



The MMCA Seoul will be displaying some of the definitive works of Iranian artist Shirin Neshat, including "Passage."

Courtesy of MMCA Seoul

Pushing the envelope

The Korean art sector has some heavy-hitting exhibitions for the New Year

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It's obviously too early to debate how the Korean art scene will remember 2014. But "nondescript" doesn't appear to be a good guess.

The earlier part of the New Year is shaping up to be a blockbuster in art exhibitions, at least to the extent the word "blockbuster" applies in art. The programs of major institutions such as the National Museum of Contemporary (MMCA) and the National Museum of Korea (NMK) are top-heavy with programs featuring top artistic talent from here and abroad.

After years of anticipation, the MMCA opened its Seoul branch late last year near Gyeongbok Palace to complement its main museum in Gwacheon, Gyeonggi Province. The Seoul museum, which aims to be to the Korean capital what the Museum of Modern Art is to New York, is determined to open the year with a bang.

A retrospective of Iranian video artist and film director Shirin Neshat and special exhibition on some of Asia's leading female artists highlight the institution's program for the early year. These will be followed by a solo exhibition of Danish artist Jesper Just, one of the most influential talents in the contemporary art scene, which is also garnering rapt attention.

In October, MMCA Seoul will collaborate with the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation of Germany in an exhibition exploring the influences of the German art and architectural movement.

While MMCA Seoul will be predominately devoted to international art this year, the main museum in Gwacheon will provide a wider platform for Korean artists. The group exhibition, "New Visions, New Voice," gathers what may prove to be the definitive works of some young and exciting Korean artists who have been injecting new life into the art scene.

To the casual gallery visitor, the National Museum of Korea (NMK)'s "Beyond Impressionism: the Birth of Modern Art" might be the event of the year.

The exhibition, which takes place from May to August, features 175 paintings, sculptures and pho-



Above: Jung Yeondoo's "Six Points"

Right: Julian Opie's "Walking in Sinsa-dong 1"

tographs from the Musee D'Orsay in Paris, which doubles as a treasure trove for Impressionist art. While the displays at NMK have previously been about historical artifacts, Beyond Impressionism will mark the institution's first serious foray into art displays.

Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, will celebrate its 10th anniversary with special exhibitions featuring rarely-seen items from its extensive collection of Korean and international art from August to December.

Plateau, another art museum owned by Samsung, will introduce new works of Korean artist Jung Yeon-doo, including "Popjeossi," inspired by the quirky K-pop girl band Crayon Pop. The museum will also highlight the works of architect Cho Min-suk of Mass Studies, who is the commissioner for the Korean Pavilion in the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale scheduled for November.

There are plenty of things to see at the two art museums of the Seoul Arts Center, Hangaram Art Museum and Hangaram Design Museum, which are currently holding the exhibitions of acclaimed photographer Annie Leibovitz and Spanish designer Javier Mariscal.

A retrospective of Japanese pop artist Yayoi Kusama, will be held



from May to June at Hangaram Art Museum in Seoul. The museum will also display 50 of the definitive works of Edvard Munch from July to October and hold a special exhibition of French craftworks from the Musee des Arts Decoratifs in Paris I December.

A new art venue opening this year will be the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), designed by Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid. The silver, skull-shaped building has

been a center of controversy for its 5 billion won (about \$474 million) price tag and its imaginative exterior some critics say poorly matches its surroundings.

Gansong Art Museum, a private museum that has many jewels of Korean traditional art including the 18th century masterpiece "Portrait of a Beauty" and opens only twice a year, has agreed to exhibit the essential pieces of its collection at the DDP from March.