

Nathan Hrdlicka

Professor Jennie Hirsh

August 31, 2024

Korea at the Venice Biennial

2024 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennial.

Inaugurated in 1995, it is the last new pavilion in the Giardini. Prior to 1995, Korea participated in the Biennial four times between 1986 and 1993 in rented spaces outside of the greater Venice and at the Arsenale. These spaces had a number of issues which led to an attempt by Korea to receive a space in the Giardini. Korea was denied and waitlisted alongside twenty other countries also fighting for the space.¹

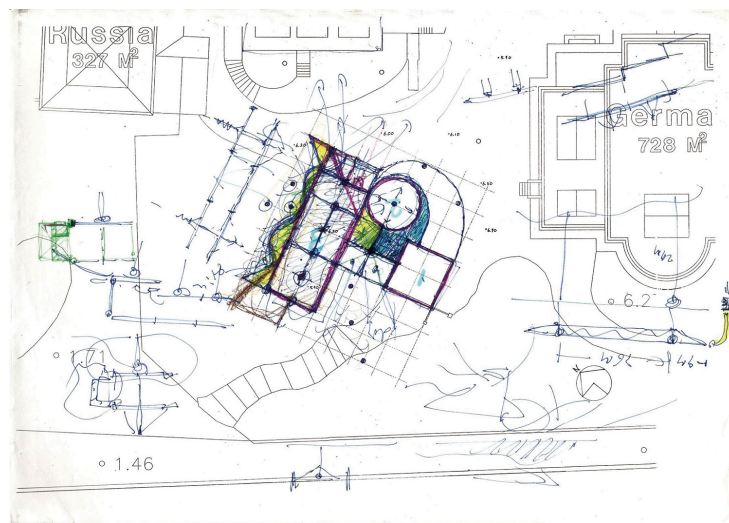


Figure 1. Preliminary blueprints of the Korean Pavilion.²

Artist Nam June Paik turned the tide in Korea's fight for its own pavilion. Paik participated in the 1993 Biennial in the German Pavilion, and won a golden lion award. Paik

¹ Kyoung-yun Ho, Seok Chul Kim, Franco Mancuso, Ernesta Serena, et al, *The Last Pavillion: The Archival Publication of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale*, Arts Council Korea, April 18, 2024, 18, ISBN 978-89-6583-124-2.

² Jia Kim. "30 Years of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and Beyond," *SPACE* January 2024, no. 674, https://vmospace.com/eng/report/report_view.html?base_seq=Mjg1Ng==#:~:text=The%20Korean%20Pavilion%20at%20the%20Venice%20Biennale%20designed%20by%20architect,architecture%20exhibitions%20have%20been%20held.

used this attention to highlight Korean artists and figures in advocacy for the creation of a Korean Pavilion.³ Paik argued that the potential Korean Pavilion could be shared by both North and South Korea as a sign of political harmony. Participation in the Biennial reflected Korea's urge to globalize and develop a more positive political image. The plan, approval, and construction of the pavilion took under two years due to the success of Paik's advocacy.⁴

The Korean Pavilion was designed by Kim Seok Chul and Franco Mancuso and originally was planned to be underground, but was impossible due to lack of space and rare trees within the Giardini. Instead, the pavilion uses glass and metal primarily, it has three distinct exhibition spaces (a cube, a semicircle, and cuboid,) and includes outdoor rooftop access. Its design has allowed for artists to transform the space in numerous ways throughout their participation in the Biennial.



Figure 2. An installation view of the Korean Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennial.

At the 2024 Biennial artist Koo Jeong A occupies the Korean Pavilion with their exhibition *Odorama Cities*, a survey of the smells that individuals associate with Korea. Koo

³ Ho et al, *The Last Pavillion: The Archival Publication of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale*, 18-20.

⁴ Ho et al, *The Last Pavillion: The Archival Publication of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale*, 18-22.

created a survey asking “What is your scent memory of Korea?” This question manifests into artwork with the creation of sixteen different fragrances on display in the Korean Pavilion and one commercial fragrance. Koo’s other artistic explorations of immaterialism and weightlessness manifest in wooden-infinity symbol bench and flooring installations as well as two mobius-strip sculptures. Inside the pavilion, a floating bronze figure that defuses scents is found.⁵

Additionally featured is *Every Island is a Mountain*, a collateral event that celebrates the 30th anniversary of Korea’s inauguration into the Venice Biennial. This collateral event at Palazzo Malta, near Arsenale, includes over 80 artworks from 36 artists and collectives who were previously featured in the Korean Pavilion. This exhibition celebrates and reflects on the role of the Korean Pavillion in the Venice Biennial and the links between the artists and artworks featured over the years of its existence.⁶ 2024 is a very celebratory year for the achievements of Korea and Korean artists within the Venice Biennial. *Odorama Cities* and *Every Island is a Mountain* celebrate the culture, art, smells, and impact of Korea.

⁵ “KOO JEONG A ODORAMA CITIES,” Korean Pavilion, Accessed August 31, 2024.
<https://www.korean-pavilion.or.kr/en/exhibition.html>.

⁶ “Every Island is a Mountain,” Hyundai Artlab, Accessed August 31, 2024.
<https://artlab.hyundai.com/project/every-island-is-a-mountain>.

Bibliography

“Every Island is a Mountain 19.4 – 8.9, 2024 Palazzo Malta – Ordine di Malta.” Venice

Biennial. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.venicebiennale.kr/en/about>.

Ho, Kyoung-yun, Seok Chul Kim, Franco Mancuso, Ernesta Serena, et al. *The Last Pavillion:*

The Archival Publication of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Arts Council

Korea, April 18, 2024. ISBN 978-89-6583-124-2.

Hyundai Artlab. “Every Island is a Mountain.” Accessed August 31, 2024.

<https://artlab.hyundai.com/project/every-island-is-a-mountain>.

Kim, Jia. “30 Years of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and Beyond.” *SPACE*

January 2024, no. 674.

https://vmSPACE.com/eng/report/report_view.html?base_seq=Mjg1Ng==#:~:text=The%20Korean%20Pavilion%20at%20the%20Venice%20Biennale%20designed%20by%20architect,architecture%20exhibitions%20have%20been%20held.

Korean Pavilion. “KOO JEONG A ODORAMA CITIES.” Accessed August 31, 2024.

<https://www.korean-pavilion.or.kr/en/exhibition.html>.

Park, Yuna. “Korean art gets spotlight at Venice Biennale 2024.” *The Korea Herald*. April 18,

2024. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20240418050680>.