

Who Were the Stars of Seoul? Here Are 6 Breakout Artists Who Captivated Collectors at the Frieze and Kiaf Fairs

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Page 1 of 10

We scoured the aisles to bring you a list of artists who are going places.



Yeo Workshop, Frieze Seoul 2022. Photo by Lets Studio. Courtesy Lets Studio and Frieze.

The global art world touched down in Seoul last week, as the debut edition of Frieze opened in the South Korean capital alongside local counterparts Kiaf and its new media-focused sister fair Kiaf Plus. VIPs of all sorts, from K-Pop superstars to mega-collectors to tastemaking international curators mingled in the aisles, and the Artnet News Pro team was on the ground in tow, scoping out all three fairs.

We returned to our various bases with a few names on our minds that, after scrupulous conversations with dealers, advisors, and collectors, we believe are poised to break into bigger art-world conversations in the months and years to come. Here's what you need to know about six of those artists.

Jong Oh (b. 1981)



Jong Oh, Line Sculpture #22, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and One and J. Gallery. Photo: Eurock Lee.

Who: Jong Oh is a South Korean artist who creates minimal, geometric sculptures and installation. Oh's works are made with materials such as thread, wooden and steel rods, pencil lines, and chains. Light and shadow play a notable role in his works, which are executed precisely in response to the space, and hence some of the pieces, especially the line installations, can only be site-specific commissioned works. Some of the works are so minimal that they might look invisible (we spotted several visitors running into a thread dangling from above at the gallery's Frieze booth), but they are at the same time ethereal and poetic.

Based in: Seoul, New York

Showing at: One and J. Gallery (Seoul), at Frieze and in a solo exhibition in the gallery.

Prices: \$3,600 to \$18,000

Why You Should Pay Attention: Oh studied sculpture at Hongik University in Seoul and earned an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. He has appeared in solo gallery shows in Seoul, New York, and Madrid, as well as a solo show at the Seoul Museum of Art. He was one of the recipients of the 33rd Kim Se-choong Young Sculpture Award this year and among the finalists of Song Eun Art Awards in 2021. Some of the pieces have a wait list till February 2023.

Fun Fact: Oh was born in Mauritania in Africa. “My father was in the fishing business and at that time Korean ships went all the way to Mauritania to fish. My father worked in the office there,” Oh told Artnet News. Oh then followed his family to moved to the Canary Islands when he was two years old, and did not move to Korea until he was 12.

Up Next: The artist has a series of gallery and museum shows lined up in the coming two years: group shows at Choi Man Lin Museum in Seoul, and Jochen Hempel Gallery in Leipzig in 2023; solo shows at Sabrina Amran Gallery in Madrid, and Perigee Gallery in Seoul in 2024.

—Vivienne Chow

Isaac Chong Wai (b. 1990)



Isaac Chong Wai, *Thirteen Crying People in North Korea* (2011), 2022. Exhibited at Zilberman Gallery's booth at Kiaf Seoul 2022. Photo: Vivienne Chow.

Who: Born in China's Guangdong in 1990 and raised in Hong Kong, Chong works across a wide range of media from performance to site-specific installations, public art, video, photography, and multimedia. He trained at the Hong Kong Baptist University's Academy of Visual Arts and then earned an MFA in public art and new artistic strategies at the Bauhaus-Universität in Weimar, Germany.

Based in: Berlin, Hong Kong

Showing at: Zilberman Gallery (Istanbul), at Kíaf

Prices: \$3,000 to \$6,000

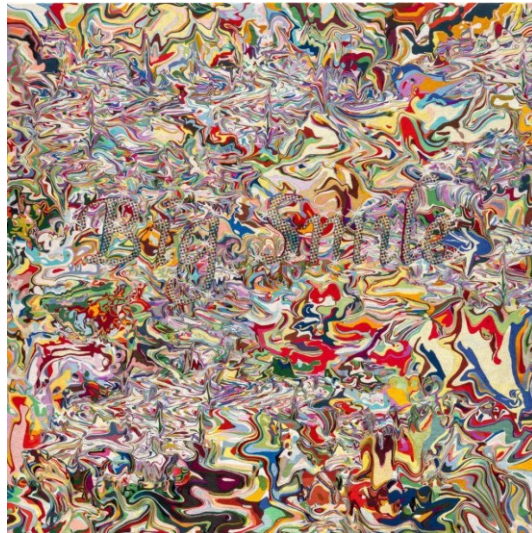
Why You Should Pay Attention: Chong's works might appear to be lyrical and poetic, particularly his performance pieces and installations, but they are not as serene as they appear to be. His work often raises questions about the aftermath of traumatic historical events, from war to protests and politics. Zilberman brought two of Chong's works to Seoul that may have specific meanings to the Korean peninsula, as they are inspired by images taken from the North Korean people crying on the streets after the death of former leader Kim Jong-Il.

Fun Fact: Although Chong's work is often related to history and politics, he was not interested in the subject when he was in school. "When I was studying in Hong Kong, I'd say history was boring," he said, but later he realized that he had a problematic way of looking at history. "I thought history was a series of facts, which is not true. History is not fact."

Up Next: Chong has just completed a public performance commissioned by Kunsttage Basel titled Difference/Indifference at Basler Münster in Basel curated by Angelika Li, co-founder and curatorial director of the Basel-based cultural organization PF25 Cultural Projects. His also showing at group show "Spheres of Interest*" at the ifa-Galerie in Berlin.

—Vivienne Chow

Kyungah Ham (b. 1966)



Kyungah Ham, Needling Whisper, Needle Country / SMS Series in Camouflage / Big Smile K 02-01-02 (2018).

Photo: Chunho An, courtesy of Kukje Gallery.

