of today is incomparably more dynamic than that of the past. Curators have become every bit as important as the artists and critics, marking a new era where new forms and new art movements emerge from the act of curating.

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4. The Korean Art Market

Park Soo-kang

Co-founder/director, AMCompass

4. The Korean Art Market

Writer

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Park Soo-kang

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Co-founder/director,
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Not even 20 years have passed since the Korean art market first starting gaining momentum, with art fairs and auction markets giving it a more modern look. The auction market kicked off with the arrival of auction houses in the 1990s before experiencing rapid growth in the mid-'00s. Korea's leading art fair event, the KIAF (Korea International Art Fair), made its debut in 2002. The booming art market of the mid-'00s, especially in London and New York, was a boon for the global market as a whole. Korea's art market also grew quickly over this period, despite murmurs about a bubble. The peak came in 2007, followed by a slump in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Prolonging the slide were other factors contributing to a less favorable market environment, including a high-profile slush fund case involving artwork and the introduction of a transfer tax on art. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism the annual value of the art market for the six years from 2008 to 2013 remained between KRW 390.3 billion and 483.6 billion – never once reaching the KRW 604.5 billion recorded in 2007.¹ It was a very different situation from other markets around the world, which were relatively quick to escape the effects of the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008 and start growing anew. But improved numbers for 2014 added hope for the market's revitalization.

1. "Mid- to Long-Term Arts Promotion Plan for Fostering a Positive Feedback Loop in the Arts Environment, 2014–2018," Republic of Korea Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Sept. 24, 2014.

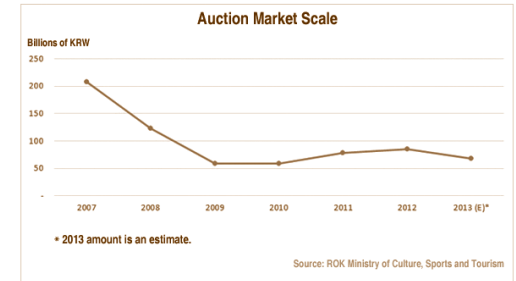
The Auction Market

Korea's art auction industry is quite young, with a history dating back about 15 years. The number of auction houses has increased steadily since the mid- to late '00s; the current count is over ten. The two dominant forces in the Korean auction market are Seoul Auction (founded in 1998) and K Auction (founded in 2005). Both offer auctions in a wide range of areas, from Korean and international modern and contemporary art to classical Korean art (including paintings, calligraphy, and pottery), decorative art, jewelry, and timepieces. The biggest of these areas, in terms of both number of artworks on offer and auction turnover, is Korean modern and contemporary art. National treasures sometimes go for more at classical Korean art auctions, but that is the exception. Some houses focus mainly on classical art (including My Art Auction, Auction Dan, I Auction, and A Auction), while others, like Herald Artday, specialize strictly in online auctions.

2. Ibid.

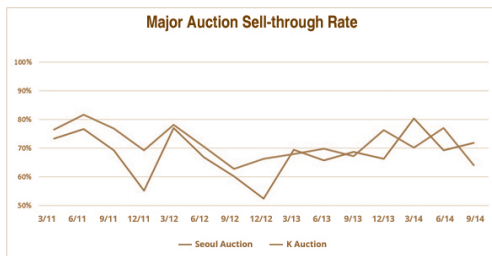
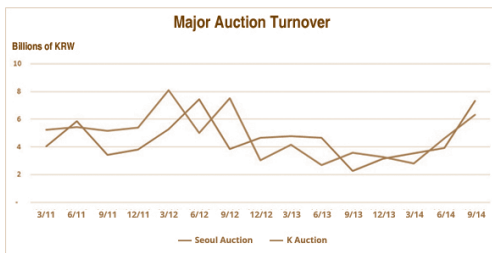
Market Scale

The scale of the Korean auction market peaked at KRW 207.5 billion in 2007 before entering a slide the following year; as of 2013, it was an estimated KRW 68 billion.² After a brief boom between 2005 and 2007, the market has been in a persistent slump.



Together, Seoul Auction and K Action hold down a virtual monopoly on the Korean auction market, and their major auctions are a barometer for trends in the market as a whole. Both hold one major auction per quarter in Seoul (in March, June, September, and December). The major auctions focus on three areas: Korean modern and contemporary art, international modern and contemporary art, and Korean classical art. A look at major auction trends for the two houses over the past four years shows sluggish performance in terms of turnover and sell-through rate for late 2012 and all of 2013, followed by a growth period in 2014. Strong auction results for both houses in September have stoked hopes that the growth will continue for some time.

1) Based on auction data from the Seoul Auction and K Auction web sites.
2) Non-art items (jewelry, timepieces, etc.) not included in auction results.
3) Auction turnover indicates aggregate hammer price, not including the auction house's transaction commission.



1) Based on auction data from the Seoul Auction and K Auction web sites.
 2) Non-art items (jewelry, timepieces, etc.) not included in auction results.

