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Six Breakout Stars of the Gwangju Biennale—And How to Acquire Them

This year's show is tough and political, but there is still plenty of work to buy



Gwangju Biennale Main Exhibition Hall, 2024. Photo: Vivienne Chow

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Pansori, an indigenous narrative vocal performance, holds a key place in Korean culture. Originating during the Joseon period (1392–1910), it involves a singer and a drummer and is known for its emotional, powerful sounds. As a storytelling tradition, it has shaped Korean music and served as a cultural bridge between generations. Recognized by UNESCO as a form of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008, pansori has influenced K-pop, K-drama, and visual art.

This year, pansori takes center stage (<https://www.gwangjubienne.org/en/exhibition/biennale/mainexhibition.do>) at the Gwangju Biennale in that South Korean city, thanks to French curator Nicolas Bourriaud, the artistic director of the event's main exhibition, which is titled "Pansori: A Soundscape of the 21st Century." Featuring works by 72 artists from 30 countries, the exhibition aims to reinterpret the traditional discipline within a modern context. Bourriaud sees pansori as a public space for voices to blend and communicate, creating a "visual symphony" that invites viewers to rethink human interactions with machines, animals, spirits, and organic life.

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Interpreting Asian traditions through a Western lens can be risky. Done thoughtfully, it can break cultural boundaries and foster new insights, but it also carries challenges. Bourriaud, who previously curated the Taipei Biennial in 2014, faced high expectations in trying to capture the essence of pansori while expanding its narrative.

This year's Gwangju Biennale focuses on a planet in crisis. Its main exhibition hall is divided into three sections: "Feedback Effect," "Polyphony," and "Primordial Sound," with installations and paintings that address various interpretations of the theme. Some works create visual and sonic experiences, though their perspectives may not always align or converge.

Exploring Yangnim-dong, a historically significant area in Gwangju, provides a more immersive experience. Here, 12 artists across eight venues have worked to integrate their creations with the environment and local community, enhancing audience engagement.

Some critics have argued that the show lacks a specific connection to the event's historical roots. Founded to commemorate the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, a pivotal moment in South Korea's democratization, the biennale this year may feel to some more like a generic global exhibition than a commemoration of this key anniversary. While the voices presented are varied, they do not coalesce into a consensus. This diversity could be strength, helping Gwangju to emerge as a platform for major global issues like migration, politics, and environmental challenges.

The biennale's Pavilion section—dedicated to displays from individual nations, as in Venice—has expanded significantly, with 31 pavilions this year compared to nine in the previous edition (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/gwangju-biennale-double-national-pavilion-asia-2280636>). Several standout exhibitions include those by Southeast Asian countries at the Asia Culture Center, Japan's lyrical "We (Still) Have Things to Remember," and the U.S. Pavilion's "Rhythmic Vibrations," presented by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, which explores the complexities of Asian identity in a Western context.

Running through December 1, the Gwangju Biennale showcases many impressive works and promising artists. Below, we highlight six rising stars worth watching.

—Vivienne Chow

Mira Mann (b. 1993)



Mira Mann, *objects of the wind* (2024). Installation view at the Gwangju Biennale, 2024. Image courtesy of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation

Gallery affiliation: Galerie Drei in Cologne

What to know: Calling the Frankfurt-born, Düsseldorf-based artist a star of this year's Gwangju Biennale is not an exaggeration. The artist has an impressive 33-foot long installation, *objects of the wind* (2024), in the main exhibition's "Feedback Effect" section and has staged a poignant takeover of an abandoned house in the Yangnim-dong area. The works delve into histories connecting Germany and Korea and reinterpret Korean folklore. They address a big picture through the personal lens of the artist, who was born to a Korean migrant mother in West Germany.

Most wanted: There is a strong demand for Mann's "mirror" works, according to the gallery, and *objects of the wind* (2024) is the largest in the series to date.

Price points: The price range for typical mid-sized sculptures and moving-image works is currently €5,000 to €10,000 (about \$5,400 to \$10,800).

Up next: The artist is currently featured in the group exhibition "...and we live by the river" at KIT in Düsseldorf through November 10. A second solo exhibition with Galerie Drei is scheduled for January.

Harrison Pearce (b. 1986)



Harrison Pearce, *Valence*. Installation view at the Gwangju Biennale, 2024. Image courtesy of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation

Gallery affiliation: Mou Projects, Hong Kong, is representing the artist in Asia. He also works closely with other galleries such as Carl Kostyál in Stockholm, Ribot Gallery in Milan, and GNYP in Antwerp.

What to know: The London-born and -based Pearce was a popular target for photographers at the preview. His ambitious installation, *Valence* (2024), commissioned by the biennale, was equally popular. It consisting of 10 modular kinetic sculptures, each with a white inflatable silicone rubber element resembling an image of the artist's brain. Its shape is distorted when it is touched gently by a metal stick's rivet, which moves in a rhythm according to an automated pneumatic system controlled by a sonic composition that aims to relate pansori with the exploration of free will and collective engagement. The intriguing presentation, which questions the relationship between human and technology, was well-received.

Most wanted: The artist's sculptural and installation works are the most in-demand, according to Mou Projects, but his paintings are also popular.

Price points: Paintings are priced \$10,000 to \$30,000. Prices for sculpture and installation vary.

