

MMCA to bolster its international art collection by 2026

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National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) Director Kim Sung-hee speaks during a press conference held Tuesday at the museum in central Seoul, where she announced a three-year plan for major projects as well as the museum's exhibition lineup for 2024. Newsis

National museum unveils exhibition lineup for this year

By Park Han-sol

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) is set to restructure its acquisition plans to strengthen its collection of international art starting this year.

Currently, out of its permanent holdings, which consist of more than 11,500 pieces, only 993 are works by foreign artists, making up 8.5 percent of the total collection.

The museum aims to increase that proportion to at least 9 percent by 2026 as part of a long-term effort to boost its global profile, according to Kim Sung-hee, who was appointed as the head of the national institute last September for a three-year term.

“The MMCA plans to set aside as much as 20 percent of its allocated annual budget to purchase quality international artworks,” she said during a New Year’s press conference in Seoul, Tuesday.

The director noted, however, that this amount alone would be nowhere near enough to meet its goal, especially with the total acquisition budget fixed at 4.7 billion won (\$3.6 million).

To compensate for the shortfall, the museum will explore two additional acquisition and funding sources: donations made to the MMCA Foundation and a special budget secured from the government.

For this year, its focus will be placed on procuring pieces by female Asian artists, in tandem with its September exhibition, “Connecting Bodies.” The show traverses the oeuvre of some 50 female creators from the region active since the 1960s — including Atsuko Tanaka (1932-2005) of Japan, Pacita Abad (1946-2004) of the Philippines and Hong Lee Hyun-sook (1958-) of Korea — to explore the diverse perspectives centered around the body.





Yeouido Saetgang Ecological Park in southern Seoul's Yeongdeungpo District, designed by landscape architect Jung Young-sun / Courtesy of Jung Ji-hyun, MMCA

The museum's ongoing partnership with overseas art institutions will strengthen through several joint and touring exhibitions this year.

"Only the Young: Experimental Art in Korea, 1960s-1970s," co-organized with the Guggenheim, is scheduled to travel to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in February following its recently concluded run in New York.

"The Modern and Contemporary Korean Writing," initially staged at the MMCA Deoksugung in 2020 as the institution's inaugural calligraphy-centric show, will be brought to the Hengshan Calligraphy Art Center in Taiwan in July.

An extensive survey co-curated with the National Art Museum of China to pair the modern ink-and-color paintings of Korea with their Chinese counterparts at the MMCA Deoksugung in November is expected to be another highlight.

To foster in-depth academic exploration of the country's modern and contemporary art, the museum is actively advancing curator-led research projects and has inaugurated a research fellowship program, encouraging global discourse between Korean and foreign scholars.

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Lee Kang-so's "Untitled 89012" (1989) / Courtesy of MMCA

Some of the noteworthy exhibitions in the MMCA's 2024 lineup are major solo shows featuring trailblazers of Korean modern art — Jung Young-sun, the country's first female landscape architect, in April, and Lee Kang-so, a notable player in the 1970s experimental art scene who later turned to airy calligraphic canvas works, in October.

Also stepping into the spotlight are artistic pursuits that have often been underrepresented in conventional museum settings. These include the first-ever show on post-19th century Korean embroidery in May; a presentation of the country's residential architecture and living culture after 2000 in July; and a survey of modern Korean ceramics since the 1950s in November.