

Interview: Andrei Jecza for Maeil Business Newspaper on Jecza Gallery's Debut at Art OnO Seoul

Why did you choose Korea's Art OnO first in Asia? Did the Korean culture wave influence your decision?

I have to admit that I have always been fascinated by the Korean culture, cinema and contemporary art scene, with many big galleries opening new spaces in Seoul. Discussing this possibility with JaeMyung Noh to make our Asian debut with Art OnO made this idea become reality and I am very much looking forward to experiencing the Korean art market in April.

As far as I know, you are going to represent Genti Korini, Paul Robas, Iosif Kiraly in the Seoul art fair. Can you tell me the reason why you chose them?

Indeed our initial intention was to focus only on three artists, but since we have never been to Korea or Asia in general to an art fair, we decided to widen the scope and also include works by Marius Bercea, Radu Oreian, Tincuta Marin and Laurian Popa. Yes it is a large selection of works, but we also have a very vibrant and diversified portfolio spanning from historical artists like Iosif Kiraly whose work we managed to place with the MoMA in New York last year; to very young artists like Paul Robas or Tincuta Marin. There is a reason for each artist we selected: on one hand we wanted to best display our diversified portfolio of artists focused in different mediums from photography (Iosif Kiraly) to sculpture and painting (Tincuta Marin, Marius Bercea, Radu Oreian, Paul Robas, Laurian Popa, Genti Korini); on the other hand we have selected artists with an international collector base, like Marius Bercea who is part of Space K Museum in Seoul; Radu Oreian who has been already exhibited in Seoul by his Milanese and New York galleries or Genti Korini who is representing Albania this year at the Venice Biennale. We have also asked for advice from JaeMyung Noh as he is a very important and relevant voice in the Korean contemporary art scene, and he helped us refine our selection.

Contemporary Eastern European art feels somewhat unfamiliar to the Korean art scene. How do you plan to approach it?

You are right, but I see common grounds which brings artists vision somehow closer together as one can perceive at first glance. In the past ten years there are a few similarities which makes us feel very close in a way. So artist expressions may also feel familiar. As there was in the 1960s and 1970s a similarity between Eastern Europe and Latin America, as on a cultural and political level many situations have been aligned due to communism and the essay of artist to escape those constraints to art and free speech.

I feel there is a common ground now especially between Romania and South Korea when it comes to the new cinematographic wave. There is a common fascination for the "cinematographic" both in art, literature, music and film... the new Romanian Wave of movies which conquered the world of cinema finds its echoes in the Korean film world or viceversa, both in subject matter and aesthetics. As does contemporary art capturing in many cases this clash between tradition and future. I see many similarities between our proposal and the Korean art scene, which I hope will be a great surprise discovery for the Korean art lovers and collectors too.

What is the current status of Eastern European contemporary art in the art world, and how vibrant is its scene?

East Europe due to its isolation for five decades from the western world (due to the Iron Curtain), always was fascinating for the art world. There are many gems, "new" artists who find their so called recognition now with 80 or 90 years old, artists like Constantin Flondor, Paul Neagu, Geta Bratescu etc and there are also these amazing classical schools of painting, which still fascinate the world, artists who studied in Cluj, for example like Marius Bercea, Tincuta Marin or Genti Korini. The scene itself in Romania is just starting and very vibrant. We have opened our second space in Bucharest after Timisoara, last year and will open a third new gallery in Bucharest next month. There is a growing number of collectors, new galleries, new museums and private institutions, amazing artists... we also co-founded a new art fair in Bucharest which attracts many new collectors every year, called RAD Art Fair. My hometown Timisoara, in the west of Romania, also hosts one of the most important art biennials in the region called Art Encounters Biennial.

Has the Russia-Ukraine war affected Eastern European contemporary art? What impact do you think the current Iran war will have?

Well... we tried to help as much as we could in the beginning of the war, offering artists who were fleeing the war a chance to continue their work in Romania, as Ukraine is on our border. Unfortunately the war became part of our new normality... it is a tragedy! We do not feel it so much in Timisoara or Bucharest, but we feel the political tension which did affect the market at its beginning, hence people did not know what comes next, but we adapted. As for the art market we became aware of many fascinating artists who escaped and became important voices for truth and the power of art in times of war on a global level like Nikita Kadan for example. We live in times where artists, gallerists and collectors adapt each day to a new reality. I feel art has the great mission and power to influence such moments in history to turn towards the good in life. I really hope we can surpass these troubled times through art.

Please explain the gallery's history, tradition, and unique strengths.

I consider myself a very lucky and fortunate man. I grew up in a family where my father was an important Romanian-Hungarian sculptor, Peter Jecza and my mother an art entrepreneur. I grew up surrounded by art. Since my childhood my parents hosted events and exhibitions at our house, which in the year 2000 became one of the first art foundations in Romania - Jecza Foundation. I started my gallery in 2011 representing the friends of my father, artists like Constantin Flondor, Paul Neagu, Roman Cotosman, Iosif Kiraly, Molnar Zoltan etc. Artists who were unknown to the West due to the communist regime in Romania and started to be very sought after and outstanding hence they have pioneered conceptual and experimental art forms in the 1960s and 1970s; but I always also stayed true to my peers, my friends, the artists of my generation. So the display at Art Ono shows these double sharpen sword of our gallery, we both represent historical artists like Iosif Kiraly, but also represent mid-career artists like Marius Bercea alongside very young artists like Paul Robas, Laurian Popa, Radu Oreian, Genti Korini or Tincuta Marin. I think this duality makes us unique and stand out.

How should one understand the characteristics of modern art in Eastern Europe at the beginner level?

East European artists, Romanians in our case, have always been fascinated by history and geopolitical experiences. Becoming a witness in the front lines of reality. East European artists have witnessed communism and the overthrow of communism, the 1989 Revolution for those born before, but also the change of regimes for the younger artists... both very dramatic experiences which made them find "solutions" through art. Each develops its own language, its vocabulary, and learns to speak in a global world with its own dialect. I am fascinated to discover their unique languages and ways to express the reality around us and makes us think and question this reality.

Could you tell us about your personal background and your passion for the art world?

My name is Andrei Jecza, I am the founder of the Jecza Galleries. I discovered my love for art at home, at Jecza Foundation's events, during studio visits and art travels - which were very unusual for a young child to visit that many museums - nevertheless since I was 14 years old I wanted to become an art dealer, and with 21 I started my first contemporary art related projects. First a few pop-up exhibitions, followed by an art newspaper for 2 years and then I opened our first serious space in Timisoara in 2011. I am sincerely grateful for my father, my mother and my wife who inspire me every day. I studied photography, history of fine arts, made a master of entrepreneurship and a second master for Art Business in London at Sotheby's Institute of Art. Now we are ready to open our third space in Romania and ready for new challenges. We are very happy to start our Asian presence in Seoul at ArtOnO. Special thanks to JaeMyung Noh for his generous invitation to participate which allows us to make our Asian debut in style surrounded by incredible colleagues from all around the world.