

Korea JoongAng Daily

When the sun sets on Frieze, Samcheong-dong comes alive with art, music and champagne

LEE JIAN lee.jian@joongang.co.kr



Artist Jimmy Robert performs "Éclipser (performance documentation)" at Barakat Contemporary in Jongno District, central Seoul, during Samcheong Night on Sept. 4. It features Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Art Practice- The Sand Grain Story - Framed Text and Photo" (1977, 1980). [BARAKAT CONTEMPORARY /JIMMY ROBERT]

Frieze Seoul may be dominating headlines this week with its blue-chip art worth billions of won by day. The fair's real fun, however, arguably begins after sundown, on the city's streets.

On Thursday's warm September evening, thousands flocked to Samcheong-dong, Seoul's old-town art quarter, for late-night art viewings, artist talks, DJ parties and free food. The crisp, fruity scent of champagne filled the late summer air. Winding alleyways lined with *hanok* (traditional Korean homes) and contemporary galleries brimmed with vibrant crowds, unusual for the normally hushed neighborhood.

Visitors came from all walks of life: locals, expats and tourists, young and old. Many sported Frieze tote bags, signaling a shared enthusiasm for art. Collectors, gallerists, curators and artists from around the world were also present for the fair, which runs through Sept. 6.



Visitors look at artwork at Frieze Seoul 2025 on Sept. 3, at Coex in Gangnam District, central Seoul. [NEWS1]

But this was hardly a pretentious affair compared to the week's lucrative daytime, which included a record-breaking sale of a 6.2 billion won (\$4.45 million) Mark Bradford piece on Wednesday. Rather, setting the tone of this evening were curious Gen Zers with burgeoning interest in art.



A visitor views Jimmy Robert's exhibition at Barakat Contemporary on Sept. 4. [LEE JIAN]

"I feel like I am traveling, like a different country," 26-year-old Kang Hye-jun, a college student, said. "I don't have a plan for the night, because honestly, I don't know too much about art, but I'm definitely ready to explore."

The evening is part of a network of "Neighborhood Nights," where galleries and museums host late-night openings during the Frieze and K1af Seoul period. Eulji, Hannam and Cheongdam also took part on Sept. 1, 2 and 3, respectively. Samcheong Night was the largest of such events, with 19 participating galleries, museums and stores.

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) kicked off the festivities at 11 a.m. with a local market featuring fresh produce, food, handicrafts and books, as well as talks by Kim Hyun-ah, head gardener of Mindful Gardeners, and architect Hyunjoon Mihn, designer of MMCA Seoul.

At 6 p.m., Kukje Gallery, one of Seoul's oldest galleries, hosted an compelling artist talk with Gala Porras-Kim and ArtReview's Chief Editor Mark Rappolt in its basement auditorium, exploring how humans assign meaning and categorize objects — and how institutions shape our perceptions. "Whatever is institutionally inherited — what once belonged to a particular category — may, for us today, mean something else entirely," Porras-Kim told the audience. "Does it still fit? Does it serve the purpose we need it to fulfill now?" Her solo exhibit, "Conditions for holding a natural form," is on view at the gallery.

By 7 p.m., food trucks appeared outside Kukje, offering churros, *tteokbokki* (spicy rice cakes) and sausages on sticks, while DJ Mogwaa set the soundtrack.

MMCA's central stage came alive at 7:30 p.m. with a concert opening by DJ Yetsuby, winner of Best Electronic Album at the 2024 Korean Music Awards. CIFIKA, a singer, producer and audiovisual artist acclaimed in Korea and abroad, followed, and the night concluded with jisokuryclub, a rising band exploring "camping rock" and "fishing pop," indie rock styles that evoke seaside holiday vibes.

Thirty-three-year-old Kim Bo-kyung and her friend Park Su-hyeon, who were dancing to jisokuryclub outside MMCA, said that there was "so much to do at Samcheong Night."

The pair had gone to the Daelim Museum earlier in the night for Petra Collins' solo exhibit. Collins is a Canadian artist, photographer and filmmaker known for her dreamlike, pastel-hued aesthetic that explores girlhood, sexuality and the complexities of feminine identity in contemporary culture, for which she collaborated with a slew of pop stars like NewJeans and Olivia Rodrigo. "That was our one must-see exhibition. Now we are just enjoying this evening's vibe."

At Hakgojae, another historic gallery in the neighborhood, curators chatted with visitors over glasses of whiskey, enthusiastically discussing the gallery's featured artist, the renowned Korean contemporary painter Kim Whanki (1913-1974), in slightly meandering but intellectually stimulating conversations.

Younger galleries hosting shows by up-and-coming artists were filled with frenzy by eager fans. Visual artist Yeon Yeo-in, for instance, was present at DIA Contemporary gallery, personally guiding visitors through her works, explaining her process and taking photos with fans.

PKM Gallery garnered buzz with makgeolli ice cream, in collaboration with the bar-slash-cafe Lick Sip in Yongsan District, known for its celebrity drop-ins.

Barakat Contemporary, a branch of Barakat Gallery also in London, Los Angeles and Hong Kong, hosted live performances at 8 p.m. by Jimmy Robert, a multidisciplinary artist whose poetic, boundary-defying practice blends performance, photography and sculpture to explore identity, queerness and the human body.

"I'm a huge art buff and I love how accessible all the art is in Seoul this week," said 23-year-old Lara Meier from Switzerland, who was exiting the gallery after viewing Robert's performance. "That show was amazing."

A few blocks south, Art Sonje Center hosted a pole dancing performance, accompanied by a live pianist — part of its female and queer group exhibit "off-site 2: Eleven Episodes."

"I have never seen pole dancing before, nor did I expect to this evening, but that was so beautiful," said Lee Kyung-min, 55. "I'm not sure if I understood the intention of the show correctly or fully, but that performance made me feel something, maybe like passion or liberation."

Crowds swelled exponentially as the night deepened. Gallery Hyundai arguably drew the largest gathering — several thousand people — at 10 p.m. for an hour-long master shaman ritual, known as gut, in tribute to Korea's pioneering video artist Nam June Paik (1932–2006).

In 1990, Paik, who frequently incorporated shamanistic elements into his work, presented a gut-style performance titled "A Pas de Loup: De Séoul à Budapest" in Gallery Hyundai's same courtyard, commemorating his fellow German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986). The event came to be recognized as a historic encounter between Korea's traditional shamanism and avant-garde contemporary art.

He is documented writing: "In medieval theology, medium meant a means of communication with God — in other words, mediation. The etymology of gut comes from the Mongolian word for 'soul (spirit itself),' so medium and gut are almost the same word."

The evening's Daedong-gut — Bisugeori (Jaktdu-gut) ritual, traditionally performed at village or national levels, prays for communal well-being, prosperity, harmony, safety and peace.

It attracted several thousand spectators outside the gallery, prompting staff to manage safety and crowd control. Aside from a few broken glasses, the event passed smoothly, leaving an indelible mark on the night's festivities.