

Postcards From the Biennale

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His paintings travel, but Ha Chong-hyun stays in Korea; Anselm Kiefer melds art and sculpture at the Doges Palace.



Works by the Korean artist Ha Chong-hyun at the Palazetto Tito include, from left to right: “Conjunction 22-01” (2022); “Conjunction 02-38(B)” (2002); “Conjunction 21-07” (2021). Credit...Sebastiano Pellion di Persano, via Kukje Gallery

VENICE — After a delay, this city is once again filled with the art class — the pavilions are full, and the parties are thrumming. But the coronavirus is still creating problems. Ha Chong-hyun, a revered Korean artist and exponent of Dansaekhwa or monochrome (single-color) painting, 86, was set to toast the opening of a survey of his work this week at the Palazzetto Tito, but both he and his wife, Park Mi-ja, tested positive and stayed home.

On Wednesday evening, the show’s curator, Sunjung Kim, was pushing ahead, welcoming guests to the exhibition (the artist’s eldest son, Ha Yun, whose birth inspired a 1967 piece on view, would be on hand the next day). There are a bounty of Ha’s trademark works, rough and elegant pictures he made by pushing oil paint through hemp cloth, as well as brooding early abstractions he treated with flames and some covered with barbed wire or springs. His recent work has featured radiant colors, and a brand-new one — shimmering with blue and white marks, a kind of waterfall — was barely dry.



Ha Chong-hyun, a master of Dansaekhwa or monochrome painting, came down with Covid-19 and stayed back in Korea.

Credit...Sang Tae Kim, via Kukje Gallery

“The Biennale always shows new things, but I wanted to do a retrospective,” Kim said, explaining that her aim is for people to understand how Ha “shows Korean contemporary art changing and growing, along with our economic development.” As it happens, she came across his art in a small space in the 1993 Biennale (back before the country had a permanent Venice pavilion). Now his work has an exhibition hall to itself, and she is hoping he will get to see it later in its run. ANDREW RUSSETH

In the Footsteps of the Doges

To get to the Anselm Kiefer exhibition at the Palazzo Ducale in Piazza San Marco, you have to wend your way past the grand courtyard, up the stone staircases where the Doges themselves once tread, through the Great Council's chamber with Tintoretto's *Il Paradiso* beaming down and still then through a narrow doorway. It is only there that you encounter the monumental works of this exciting show.

Here, Kiefer's floor-to-ceiling paintings — in 14 parts, total — cover every wall of the Sala dello Scurtino. A second work with the same title, a painting in seven parts, is installed as an apse in an adjacent room.



Installation view of Anselm Kiefer's massive "Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce (Andrea Emo)" from 2022. Credit...Anselm Kiefer; via Gagosian and Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia



Loosely translated, the title is: "These writings, when burned, will finally cast a little light." The works feature the markings of Venice itself. Credit...Anselm Kiefer; via Gagolian and Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia

The exhibition, which coincides with the Biennale, is part of a celebration for the 1600th anniversary of the founding of Venice. Like so much of Kiefer's work, the past is key. There are familiar motifs: the experience of destruction, the haunting empty landscapes, empty clothes. And the mix of materials — from acrylic and oil to resin, steel, zinc, lead, metal wire, gold leaf, cauterized wood, fabric, earth, straw, rope, paper and charcoal, as well as shoes and burned books — melds art and sculpture.

But look even closer and you start to see the impressions of this city: an outline of an angel, the winged lion of St. Mark, the lapping water of the Grand Canal, the Gothic architecture of the palace itself.

The title of the work is from the writings of the Venetian philosopher Andrea Emo: "Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce," loosely translated as, "These writings, when burned, will finally cast a little light."

It is impossible not to think about the past as you gaze up at where the German artist's canvases meet the ceilings, with the golden tones from those centuries-old paintings reflected in the new work below. It is in this same room that Tintoretto, Palma il Giovane, Andrea Vicentino all once made their mark. In notes, Kiefer said he wanted to make the room not just a memory, but a metaphor for movement between east and west, a convergence between the past and present. Standing in that room, it feels so. JULIE BLOOM

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