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MMCA names 4 finalists for Korea Artist Prize 2026

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From left are four finalists selected for Korea Artist Prize 2026: Lee Hai Min Sun, Lee Jung-woo, Jeon Hyun-sun and Hong Jin-hwon. Courtesy of MMCA

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) has unveiled the four finalists for this year's Korea Artist Prize: Lee Hai Min Sun, Hong Jin-hwon, Lee Jung-woo and Jeon Hyun-sun.

Established in 2012, the annual prize, co-organized by the MMCA and the SBS Foundation, has championed promising and mid-career creatives who offer new perspectives on contemporary Korean art.

Each year, four individuals or collectives are short-listed, with each finalist receiving 50 million won (\$34,000) to develop new works for a dedicated exhibition.

Through painting, Lee Hai Min Sun looks closely at everyday objects and reads in them the fragile presence of individuals. Her canvases dwell on figures and forms that seem to be on the verge of disappearance yet persistently remain at the margins.

Hong is drawn to “intervening” in the power relations embedded in images. Working with photography, film and web programming, he tracks how scenes of protests and public gatherings are flattened into images.

Lee Jung-woo turns to glitches within technological systems. In his latest work, he feeds fragments of lost historical archives into generative artificial intelligence, revealing how technology reconstructs or distorts the past.

Jeon investigates how two-dimensional paintings behave once they enter a space. Her new work is presented like a climbing surface, with images broken into sections that overlap and reassemble.

This year’s jury comprises Emma Enderby, director of Berlin’s KW Institute for Contemporary Art; Charmaine Toh, senior curator at Tate; Ho Tzu Nyen, artistic director of the 16th Gwangju Biennale; art critic Jung Hyun; Kim Ji-yeon, director of the alternative space D/P; MMCA Director Kim Sung-hee; and MMCA Curator Park Deok-sun.

The exhibition, “Korea Artist Prize 2026,” is slated to run from July 24 to Dec. 6. The final winner will be announced in October and receive an additional 10 million won in prize money.