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Saving memories in Gwangju

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We leave traces of our lives everyday, for instance by taking photos of the ones we love, scribbling down notes or writing e-mails. But seldom do we ever wonder about the reasons behind our actions or worry about what is going to happen once we forget about our creations.



Massimiliano Gioni, artistic director of Gwangju Biennale 2010. (Gwangju Biennale)

Living under a barrage of images, writing, objects and all sorts of data stored in numerous gadgets today, perhaps now is a good time to stop and think.

Two art shows currently underway in Gwangju, South Jeolla Province, ponder the question in different ways. One investigates the relationship between images and people and the other focuses on digital data and how to preserve it.

Gwangju Biennale

The 8th Gwangju Biennale, which kicked off its 66-day run, last Friday, is less

Life & Style



Most people have headaches from time to time. But if you have a long-lasting head



Kim, a 40-year-old office worker, panicked last week when she heard the news that

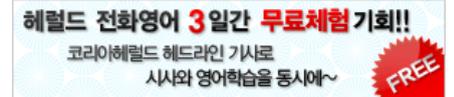


MINNEAPOLIS Dr. Marcus Thygeson once wrote his patients countless prescriptions f

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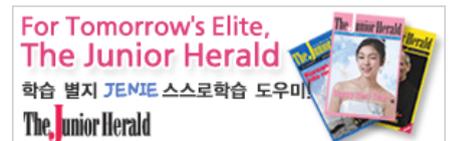
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spectacular and whimsical than previous editions. More serious and profound instead, this year's event aims to retrace at least "10,000 Lives" as its title reads.



Visitors look around "The Teddy Bear Project" by Ydessa Hendeles at Gwangju Biennale 2010. (Yonhap News)

The title is borrowed from "Maninbo" or "10,000 Lives" the 30-volume epic poem by Korean [writer](#) Ko Un. While he was in prison for his participation in the 1980 democracy [movement](#), Ko wrote over 4,000 poems, describing every person he had ever met -- personally or indirectly -- through literature.

"[Images](#) are children of nostalgia. We make them because we miss somebody. This is an exhibition about losing somebody and the struggle of not wanting to let go and wanting to fight time," Massimiliano Gioni, artistic director of the biennale, told the press last week.

"The exhibition unfolds as a gallery of portraits or as a family [album](#). Encompassing a diverse range of media, 10,000 Lives presents a series of case studies that explore our love for images and our need to create substitutes, effigies and stand-ins for ourselves and our loved ones," said Gioni.

The show features a wide range of exhibits including historical works and cultural artifacts, photos and paintings and sculptures and installations. Over 130 artists from 30 countries are represented, spanning around 110 years of history since 1901. The majority of the exhibits are photographic.

"For more than one hundred years, photography has been the image making technology, so it is only natural that it features so prominently in the show. Then again -- given the dramatic changes brought about by digital technologies -- the exhibition could be read, indirectly, as a sort of a requiem for photography and particularly for that kind of mechanized view of [identity](#) and reality that traditional photography promoted," said Gioni.

Gwangju Biennale Hall, the main venue, branches off into five separate galleries.

The first gallery shows works that question and create photographic representations. Peter Fischli and David Weiss aligned some 3,000 photos they took over a 15-year period on a 27 meter-long table while Franco Vaccari invites visitors to take snap shots at an instant photo booth he [installed](#).



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Visitors look at "Visible World" by Peter Fischli and David Weiss at Gwangju Biennale 2010. (Park Min-young/ The Korea Herald)

The second gallery analyzes how visual experiences are inscribed in our eyes and bodies. One notable exhibit is Artur Zmijewski's video in which blind people are filmed, painting the world as they experience it.

The third gallery begins with a room full of some 100 life-sized sculptures of [Chinese](#) people, depicting the exploitation of the peasant farmers at the hands of a wealthy landowner. The work, "Rent Collection Courtyard" by Zhao Shutong, Wang Guanyi and The Rent Collection Courtyard Collective, is being exhibited outside of [China](#) for the first time.

The section then moves on, exploring the ways images are used to recreate myths, heroes and martyrs.

Do not be surprised to find a person painfully rolling on the floor in the fourth gallery. It is a performance titled "Instead of Allowing Some Things to Rise Up to your Face, Dancing and Bruce and Dan and other Things" by Tino Sehgal, one of the most famous contemporary performance artists.

Moving in slow motion, the performer seems to be in [extreme](#) pain but is actually reenacting dance-like gestures from early videos by Bruce Nauman and Dan Granham. As usual, it is hard to take your eyes off Sehgal's somewhat spooky yet intriguing work.

The final gallery sheds light on the structures of cinema and television. Park Tae-kyu, the only remaining painter of movie posters in Gwangju, displays large hand-painted versions of Korean films.

Take the time to visit the other two main venues of the biennale -- Gwangju Museum of Art and Gwangju Folk Museum -- which are all situated within a 10 minute walk of the Biennale Hall.

