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Frieze Los Angeles Opens Amid Attention to Asian Artists

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Meeson Pae, “Seep,” 2024. The artist’s work, shown at Frieze Los Angeles, evokes the body as sensual architecture and machine.

Last year, Meeson Pae, a Korean American multidisciplinary artist, walked through the Frieze Los Angeles art fair and thought, “One day, I hope to be here.”

This year, she will be, in the booth presented by the gallerist Anat Ebgi at the fair, at the Santa Monica Airport, which opens to V.I.P.’s on Thursday and to the public on Friday.

Pae is just one of the dozens of Asian artists, gallerists, curators and collectors in Los Angeles who over the last few years have been gaining recognition and attention from the city’s galleries, museums and the marketplace. The art world’s recent emphasis on equity and inclusion is moving beyond a focus on Black and Latino contributions to include Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, who have a long history in the city but until recently have tended to be left out of any discussion of the art market, and may have experienced discrimination — even racist incidents — during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Los Angeles, Asian Americans represent the third largest racial group, behind Latinos and whites. And California’s Asian American and Pacific Islander population grew by 25 percent over the past decade, faster than any other ethnic group in the state.

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Meeson Pae

This heightened sensitivity to inclusion has been making its way into the Los Angeles art world. Of the 98 galleries in Frieze Los Angeles this year, seven are from Asia — up from only two in 2022. Three are participating for the first time.

And several U.S. galleries are highlighting Asian artists, including Lehmann Maupin, which will show Kim Yun Shin, the octogenarian Korean sculptor who just joined the gallery. Rachel Uffner will feature the mystical landscapes of Erica Mao, a Taiwanese American artist; and the Tina Kim gallery will show Jennifer Tee, a Chinese-Indonesian Dutch artist.

Art from Asia has also become an integral part of the program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) over the last 20 years, one of many institutions increasingly highlighting shows of work from Japan, China and Korea with patrons' support.

But many Asian artists say they just want to be known and recognized for their work, not their ethnicity. Greg Ito, a fourth-generation Japanese American artist, whose grandparents met in an American internment camp, was born in Los Angeles. He said his work "is not about the Japanese American experience," but instead explores universal themes such as love and loss.

"Do I want my art to be about me being Asian? No," added Ito, who has a solo show opening at Ebgi's New York gallery in March. "It's more about the current state of the human condition."