Auction Record

Most of Korea's top bids have been at major auctions by Seoul Auction and K Auction. The works tend to be by artists who have long been prized by collectors: Kim Whan-ki (1913–74), Park Soo-keun (1914–65), Lee Joong-seop (1916–56), Lee Dai-won (1921–2005), Kim Tschang-yeul (b. 1929), Lee Ufan (b. 1936), Kim Chong-hak (b. 1937), and Oh Chi-gyun (b. 1956). Many of the auction records for these artists were set in the art market boom year of 2007; none have been broken since. The record holder for the highest bid at a Korean modern/contemporary art auction is Park Soo-keun's *Laundry* (1950), which went for KRW 4.52 billion in 2007.

<Top Bids for Major Korean Artists in the Domestic Market>

Artist	Title	Hammer Price (KRW)	Auction House	Auction Date(m/d/y)
Park Soo-keun	A Wash Place (1950)	4,520,000,000	Seoul Auction	5/22/2007
Lee Joong-seop	A Bull (date unknown)	3,560,000,000	Seoul Auction	6/29/2010
Kim Whan-ki	The Flower and Jar (1957)	3,050,000,000	Seoul Auction	5/22/2007
Lee Ufan	From Line (1978)	1,600,000,000	Seoul Auction	9/15/2007
Lee Dai-won	Farm (1987)	660,000,000	Seoul Auction	12/18/2013
Kim Chong-hak	Landscape (2006)	580,000,000	Seoul Auction	9/15/2007
Oh Chi-gyun	Road (1999)	500,000,000	Seoul Auction	9/15/2007
Kim Tschang-yeul	Waterdrops No. L1 (1977)	370,000,000	K Auction	9/25/2014

* Auction data from Art Price (www.artprice.com), Seoul Auction, and K Auction.

Working toward Sustainable Growth

Since the late '00s, Hong Kong has held a very important place in the world auction market. By 2007, China was the world's third largest art market after the U.S. and Great Britain, and Christie's Hong Kong played an especially key role in that growth, with auction turnover reaching as high as USD 197 million.³ Soon other Asian auction houses were entering the Hong Kong market. By 2008, both Taiwan's Ravenel and Japan's Est-Ouest were holding auctions in Hong Kong.

Seoul Auction joined the fray in 2008, becoming the industry's first-ever house listed on KOSDAQ. Together with Christie's, it accounts for the most auctions of Korean art in Hong Kong. It also sets itself apart with its focus on Western contemporary art. Christie's and Sotheby's both focus on Asian art in yearly spring and fall auctions, while the Asian houses have their own auctions centering on Asian art. Lee Ufan's *From Point* (1977) went for HKD 15.2 million (about KRW 2.1 billion) in fall 2012 at Seoul Auction in Hong Kong, setting an auction record in that market for modern or contemporary Korean art.

K Auction also held its first overseas auction in Macau in fall 2008. It went on to organize a partnership in Hong Kong with Shinwa Art Auction and Larasati, titled UAA (United Asian Auctioneers in Hong Kong). Because of the three different houses participating, the works cover a broad spectrum of Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Western modern and contemporary art.

One major trend in the auction industry recently has been a stronger push toward online business. Sotheby's announced plans to hold live auctions through eBay, with bidders able to watch and place bids over the internet rather than going to the auction house.⁴ Korean houses have also been working hard on online auctions. Seoul Auction rebranded and relaunched its existing online auction in August 2014 as "eBid Now." K Auction began its online sales in 2006, with five to six auctions held per year. The scale of the auctions has also grown: steady improvements in the level of work on sale mean that auctions include not only mid-price items, but high-ticket ones as well.



Seoul Auction, The 9th Hong Kong Sale © Seoul Auction

3. 'Art Market Trends 2007', Artprice, 2008.

4. Greg Bensinger, 'eBay Tries Its Lot With Live Auctions, Again', The Wall Street Journal, 6/10/14, retrieved from <http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2014/10/06/ebay-tries-its-lot-with-live-auctions-again/>

Art Fairs

Today, art fairs represent arguably the premier platform for art transactions. The number of fairs increased from just seven worldwide in the 1980s to double that in the 1990s.⁵ Between 2000 and 2005, it reached 68; by 2011, it stood at 189.⁶

The competition has been heating up in Asia, with different cities battling to bring in their own art fairs. Art HK was launched in Hong Kong in 2008; in 2013, it was reborn as Art Basel Hong Kong. In Singapore, the Art Singapore was held between 2000 and 2010, and Art Stage Singapore has been taking place since 2011. Fairs can also be found in most of Asia's other major cities, including Art Taipei in Taiwan, Art Fair Tokyo in Japan, and Art Beijing in China.

The trend is also visible in Korea, where art fairs have been proliferating at a fast clip since the mid-'00s. Four were founded in the 1990s. Another nine were added between 2000 and 2005, and 21 more between 2006 and 2010.⁷ The number of fairs held on an annual basis rose from 29 in 2008 to 35 in 2012.⁸

Most of the Korean art fairs focus on contemporary art, with items representing a wide range of media. Some, like *Seoul Photo and Art Edition*, specialize in specific genres like photography and prints. Several fairs have been breaking away from the traditional gallery-driven format, with artists themselves appearing to run their own booths. More than half the fairs taking place today are in Seoul, although the number outside the capital has been growing.



