

J A S O N H A A M

What makes Seoul an art city?

Speaking specifically about the market, Seoul has a comparatively large and important domestic art market, with an established gallery system (both home-grown and increasingly the presence of international galleries), multiple generations of collectors and strong auction houses. There are also favorable tax systems for the commercial art world. (Let me know if you would like me to expand on this) Most importantly, we have some really great artists in this country.

Korea is home to some of the largest and most important companies on the planet, history of corporate philanthropy and collecting, an affluent population and a strong appetite for art, both from collectors and a well-educated general public, who have access to high-quality public and private museums, with world-class exhibitions and collections.

More broadly, Korea as a country has a history of more than 10,000 years, and culture of making art dating back thousands of years, we also have a culture of art appreciation and of viewing art as an important part of popular culture. There is also so much interest in the popular culture of Korea at the moment, whether that's K-Pop, Korean cinema / TV etc being consumed by a global public.

Regionally, we have the dual advantage of our geographic proximity to China, and an international mindset similar to that of the US, with English widely spoken as the language of business and commerce.

What does your gallery do that's unique in the Seoul gallery scene, and the international one?

In Seoul we are unique because of our international outlook - I travel a lot internationally, including to Europe, the US, and much further afield (to places like Senegal). We have a stand-alone, fully flexible gallery building and a space that is designed specifically for exhibitions.

We are unique in the international art world because we are an internationally focused Korean gallery - we bring top quality works by the biggest international names - as evidenced by our upcoming Urs Fischer solo show (Opening on the 25th of August), which will feature a completely new body of large-scale paintings. We are also looking to the global art world, whilst the majority of Korean galleries tend to focus mostly on the local market.

Some of the artists in our program are not (yet) famous often in their own countries and it is important to me to work with artists at an early stage in their careers and to judge them solely on the quality of their work and the message they have, working with them in the long-term to propagate their voices.

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We have recently started working with young Korean artists, whose works will be exhibited at Frieze Seoul.

What's the mission of Jason Haam Gallery?

We have two!

Firstly, to work with the best global artists, and persuade them to work with us in Korea - thereby giving Koreans to get a taste of the best art in the world, at our gallery.

There are also no globally recognized young Korean artists right now and we want to change that. The next generation needs championing and support in becoming global stars and deeper engagement with the best global artists, galleries, and institutions.

With KIAF and now Frieze, do you think Seoul is becoming an (the?) art market hub of Asia?

Seoul is undoubtedly an art market hub, and there is certainly a huge opportunity here - we have the supply and we have the demand. The Asia art market is very broad (depending on your definition of Asia), and still maturing, it's also rapidly evolving particularly in Korea

We also have a sophisticated and well-established infrastructure, from artists and galleries to auction houses, museums, biennales and institutions, as well as corporate and private collectors. There is also an embedded culture of art appreciation and collecting in Korea, which is common across all generations.

Is Seoul a global art power player? Why/not/when will it be?

Potential is there and the ingredients are all there. As I've said above, there is some way to go but there's a commitment from the scene and major players in terms of galleries and Frieze, who are continuing to invest and commit to Korea.

Another important step is for artists to see Korea as an important place to present their works.

What is unique about Seoul's art gallery ecosystem?

We have a lot of galleries here but not a huge number of what the rest of the art world might recognize as major names. People will be familiar with the long-term established galleries like Kukje and Hyundai, but there are a lot of incredibly exciting younger galleries who are proving

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that it's possible to do something new and ambitious here.

What do collectors in Seoul want? Are tastes divided into Korean v Int'l or modern v contemporary? Curious to hear a bit about this.

Amongst what I'd loosely describe as an older generation of collectors, the taste is relatively homogenous, with an emphasis placed on being able to secure significant works by top international blue-chip artists.

In terms of Korean artists, the Korean artists who do particularly are those who have established themselves outside of the country. The taste is also definitely moving towards international contemporary, with an increasing appetite for global names.

What does the scene here need more of and less of?

There's a huge amount of potential here, but the scene is still evolving.

An important next step is to make the city a year-round hub, and we are seeing this starting to happen. The arrival of Frieze Seoul, taking place alongside KIAF, is creating a lot of buzz, both here and internationally and means, for the first time, Korea has a "moment" in the international art market; more and more major international galleries are coming to town, often for the first time, whilst others are doubling-down on their commitment to the city.

There are still some gaps, particularly in the professional services side of the art world, but we do expect that to change pretty rapidly. Whilst that energy, growth and recognition is important, it's also important that we grow sustainably and create a long-term viable ecology and ecosystem. To do that, there some key things we need to see in the art market.

We need to see more collectors from a younger generation, and responsible collecting habits, and less speculative activities. We also need more collaboration across the sector, something which we're starting to see, and for more Koreans (artists and galleries) to break into the global art world. I want to even things out.

Artists (Korean or Int'l) you're currently into?

Urs Fischer!

Seeing him in action and being able to work with his works have been a great privilege.

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We have also recently started working with Amanda Baldwin, Poppy Jones, Mike Lee, Moka Lee, and Ricky Swallow and are excited present their works for the first time in our booth at Frieze Seoul.

What's your best kept Seoul (art) secret?

In terms of art: the Kansong Art Museum. It's the first private museum in the country. It's very close to the gallery, and has one of the main collections of ceramics and Korean national treasures. The founder was a 1920s landowner, who started collecting important historical artefacts to prevent them going to Japan.

Amorepacific Museum of Art's Andreas Gursky exhibition is to die for.

There's also the National Museum of Korea - our equivalent of the Met, which gives the most beautiful and authentic experience of Korean artistic culture - you have to go.

Outside of art, I wouldn't know what to tell you.