

K-ART POPS

January 2018 | Dionne Bel

page 1 of 7



112

THE ART ISSUE

Robb Report



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Last October, the third edition of the Asia Now art fair in Paris showed just how far Asian contemporary art, especially Korean art, has come.

January-2018

THE ART ISSUE

113

Storage unit and lighting in metal finished with a blue lacquer and with a brass base structure, from Shanghai's Studio MVW.



By **DIONNE BEL**

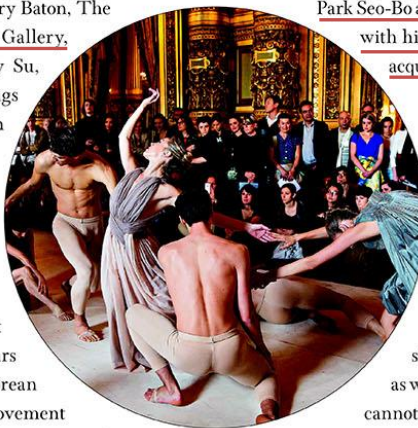
The third edition of Asia Now, Europe's first boutique art fair dedicated to Asian contemporary art that was cofounded by Alexandra Fain, welcomed 33 Asian and Western galleries representing 135 established and emerging artists from 10 Asian territories. Unlike most fairs in Europe that focus on Western art, Asia Now acts as a guide to deciphering the Asian art world, understanding its transformation

and revealing its potential for development. It highlights some of the most interesting artists to collect and watch today who are currently unknown in Europe, yet recognised by local and international specialists.

As each edition focuses on a specific region, in 2017, the fair zoomed in on the Korean artistic scene through a special programme coordinated by South Korean curator Joanne Kim, which presented Korean galleries including 313 Art Project,

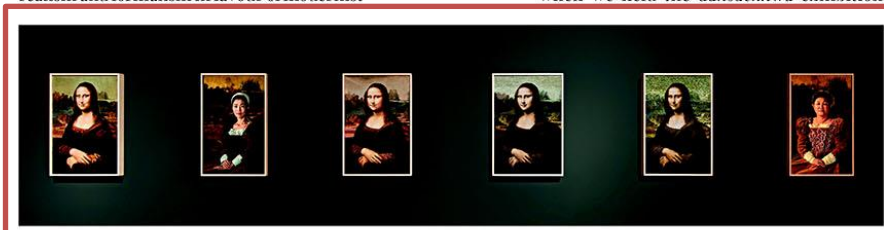
THE ART ISSUE

Choi&Lager Gallery, Gallery Baton, The Columns Gallery, Kukje Gallery, Gallery SoSo and Gallery Su, conferences, film screenings and performances. Although the Korean art scene today is extremely developed, its artists' practice marked by maturity, authenticity and technical virtuosity, it remains little known within global art circles. It has only been in recent years that *dansaekhwa* – the Korean monochrome painting movement arising in the 1970s as a rejection of realism and formalism in favour of modernist



Park Seo-Bo achieved a new auction record with his *Ecriture No. 38-75* painting acquired for HK\$13,300,000.

Sotheby's Asia specialist, Jacky Ho, discloses: "Korean contemporary art is very collectable and is becoming increasingly popular on the auction market. The support is strong domestically and internationally because of a still relatively low price point, as well as cultural originality that cannot be found elsewhere. In fact, Sotheby's opened the door to this category when we held the *dansaekhwa* exhibition



abstraction, associated with artists like Ha Chong-Hyun, Hur Hwang, Lee Dong-Youb, Lee Ufan, Park Seo-Bo and Yun Hyong-Keun – has captured the attention of audiences outside South Korea, whereas the Chinese art market has exploded with a strong support system. International galleries Pace, Lehmann Maupin and Perrotin have opened spaces and Christie's an office in Seoul, but Kim notes the lack of small and medium-sized galleries and other platforms promoting young Korean artists overseas.

While Chinese and Japanese artists topped Sotheby's Hong Kong's most recent modern and contemporary art sale with prices up to HK\$105,287,500 (S\$ 18,154,251),

From top: performance called *Vessel 04* by Ayoung Kim; *Mona Lisa and the Others from the North*, a video installation by Kyungah Ham.

in March 2015, bringing the subject to international exposure. The momentum was then carried on by international galleries and world-leading fairs such as Venice Biennale, allowing the interest to grow even further among collectors."

Dansaekhwa artists also performed extremely well at the November 2017 Phillips Hong Kong 20th-century and contemporary art and design auction.

Head of sale, Sandy Ma, comments: "The market for the highest-quality works by artists such as Lee Ufan and Chung Sang-Hwa remains healthy. This is indicative of the market recognising the historical importance of this movement."

January-2018

THE ART ISSUE

115



At the same time, the Korean art scene is becoming more diverse in terms of mediums and topics covered, with the young generation's approach more individual and personal than ever before.