KIAF (Korea International Art Fair) 2014

Korea's premier fair event may be the *KIAF (Korea International Art Fair)*. Launched in 2002, it is the biggest art fair in the country. It takes place every fall in Seoul under the auspices of the Galleries Association of Korea. One of its biggest features is the selection of a guest country each year, with galleries invited in from that region. A steady rise in visitors has helped KIAF grow into Korea's leading art event. But for all the international packaging, some argue that the galleries and collectors participating are still very much Korea-centered.

Other art fairs are held throughout the year in Seoul. One of the major ones in the first half of the year is Korea's oldest, the *Korea Galleries Art Fair*, which started in 1979. Organized by the Galleries Association of Korea, it exclusively features Korean member galleries.

The *Seoul Open Art Fair*, which began in 2006, has a stronger focus on mid- and lower-price work than KIAF or Korea Gallery Art Fair. *G-Seoul*, which was launched in 2011, has stated the goal of becoming a "premium art fair": the number of participating galleries is small, but they are assigned relatively spacious booths, with mostly larger, high-ticket items on display.

A wide assortment of fairs can also be found in the second half of the year. The *Asia Hotel Art Fair* has been held once per year in Seoul and Hong Kong since 2009. The concept for this event involves using hotel rooms as galleries, with visitors viewing and purchasing items amid a homey atmosphere. Art Edition is an event that deals exclusively in editioned works, including prints, photography, and sculpture. Its previous incarnation was as the *Seoul Print Art Fair*, which was launched in 1995. The *MANIF Seoul International Art Fair* ("MANIF" for short) has artists running their own booths as solo exhibition spaces. MANIF was established 20 years ago with the goal of popularizing art. The *ASYAAF (Asian Students and Young Artists Art Festival)* has a format where young Asian artists compete to have their work selected for exhibition and sale.

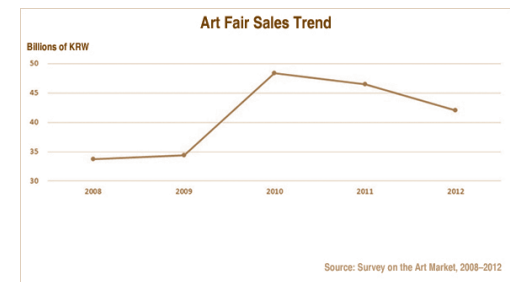


L) Korea Gallery Art Fair 2014

R) Artshow Busan 2014

New art fairs keep emerging outside of Seoul as well. First on the list is *Artshow Busan*, held in Korea's second city of Busan. It's a relatively new event launched in 2012, but its growth in program management and sales has been swift. The *Busan International Art Fair* has also been held continuously since 2008. Gwangju, famed for its eponymous Biennale event, has also hosted the *Art Gwangju* fair since 2010, while the *Daegu Art Fair* has been held in Daegu since 2008.

Not all art fairs announce their sales numbers, so it is difficult to tally their performance. But a 2012 art market survey showed artwork sales reaching KRW 48.4 billion in 2010 before gradually sliding to about KRW 42 billion as of 2012.⁹



5. Maria Lind & Olav Velthuis (eds), *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012, pp. 118-119.

6. Ibid., p.119.

7. *2012 Art Market Survey*, ROK Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism & Korea Arts Management Service, 2013, p. 125.

8. Ibid., p. 121.

9. Ibid., p.120.

Recently, some new experiments have been under way with Korea's art fairs. In addition to existing features like guest country invitations and talk programs, they've also started bringing non-profit art spaces on board and organizing feature exhibitions to show the kind of large-scale installation pieces often seen at biennial events and art museums. The goal is to draw more visitors and expand a base of art lovers. But the end goal of any art fair is to promote artwork sales. Many today continue arguing for strategies to build the base of collectors – the end users.

Korea's art market has been called local and limited when compared to the country's economic scale and the size of its art community. The "Mid- to Long-Term Arts Promotion Plan" announced by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in September 2014 includes a commitment to building the market to a scale of KRW 630 billion by 2018. With government policy support added onto the recovery the market has been experiencing this year, expectations continue to grow.

writer

Park Soo-Kang

Park Soo-kang is co-founder and director of AMCompass, an art market research company based in Seoul, South Korea. AMCompass provides comprehensive and responsive research on the Asian art market, with a special focus on Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore.

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theArtro is a platform for international exchange of Korean contemporary art. theArtro introduces the discourses and people in Korean art scene, as well as building a database on art spaces and events. We support communication and networking among Korean and foreign visual arts professionals, academia, and institutions.

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for Korean
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**The PROJECT ViA
program is aimed at
promoting exchange in
the Korean contemporary
art community by
providing a useful
channel for experienced
visual art specialists
to develop their
professional networks.**

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