
SeMA

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Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018

September 6 - November 18, 2018

Opening: September 5

Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA)

61 Deoksugung-gil, Jung-gu
Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA)
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☐ Introduction: *Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018*

The 10th edition of *Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018* (formerly SeMA Biennale: *Mediacity Seoul*) will be held for 74 days, from September 6th to November 18th, 2018. Hosted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and organized by the Seoul Museum of Art, the biennale has become established as one of the most representative contemporary art events since its first edition held in 2000. Hosted every even-numbered year, it reflects Seoul as a central city for media art and technology, focusing on the diversity of artistic forms that expand our notion of media.

The 10th edition of the biennale has diverged from the previous structure of appointing a singular artistic director and has invited professionals from different fields (marked below as 'the Collective') to create a discursive public sphere. The biennale includes not only intellectuals from a broad range of fields such as art, economy, environment, politics, society and technology, but also aims for an exhibition that is open to the general public. In its attempt to maximize people's access to culture and art, it aims to provide opportunities for

a new social shift.

The Collective that will direct and curate *Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018* consists of the following members: Hyo-joon Choi, the director of SeMA; Gibin Hong, the director of the Global Political Economy Institute; Daul Jang, Senior Climate and Energy Campaigner at Greenpeace; Jangun Kim, independent curator; Namsoo Kim, dance critic and Lim Kyung Yong, the owner of The Book Society (in alphabetical order). These six people were nominated by SeMA and selected by a selection committee after thorough discussion and review. Based on close collaboration, the Collective is guiding the joint curatorial process of the Biennale.

The 10th edition of the Biennale contemplates the fundamental questions regarding the new values that humanity must pursue under the current social climate of surging uncertainty and doubt. At the same time, based on the exchanges and interdisciplinarity stimulated by contemporary art, this year's biennale aims to present the social role and function of art as a medium of communication, overcoming its traditional exclusively elitist status.

□ A collective intellect of six

Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018 is undertaking a new experiment engaging the collective intellect of a co-directorship. To highlight the biennale as a field that produces meanings through the sharing of common subjects and keywords as well as the exploration of differences, the Collective, consisting of six professionals from different fields, are introducing through this year's biennale the conditions of life and creative efforts that are generated by contemporary social culture. The "new agents" invited to this year's biennale consist not only of contemporary artists but also of activists, curators and researchers, so the biennale can encompass the diversity of their practices and stories.

To break through the limitations of contemporary art exhibitions, this year's biennale is focusing on expanded forms of intellect and practice such as *symposia* camps, the commons and *agora*. By this, it refrains from exhibitions that are realized through scattered curatorial chapters and typically composed

of subtopics and instead motivates the realization of *communitas*, where differences intertwine within the biennale's voice or gestures. *Praxis*, as defined by Aristotle, refers to a dynamic state of life where the goal is the substantial process of action, motivated by appreciation for and pleasure in the action itself. We see the process of making this year's biennale as an act of discovering "new practitioners/agents." And during this process, we intend to question the possible conditions of a biennale and, going one step further, of art and life focused on the realization and satisfaction of the self.

A "discussion" held for the purpose of obtaining a common result is a highly political and public matter, while also being a highly intimate affair. Therefore, this biennale aspires for the art museum, as a space where the public and the private intersect, to operate as a genuine "field of discussion," where the problems of individual and the whole can be exposed simultaneously.

□ *A Good Life: the subject matter of the 10th Seoul Mediacity Biennale*

Philosopher Ernst Bloch proposed that *noch nicht* (not yet) is the principle of human hope. He asserted that the unreachable and the unknown - like a vanishing point that can never be approached - is the impetus of the hope that drives us toward future. Our gaze is oriented toward something that should appear, that seems to be about to appear but has yet to appear. This principle could be rephrased as the principle of the "already visible." However, because 'it' is yet to be realized, the less clearly we can see it, the more it traps our gaze, making it impossible for us to be detached from this invisible future. This discrepancy is exactly the place where we can intervene, in the sense that we can mediate the shift from the "yet to be" real to the "already visible" by capturing the images we imagine. This edition of the *Seoul Mediacity Biennale* centers the role of art on mediating this shift. In other words, we will be reinterpreting contemporary life through interdisciplinary collaborations that go beyond the generic definition of 'art' while imagining together the "yet to be realized but already visible" creative and future-oriented alternative values as suggested by different individuals and collectives.

Since the global financial crisis in 2008, a new expression has emerged in the

financial market: “the new normal.” This term was created to describe socio-economical changes, but we could consider it in broader terms as an inclusive notion that can be applied to the various crises that exist in the multilayered dimensions surrounding us in the current era. This is because questions have accumulated on a fundamental level about the reality and legitimacy of what was once considered normative reality. Too much time has passed already with these problems remaining unsolved within the existing orders. Now these crises have become a reality that is no longer foreign to us as we both consciously and unconsciously adapt ourselves and our lives to those realities.

In other words, our current life continues under new norms in every part of the globe. Hence, now is the time to examine the possibility of new orders instead of analyzing the crisis of old orders. In contrast to the capital or financial market, the majority of the “new normal” we should focus on is up to us to define and cultivate.

As described symbolically by Albert Camus’ posthumous work *The First Man*, humankind has been imagining a new form of human being since the later part of the past century. The imagining of this new form of human being has unfolded in infinitely diverse directions, encompassing subjects such as the human body, different identities guided by gender politics, relation to the other or to nature, the five senses and human perception of time and space as well as metaphysical and religious exploration of the universe and eternity.

We can see this phenomenon as a symptom of the imminent transformation to another form of human after the industrial evolution, deviating from the previous model of the humanistic perspective which was derived from the 16th century renaissance era. To avoid the dystopia depicted in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, we need to actively imagine and interpret the new form of human. A new form of human will only be possible under the premise of a concrete person who dreams of a “good life” in the shifting world and yearns for the realization of it, without surrendering to nihilistic imagination.

For thousands of years, regardless of place and culture, the simple notion of a

“good life” has been the most crucial point of reference for humankind in establishing its being. The specific content of a good life differs according to elements such as time, space and culture. Yet on the other hand, in those countless variations of the form of a good life there are certainly common denominators to be found. *Eudonomia*, or the flourishing life that develops through awakening the desires and abilities dormant in the human body and mind, could be named as the first denominator. The second common denominator then is the fact that exploration based on endless discussions is necessary to grasp what a good life can mean to an individual. *Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018* aims to explore and discuss with the multitude what this notion of a “good life”, which is both an eternal compass and an ever-changing chameleon, could mean for us in these times.

April 2018

Members of Collective, *Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2018*