They showcase interesting pieces too, including "One Year Performance" by Tehching Hsieh in Gwangju Museum of Art. The Taiwanese artist spent one year punching a time clock every hour of every day before taking his photo. His head was shaved clean in April 1980, when he started, but his hair had grown long by April 1981 when he finished the [project](#).

Gwangju Biennale runs through Nov. 7 at Gwangju Biennale Hall, Gwangju Museum of Art, Gwangju Folk Museum, Folklore Education [Center](#) and Yangdong Traditional Market in Gwangju, South Jeolla Province. [Tickets](#) range from 1,000 won to 14,000 won. Opening hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, call (062) 608-4114 or visit [www.gb.or.kr](#).

Kunsthalle Gwangju

If Gwangju Biennale organized the memories of our past, Kunsthalle Gwangju gears up to save those of the future.

Kunsthalle Gwangju opened its doors Tuesday in the heart of Gwangju near the old provincial hall. It is hard to miss the building, constructed with stacks of cargo containers.





Kunsthalle Gwangju Kunsthalle Gwangju

It is the second branch of Platoon Kunsthalle -- a [private](#) organization based in Berlin -- in Korea. The first one in Cheongdam-dong has become one of the hottest spots to hang out in the Gangnam area, among artists and those who enjoy art and culture, since its [opening](#) in April 2009.

Inside the rigid metal walls, Kunsthalle, which means "art hall" in German, is very kaleidoscopic, holding various exhibitions and cultural events, flea markets, artists' residency [programs](#) and parties in the bar.

But Kunsthalle Gwangju, which opened in collaboration with the Ministry of [Culture](#), Sports and [Tourism](#) and the Hub City of Asian Culture, plays another important role: It is a preview of the Asian Culture Complex, opening in 2014.

"Similar to the concept of Kunsthalle, ACC also aims to present international contemporary artists who are willing to interact with Gwangju citizens. The Culture Ministry contacted us after seeing the Kunsthalle in Seoul. We are very open to projects that develop and introduce the unknown or subcultures. We realized Gwangju's potential to become a cultural city and thought this would be a fun project, so we started working together with the Culture Ministry on building the specific concepts last October," said Kim Illa, public relations officer at Kunsthalle.

Once ACC is built in 2014, Kunsthalle Gwangju will move elsewhere.

"The good thing about a building made of cargo containers is that it is movable. It has not been confirmed yet where it will be headed. It could be to someplace in Gwangju or maybe to another city," said Kim.

Etoy, an international artist [group](#) based in Zurich, are in charge of the opening exhibition. After many years of pushing the boundaries of art since 1994, etoy recently turned itself into a registered shareholder company -- etoy.CORPORATION -- which invests in and produces art.

"Etoy does not believe in one genius artist. We believe in collaboration work. We have programmers, artists. We need lots of different know-how. Anyone can be an etoy agent too, either by investing money or buying shares. We don't sell single art objects, so you cannot buy our creations but you can become a part of it by investing," Monorom, a board member of etoy, told The Korea Herald.

This is the first time that most of etoy's major works have been displayed at the same time in the same venue. Just about everything orange inside Kunsthalle Gwangju is by etoy. Including gambling machines and vending machines, etoy's works may remind you more of a game arcade than an art show.

"We try to persuade customers to open their eyes, twist values and change minds. How? That depends on your openness. You have to be open to enjoy art," said Monorom.

Most of the art -- including "Tamatar," an installation consisting of 16 white balls containing information about individuals, which roll around interacting with one another and with people -- belongs to etoy's recent "[Mission](#) Eternity" project.



"TAMATAR" by etoy at Kunsthalle Gwangju (Kunsthalle Gwangju)

The project addresses issues that are still unsolved in the digital world we live

The project addresses issues that are still unresolved in the digital world we live in, such as finding a way to collect and secure all the data we produce during our lives, both online and offline.

“We do not believe in paintings. At the time you have data, media and video. What will happen to data after we die? We try to find ways to save data for the next generation,” said Monorom.

“Each museum has this problem of how to preserve data and make sure it doesn’t get lost. Looking back at human culture and how they preserved memories in the past, however, is usually boring. Monuments and tombs are not adequate for today. We use the technology we have now to create culture and we should use it to save people’s memories,” added Pol, an etoy agent.

Is it a simple coincidence that two of the biggest shows in Gwangju both touch on the issues of remembering and saving the traces of ourselves and the ones we love?

“It is a very imminent problem. We use Facebook, Twitter, online messengers everyday and those trigger even more emotions than before. Imagine a dead friend logging in. Somebody could have used your friend’s [computer](#) and logged in, but seeing your friend’s name, emotions will flow out. I think art has to question today’s problems,” said Pol.

“Leaving Reality Behind...” by etoy runs through Nov. 7 at Kunsthalle Gwangju in Dong-gu, Gwangju. Admission is free. For more information, call (062) 236-0730 or visit www.kunsthalle-gwangju.com.

To get to Gwangju from Seoul, take the KTX from Yongsan station. It takes about three hours. Flights from Gimpo Airport to Gwangju Airport take approximately 30 minutes.

By Park Min-young (claire@heraldm.com)

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