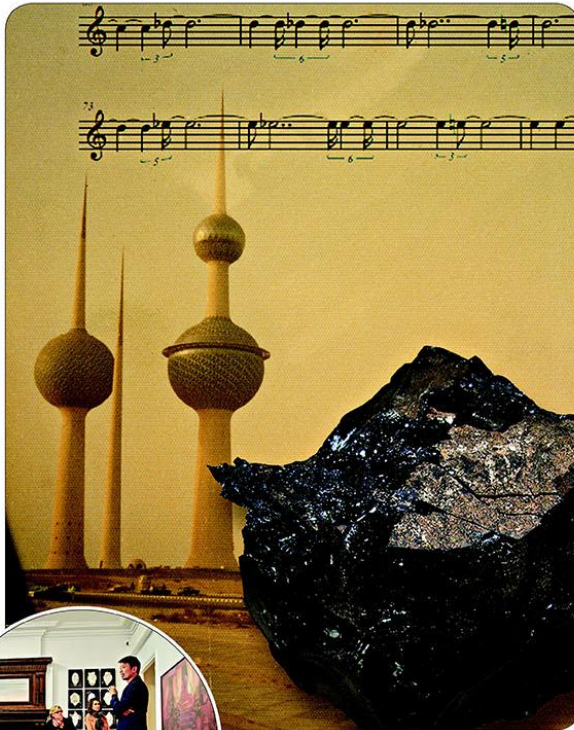
Artists in their 20s, 30s and 40s represent the first generation in South Korea who have started asking questions about identity and their

Ciel de Peking is an experimental ink on canvas work by Paris-based Chinese artist Li Chevalier.

nation's history in the 1970s and 1980s censored by the government, a period of immense social, political and economic change. They are also notable for their outward-looking stances and interest in other countries and

cultures, as they now study abroad, travel freely and have friends worldwide. Fascinated by communication between the two

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and sound, and the new direction that the country's art scene is taking as artists are increasingly exposed to K-pop and Korean cinema.

"Younger artists especially are exposed more and more to visual content with music and videos all the time, creating a sensitivity to colour and texture," says Kim. Another rising star to watch is virtual reality video artist, Hayoun Kwon, whose practice questions the notion of individual and collective memory. A pioneer in her field, the Palais de Tokyo's 2017 Discovery Prize winner unites the exploration of new technologies and new forms of narration. Kim also notes a revival in performance art because it connects better with viewers by bringing back the human touch, as they have to be physically present. She highlights An/Other Avant-Garde Performance, a collaboration with the 2018

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Koreas, Kyungah Ham stands out for her *Mona Lisa and the Others from the North* installation juxtaposing portraits of Mona Lisa embroidered by North Korean artisans with interviews of North Korean refugees who have settled in South Korea.

Three top South Korean contemporary artists include Kelvin

Zepheth, Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You, Shell 1 by Ayoung Kim.

Inset:

Asia Now was held from 18 to 22 October last year.

Kyung Kun Park, Ayoung Kim and Lee Wan, whose works symbolise the increasing popularity of the medium of multisensory video art combining images, language, music

Busan Biennale curatorial team featuring works by Jooyoung Kim, a leading first-generation South Korean performance artist who initiated the Nomadism concept as a form of artistic activism, and is recognised for her projects through which she frees herself from institutional restrictions.

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January 2018

THE ART ISSUE

117

Q&A WITH ALEXANDRA FAIN, COFOUNDER, ASIA NOW

Tell me about the development of Asian contemporary art since you fell in love with it in 2010.

There has been an evolution towards a more structured scene by public and private patrons. Public patrons include the National Gallery in Singapore. This kind of thing didn't exist five years ago. Private patrons are the collectors themselves. Arts infrastructures are getting stronger and stronger. As for the Korean scene, the galleries there are well structured, everything is so well organised, two top-level biennales in Busan and Gwangju – it's really impressive for such a small country. The Asian scene is getting there in terms of international recognition through top exhibitions as well. In Paris, I can remember Ai Weiwei at Jeu de Paume, Zeng Fanzhi at the Modern Art Museum, Yue Minjun at the Cartier Foundation, and then smaller initiatives at the Palais de Tokyo, K11 partnering with the Pompidou Centre and the presence of Yung Ma as a Chinese curator. In many other cities, there is institutional interest for the masters and also for the new generation and from the collectors' side as well, otherwise Asia Now would have had only one edition. There is true curiosity for the Chinese scene, which is so vibrant, the less known but mature Korean scene, and still



emerging scenes like Indonesia or the Philippines with so many great artists.

Is Asia Now a springboard for increasing the value and desirability of Asia's contemporary artists? At Asia Now, our mission is to unveil to European and international

“There is true curiosity for the Chinese scene.”

collectors some of the most highly regarded contemporary artists from Asia. Some of them are already recognised in their own countries, but they're not even known here. At the 2017 Venice Biennale, you saw Manuel Ocampo at the Philippine pavilion, Takahiro Iwasaki at the Japanese pavilion, Tintin Wuliat at the

Indonesian pavilion and Lee Wan at the Korean pavilion – all these artists have been invited by Asia Now from the beginning, which is meaningful. Zheng Guogu, Polit-Sheer-Form Office, Robert Gutierrez and Aquilizan have also been very successful. At the third edition of Asia Now, we had top French collectors known only to collect or to support openly the French scene, who bought pieces by Asian artists from various galleries. It's highly rewarding to have sown some seeds in 2015 and to see three years afterwards that collectors, should they be French, Swiss, German, Spanish or Italian, are really into the Asian scene. It's the ultimate promise that we're making to the galleries that trust us: to bring to Paris some of their best artists to create a conversation with top collectors and institutions.

Which artists are the most interesting to collect and follow today? The new generation of Korean video artists like Hayoun Kwon and Lee Wan since we highlighted them at the latest edition of Asia Now. Shanghai is one of the most dynamic places for contemporary art right now, so I would love to include the duo Birdhead at the fair. I would also love to present Cao Fei, Cheng Ran, TeamLab, Patricia Perez Eustaquio and Mark Justiniani.

Photo STEPHAN JULLIARD