Who: Kyungah Ham conceives designs for ornate embroideries (some embedded with messages anathema to the Kim Jong-un regime) that are couriered to North Korean artisans she has never met via professional smugglers, who then use bribes and subterfuge to transport their impossibly lush handiwork back to her studio—that is, assuming the many dangers of the illicit cross-border trade don't consume the artisans, the middlemen, or the artist herself first.

Based in: Seoul

Showing at: Kukje Gallery (Seoul), at Frieze

Price: The work on view in the booth was priced between \$110,000 and \$130,000.

Why You Should Pay Attention: Ham has solved the high-level riddle of how to attract viewers to an issue of international importance with visual honey; visitors were swarming the piece in Kukje's booth on Saturday afternoon with phone cameras up.

Despite some outside criticism of the ethics of her arrangement with the North Korean artisans, a growing number of Western institutions are eager to support Ham's practice, too: the Victoria and Albert Museum will put the embroidery it acquired on view during Frieze London next month, and her works were included in both the 2020–21 Asia Society Triennial in New York and last year's exhibition "Border Crossings: North and South Korean Art from the Sigg Collection" at the Kunstmuseum Bern.

Fun Fact: In 2018, Ham told the New York Times that she only informs her galleries about a portion of the completed embroideries at her studio, as a way to limit the number sold to potentially over-possessive private collectors rather than made available to the wider public via museums.

Up Next: Ham's second solo exhibition with Kukje will be held in fall 2023.

—Tim Schneider

Jeong-Ju Jeong (b. 1970)



Jeong-Ju Jeong, Lobby (2010). Courtesy of Gallery Choseun, Seoul.

Who: For more than 20 years, Jeong-Ju Jeong has created quietly surreal sculptures, video works, and 3D animations that play on themes of memory, intimacy, and surveillance. His architectural models literally house film pieces or include cameras that inspect viewers as they inspect the structures, while his digitally rendered “moving drawings” depict remembered interiors (such as bedrooms from his previous residences) continuously washed by naturalistic cycles of daylight.

Based in: Seoul

Showing at: Gallery Chosun (Seoul), at Kiaf

Prices: \$6,000 to \$15,000 for sculptures; \$6,000 to \$9,000 for videos.

Why You Should Pay Attention: His works have been acquired by numerous institutions outside and inside Korea, including the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany; the Seoul Museum of Art; and the Gwangju Museum of Art.

Fun Fact: Jeong originally wanted to build the actual full-sized architectural spaces corresponding to his mature output, according to Chosun Gallery manager Joon Soo Yeo, but pivoted to this vastly more feasible approach after coming to terms with the sizable expense and difficulty of placing the end results with collectors.

Up Next: Jeong’s next solo show at Gallery Chosun is scheduled for 2023.

—Tim Schneider

Natalia González Martín (b.1995)



Natalia González Martín, *Leda and The Swan in 3 Acts (The Great Wings / The Broken Wall / Terrified Fingers)* (2022). Image courtesy the artist and Steve Turner.

Who: González Martín's contemporary icon paintings populated with characters from biblical, mythology, or old fables throw a critical gaze upon internalized religious or traditional prescriptions on contemporary social mores and our physical bodies. Her work on view at Kias was a simultaneously dark and sensuous take on Leda and the Swan. The paintings are imbued with delicate details that reward close looking.

Based in: London

Showing at: Steve Turner (L.A.), at Kias

Prices: Small panels (11 x 8 inches) have been priced at around \$4,000 and the work on view at the fair (a triptych of 20 x 20 inch tondo's) was \$24,000.

Why You Should Pay Attention: Martín's triptych sold at the fair. Still unrepresented, her work has caught the attention of other taste-making dealers from Hannah Barry Gallery to Margate's Quench Gallery run by artists Lindsey Mendick and Guy Oliver.

Fun Fact: During the pandemic, González Martín set up studio in her flat in London—feasible as she often works in miniature, with certain paintings requiring a hair-thin paintbrush to execute their minute detail.

Up Next: She is curating a group show themed around Umberto Eco's "Neo Medievalism" (in which she will also present works) at Steve Turner's large gallery room in July 2023. She will also have a large solo show at Steve Turner in L.A. in 2024.

—Naomi Rea

Fyerool Darma (b.1987)



Fyerool Darma, Screenshot 02-07-2022 at 12:30 AM (kaw454kti) featuring moyang, Lee Khee San (2022). Image courtesy of the artist and Yeo Workshop, Singapore.

Who: Darma's eye-catching collage works look like flat screen televisions from afar, but they are actually very tactile and manually worked pieces, incorporating woven textile, cut vinyl, and scratched or painted on found images. The found imagery is harvested from the web by searching for representations of Southeast Asian culture, often constructed from an East to West-facing lens—from historical landscapes or portraits that were sent back to the West to gain investment for the country through to contemporary tourism marketing. Darma reappropriates these images (literally stealing them from American stock image corporations), and deploys a post-colonial gaze to ask instead what Southeast Asian culture looks like to itself.

Based in: Singapore

Showing at: Yeo Workshop (Singapore), at Frieze

Prices: \$12,000 for the individual works on view at the fair.

Why You Should Pay Attention: The gallery had sold three of the works in the solo presentation in the Asia Focus section in the early hours of the fair. It had also received a lot of early interest from local institutions, with the gallery filling his calendar with institutional appointments for the next few days, and resolving to focus the rest of the sales on corporate institutional collections to enable more full installations of the work to be shown together.

Fun Fact: Mounted like TV screens, people often think Darma's works are digital when looking at pictures of them online—"We had a show like this at the gallery and people thought that it was a show in the metaverse," Yeo said.

Up Next: Darma will be included in a forthcoming group show at National Gallery Singapore in November.

—Naomi Rea