Up next: The artist is currently having a solo show with GNYP in Antwerp. He will be in the Artissima art fair in Turin with Ribot in November, a group show with Perrotin in February in 2025, and a solo show with New Galerie next spring. Mou Projects aims to bring the artist back to Hong Kong for a solo in 2025 or 2026, a follow-up to the artist's first solo with the gallery in 2023.

Haseeb Ahmed (b. 1985)



Haseeb Ahmed. *Stock Weather III*. Installation view at the Gwangju Biennale, 2024. Image courtesy of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation

Gallery affiliation: Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels

What to know: Born in Ohio and based in Brussels, Ahmed has a research-based practice that blends art with science and technology, with a focus on the fluid dynamics of wind and water. At the Gwangju Biennale, he presents *Stock Weather III* (2024), an installation that connects the manmade global economy with weather, which comes from nature, exploring how the two shape our lives. Stock market data controls fans that create winds over a miniature desert. A camera captures this evolving scene, displayed on curved monitors, hinting at the game-like nature of economics. The rotating arm acts like a clock, but the landscape stays in twilight, symbolizing a bleak future shaped by global capitalism.

Most wanted: Mixed-media scrolls and sculptures

Price points: \$8,000 to \$45,000

Up next: Ahmed is currently included in the exhibition “A Botanical Conversation” at Harlan Levey Projects, which runs through December 14. The artist will soon premiere a new film, *Sand Reckoner*, which traces the origin of the Mediterranean’s sirocco wind. He is also organizing “Pantha Rhei on the Rhine,” which consists of sound works commissioned by various institutions in Europe, and preparing for a presentation of his recent works at his new studio.

Yein Lee (b. 1988)



Yein Lee, *System of In-between State* (2024). Installation view at the Gwangju Biennale, 2024. Image courtesy of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation

Gallery affiliation: Lee does not currently have any galleries representing her, but she will be working with Podium in Hong Kong. She has also worked with Jack Barrett in New York, Super Dakota in Brussels, and Galerie Derouillon in Paris.

What to know: Lee is a Korean artist based in Vienna who works across sculpture, installation, painting, and performance to explore fragmented and transient representations of the body. By reusing found materials and blending elements of technology with organic forms, her art examines social and ecological breakdowns, amplifying voices of otherness through bodies in states of crisis. Featured in Gwangju Biennale is *System of In-between State* (2024), an eerie installation that consists of complex sculptures that look like enigmatic cyborgs made up of body parts and technological hardware. Could this be a vision of our future?

Most wanted: Lee's sculptures, as well as acrylic ink and lacquer paintings on galvanized steel plate.

Price points: Prices for sculptures range from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Her paintings start at \$3,000.

Up next: She will be in a group exhibition, "Aftershock," at Podium in Hong Kong in March 2025, coinciding with Art Basel Hong Kong.

Phạm Minh Hiếu (b. 1996)



Phạm Minh Hiếu, “The Laboratory for Experimental (Meta)physics (Room 5),” the Vietnam Pavilion, Gwangju Biennale Pavilion. Installation view at the Gwangju Biennale, 2024. Image courtesy of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation

Gallery affiliation: Galerie Quynh in Ho Chi Minh City

What to know: Born and based in Hanoi, Phạm draws on philosophy, physics, technology, and anthropology to create “total installations”—immersive environments that question reality through ideas and objects. His work reflects the experiences of a generation coming of age in a modern Vietnam shaped by its colonial past and the Vietnam War. In the Gwangju Biennale Pavilion’s Vietnam Pavilion, Phạm’s “The Laboratory for Experimental (Meta)physics (Room 5)” features a double-sided illuminated folding screen. One side depicts a calm water surface, while the other shows a chaotic urban scene. The contrasting imagery and soundscape highlight the complexity of navigating dual realities.

Most wanted: A mosaic work titled *Somewhere* and the video work *Here & Now 2023* have received the most attention.

Price points: \$12,000 to \$60,000

Up next: The artist serves as one of the curators of the Creative Design Festival in Hanoi, running from November 9 to 17 as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. (The other curators are Uyen Le and Van Do.) The artist is planning to further develop the Gwangju work in the U.S. in 2025.

Amol K Patil (b. 1987)



Amol K Patil, *Who is invited in the City?* (2024). Installation view at the Gwangju Biennale, 2024. Image courtesy of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation

Gallery affiliation: Project 88 in Mumbai and TKG+ Projects in Taipei

What to know: Born in Mumbai and based between Mumbai and Amsterdam, Patil is a conceptual and performance artist who also works with sculpture and painting. His practice often involves the excavation of historical tales and the archives of his family. His late father, Kisan, who died when the artist was a child, was an avant-garde playwright, and his grandfather was a poet. Both adopted art as a form of resistance, which greatly influenced Patil. Commissioned by the biennale, Patil's installation *Who is invited in the City?* (2024), which consists of bronze sculptures, video, light, and sound, is a poignant reflection on the shift of the contemporary urban landscape of Mumbai.

Most wanted: Wall-hanging bronze sculptures and works on paper.

Price points: \$3,000 to \$10,000

Up next: The artist will have a solo show at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in California in January, another at the Röda Sten Konsthall in Sweden in February, and one more at the Bałtycka Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej in Poland in April. He will participate in Mercosul Biennial in Brazil in March.

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