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K-Culture Chronicles: Inside Korea's Art Boom

This week, Artnet Pro editor Andrew Russeth speaks to Asia Pivot co-author Vivienne Chow.



Sungnyemun Gate in Seoul, South Korea, a new epicenter for arts and culture. Photo: Chung Sung-Jun

At the start of September, a massive chunk of the international art world descended on South Korea for a bounty of high-profile art offerings. The marquee event was Frieze Seoul, in its third edition, at the Coex convention center in the luxe Gangnam district, running alongside the long-established Korea International Art Fair. But they represented just one element of the action.

All over Seoul, museums and galleries were opening big shows, angling for attention. Samsung's Leeum museum hosted an Anicka Yi blowout and a superb show of young artists curated by Rirkrit Tiravanija. The beauty giant Amorepacific welcomed Elmgreen & Dragset at a museum in the basement of its David Chipperfield–designed headquarters, while Gagosian set up shop with a Derrick Adams exhibition on the ground floor. Up above, local heavyweights came out swinging—PKM with Yoo Youngkuk, Pace with the potent pairing of Lee Ufan and Mark Rothko, and Jason Haam with Urs Fischer. Celebrities were everywhere. Parties were everywhere. No one seemed to be sleeping. Everyone was on the move.

And the festivities were not confined to Seoul. The esteemed Gwangju Biennale inaugurated its 15th edition in that southern city the day after the fairs opened, a sharp, tough show curated by the Frenchman Nicolas Borriaud that ran alongside more than 30 national pavilions. And along the country's southern coast, the latest Busan Biennale also drew crowds, with more than 60 artists selected by its curators, Vera Mey and Philippe Pirotte.

There was so much happening that it was impossible to see it all—even with a dedicated driver—which many VIPs had—and even if you were willing to forgo moments of rest. This week, Artnet Pro editor Andrew Russeth is joined by London-based reporter and co-author of the Asia Pivot newsletter Vivienne Chow to discuss the art, the food, and everything in between.

—*Andrew Russeth*