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KOREA, SOUTH

ROUNDUP FROM ART BUSAN 2019

BY OPHELIA LAI

The eighth edition of Art Busan held its VIP preview on May 30 at its usual venue, the Busan Exhibition and Convention Center (BEXCO). This year's lineup featured 164 galleries, over a third of which hailed from beyond South Korea, including first-time European participants Société (Berlin), Almine Rech (Paris/Brussels/London/New York), Peres Projects (Berlin), and König Galerie (Berlin/London).

Aside from the main galleries sector, Art Busan features a design showcase. This year's edition included furniture exhibits by Dansk and Sfera; a rack of voluminous dresses by fashion brand Tchai Kim; and an unapologetically Insta-friendly pink booth with "#photozone" printed on it, curated by South Korean influencer Hee Jae Kang. This interweaving of contemporary art and design was occasionally jarring, but a number of galleries played to the fair's love of design in ways that felt organic and aesthetically cohesive. This was evident at Peres Projects, where the squiggly pink-and-blue seats by Korean designer Greem Jeong chimed with Blair Thurman's looped acrylic composition, Mr. Salty (2018), and the gestural scribble-like brushwork of Donna Huanca's Chymeia (2018).

The Korean art market caters predominantly to its local client base, although dealers and fair organizers have taken significant steps to internationalize. Several Seoul-based heavyweights and smaller regional exhibitors were at the fair. Kukje Gallery (Seoul/Busan) and Gallery Hyundai (Seoul) opted for booths representing their local and international rosters, featuring Dansaekhwa works, which tend to do well at Korean fairs, along with pieces by Julian Opie and Roni Horn at the former and François Morellet at the latter.

Of international participants, König Galerie enjoyed heavy foot traffic at its solo booth of Erwin Wurm's quirky drawings, sculptures and installations, with small crowds waiting to snap a photo with a giant knitted hat. Pearl Lam Galleries' (Hong Kong/Singapore/Shanghai) booth took the opposite approach, giving Zhou Yangming's sparsely hung abstract canvases plenty of room to breathe. Surrounded by (sometimes wantonly) playful displays, Pearl Lam's presentation was an oasis of painterly poeticism.

Art Busan 2019 takes place at the Busan Exhibition and Convention Center from May 31 to June 2, 2019.

Ophelia Lai is ArtAsiaPacific's reviews editor.



The booth of Berlin's Peres Projects was curated to organically integrate design and fine art. GREEM JEONG's squiggly chairs can be seen, along with (left-hand wall) BLAIR THURMAN's Mr. Salty (2018) and (back wall) Donna Huanca's Chymeia (2018).