



Art Matters | The Art World Eyes a New Destination: Gwangju, South Korea

CULTURE By KEVIN MCGARRY MAY 15, 2014 12:00 PM

Throughout most of the past week, Randalls Island seemed the most far-flung art destination anyone in the New York art world was paying attention to. But a dinner at the West Village club Norwood held during Frieze New York shifted attention to a locale halfway around the world. The curator Jessica Morgan of the Tate Modern in London announced the artists participating in her edition of the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea this fall, which runs Sept. 5 through Nov. 9. Founded in 1995, the event is South Korea's most important international exhibition, and arguably Asia's as well, and has put the nation's sixth-largest city on the map.

Four years ago, Massimiliano Gioni of the New Museum organized a successful eighth edition of the Gwangju Biennale, "10,000 Lives," which catapulted him into the pantheon of power players as the curator of last year's Venice Biennale — making him one of the youngest people ever to helm that Super Bowl of the art world.

Morgan, who worked at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston before moving to London, could be next. Too few women are asked to curate these large-scale biennials around the world, which makes her a refreshing choice. Her most recent exhibition stateside was a huge survey of work by the New York-based Swiss sculptor Urs Fischer at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Fischer is one of more than 100 artists from 35 countries that Morgan has selected for the biennial (he will create a new wallpaper installation containing works by fellow artists Heman Chong, George Condo, Apostolos Georgiou, Prem Sahib and Stewart Uoo), which she has titled "Burning Down the House."

Naturally, the symbol of a house in flames can be imagined as representing the art-world status quo — as Morgan alluded to in her remarks about the show — as much as the walls on which art is hung. The South African artist Jane Alexander will create a new installation questioning state control and personal liberties, while a number of performance artists — including the Korean dancer and choreographer Geumhyung Jeong, the London-based Korean artist Young In Hong and the agitprop Seoul-based Okin Collective — will enact time-based works throughout the run of the exhibition. Tying it all together — or, perhaps more accurately, obscuring the exhibition in an aestheticized haze — the London-based Spanish design duo El Ultimo Grito will present a "smoke" motif that unites the overall exhibition architecture.