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MSCHF

Korea Times,

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winter*

November 2023

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Installation view of New York-based art collective MSCHF's "Big Red Boot" at its first-ever museum retrospective, "Nothing is Sacred," at Daelim Museum in central Seoul / Courtesy of Daelim Museum

By Park Han-sol

2023-11-26

As the year draws to a close, Seoul's art scene comes alive with a diverse array of international exhibits – some provocative, some meditative and some a blend of both.

Many of these exhibitions mark their artists' debut shows in the country, making them worth a visit for art enthusiasts during the season.



Installation view of MSCHF's "Jesus Shoes," left, and "Satan Shoes" at its first museum retrospective, "Nothing is Sacred," at Daelim Museum in central Seoul / Yonhap

MSCHF's playful provocations

At the heart of the city's art buzz is MSCHF, a New York-based art collective known for its audacious and satirical creations.

"We're trying to do stuff that the world can't even define," once remarked Gabriel Whaley, the CEO and founder of MSCHF.

The team's mission statement becomes apparent to anyone who takes even a cursory look at its lineup of tongue-in-cheek products. There are "Jesus Shoes" and "Satan Shoes," which are customized Nike Air Max 97s with soles filled with holy water from the Jordan River and the blood of MSCHF members, respectively.

And what about \$76,000 Birkenstock sandals crafted from deconstructed Hermes Birkin bags or a fluorescent Louis Vuitton handbag that can only be viewed through a microscope?

Aside from their farcical premises, what led MSCHF's antics to grab headlines was the fact that none of them were officially affiliated with the big-name brands themselves. These risky creations that push the boundaries of copyright and appropriation have naturally made the group prone to lawsuits, but the resulting publicity only reinforces the team's mischievous goal – to take a jab at the absurdities of viral consumer culture while being a very part of it.



MSCHF's "Big Red Boot" / Courtesy of MSCHF, Daelim Museum

“There is a lot you think you can't mess with – people, brands or companies, that are, in our minds, really powerful,” said Lukas Bentel, chief creative officer of MSCHF, during a press tour at Daelim Museum, where the collective's first-ever museum retrospective in the world is being held.

Some 100 satirical works on view at “Nothing is Sacred” – interactive games, sneakers, paintings and performance art – aim to challenge that notion.

There's even a section in the show where visitors can try on a pair of preposterously bulbous, cartoonish boots – the big red footwear that went viral

among countless influencers and celebrities early this year precisely because of its ridiculous, impractical nature.



Installation view of Emilio Vedova's solo exhibition, "Color and Gesture," at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul. Copyrighted by Fondazione Emilio Vedova e Annabianca. Courtesy of Thaddaeus Ropac gallery, London, Paris, Salzburg, Seoul

Emilio Vedova's Italian abstractions

The Venetian artist Emilio Vedova's (1919-2006) boldly hued, gestural abstractions are known for being the prominent face of Italian Art Informel movement. His works have left a lasting impact on a string of neo-expressionist creatives, including Georg Baselitz.

"Color and Gesture" at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul marks the first solo exhibition of the late 20th-century Italian master in Korea. It features paintings produced from the early 1980s to 2006, the final year of the artist's life.

As a primarily self-taught creative who grew up amid the Venetian lagoon and its architectural wonders, Vedova reflected on his roots in his works by mixing the city's sand with acrylic paint, giving them distinct topographical textures.

The gallery distinguishes his gestural drive from purely formal American abstract expressionism, noting that each of his dynamic strokes was “a means to express his raw and, at times, violent reaction to the world around him” – a characteristic that takes its cues from his earlier, politically conscious works during the Spanish Civil War and World War II.



Lorie Beltrán's "Studio Collapse" (2023) on view at his solo exhibition, "Total Collapse," at Lehmann Maupin Seoul / Courtesy of the artist, Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London and Central Fine, Miami Beach

Lorie Beltrán's material experiments

Lorie Beltrán's work floats somewhere between painting and sculpture.

Upon closer inspection, it reveals itself as a tactile accumulation of undulating paint layers, with the 3D surface vividly capturing the amount of labor invested in producing such dizzying optical effects.

For his debut show in Korea, “Total Collapse,” at Lehmann Maupin Seoul, the Venezuelan-American artist presents his latest kaleidoscopic creations, offering a compelling showcase of his signature material experimentations.

The 38-year-old begins his work by crafting custom molds and pouring paint into them layer by layer over months, sometimes spanning years. He then takes out the mold and slices the hardened block of color into a series of strips, rearranging them to birth a distinctly compressed screen.

Such a focus placed on physical labor is partially rooted in his previous jobs held in construction and fabrication, according to the gallery.

But Beltran notes that what sets artistic labor apart from other forms of exertion is its visibility: “Regular labor is meant to be invisible. If you see how a wall was painted, it’s a bad job. Artistic labor is meant to be seen, or to expose itself.”



Yuko Mohri's "Decomposition" (2023) on view at the group exhibition, "Body, Love, Gender," at Gana Art Center in central Seoul / Courtesy of Gana Art

Japanese artists galore

Other exhibits worth exploring include “Body, Love, Gender” at Gana Art Center, a group show featuring seven Japanese female artists – Ryoko Aoki, Tomoko Kashiki, Rikako Kawauchi, Yuko Mohri, Kyoko Murase, Asami Shoji and Nami Yokoyama.

This collective showcase presents fresh, liberated perspectives on the organic body, mind and gender – for example, through Mohri’s “Decomposition,” where electrodes are inserted into an assortment of slowly decaying fruits, converting their invisible, fluctuating water content into sounds.

Another Japanese creative Yuichi Hirako invites visitors to reconsider the boundaries between nature and humans through his surreal, fairytale-like imaginings at his solo exhibition, “Journey,” at Space K Seoul.

The Tokyo-based artist’s paintings and sculptures form an organic blend of plants, wildlife and the “tree man” – a hybrid figure with a human body and a tree head adorned with antlers. Inspired in part from the Japanese folklore of “kodama,” or tree spirits, the character is both a self-portrait and a visual representation of the non-hierarchical relationship he envisions between nature and man-made society.



Installation view of Yuichi Hirako's solo exhibition, "Journey," at Space K Seoul / Courtesy of Space K Seoul