

to where the flowers are blooming

Gwangju Biennale 5.18 Democratization Movement Special Exhibition in Venice

VENUE Spazio Berlendis, Cannaregio 6301, Venice

DATES April 20 – Nov 27, 2022

OPEN Tuesday to Sunday, 10am – 6pm

ADMISSION Free

WEBSITE gwangjubienale.org

SPECIAL EVENT April 20, 4pm – 7pm opening by invitation

ORGANIZED BY Gwangju Biennale Foundation

The **Gwangju Biennale Foundation** and the **City of Gwangju** present **"to where the flowers are blooming" 5.18 Democratization Movement** special exhibition in Venice at **Spazio Berlendis** from **April 20 to November 27, 2022**.

A celebration of the 5.18 Democratization Movement, **"to where the flowers are blooming"** began in Seoul, Korea, in May 2020 and toured around Taipei, Cologne, and Gwangju to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the movement and reflect on the history and contemporaneity of the spirit of Gwangju, which drove Korea's democratization.

After two years of postponement due to the coronavirus pandemic, the exhibition has now arrived in Venice, a city that has overcome the many challenges posed by its environment through will and community spirit to grow into a representative city of arts and culture. Reflecting on today's humanity, the exhibition presents the spirit of Gwangju as explored through artistic language.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from the phrase "to where the flowers are blooming" from the final chapter of **Han Kang's novel "Human Acts"**, which deals with the lasting trauma of May 1980 on Gwangju and questions which historical memories must be most tightly held onto. **The exhibition explores the will of human communities to rise above the vivid memories of anguish and historical tragedy and proceed forward toward a better world.** Curated by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation's exhibition department, **"to where the flowers are blooming" is largely composed of three sections: an archive section** that outlines the 5.18 Democratization Movement and the history of democracy in Korea, **a section of commissioned works** from the Gwangju Biennale, and **a section on Gwangju's spirit and contribution to Korea's democratization.**

The archive section curated by Yoo Kyoungnam, a researcher at the 5.18 Institute of Chonnam National University, **introduces the legacy of the 5.18 Democratization Movement in Gwangju.**

The second section composed of works commissioned by the Gwangju Biennale surveys the city's history, memories, trauma, and spiritual heritage in line with its historical sites, and features works produced through intensive research on the city and the democratization movement. **Kader Attia's "Shifting Borders"** sheds light on political and social irrationalities in history as it seeks remedies for the traumas caused in the process, while **Ho Tzu Nyen's "The 49th Hexagram"** captures civil struggles and revolutions in Korean modern and contemporary history. **Bae Young-hwan** presents "Pop Song: March for the Beloved, ver.2", a video installation incorporating paving blocks inscribed with lyrics from "March for the Beloved," a song that has been frequently sung at democratization protests, including the 5.18 movement.

The third section, which reflects on the democratization movement in Gwangju and modern-day activism, begins with **Hong Sung-dam's "May Print Series"**, which captures scenes from May 1980. The artist has compiled 50 woodblock prints documenting the movement and Gwangju residents at the time, adding a self-written poem to compose a book that tells the story of 5.18. **Noh Suntag's "Forgetting Machines"** captures the fading portraits of Gwangju's Mangwol-dong cemetery, where the victims of the 5.18 movement are buried, as a reminder of the

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passing of time and our ignorance of history. **Ahn Chang Hong's** "Arirang Series" follows the traces of upheaval in Korean modern and contemporary history that have accumulated inside ordinary people. **Choi Sun's** work containing human breath reminds viewers that democracy, like air, must be lived and breathed. "The Politics of Memory" by **Jin Meyerson** links a painting to a memorial site in Gwangju via an AR overlay to redefine communities and history in this age of social media by connecting memory and physical location. As **Kim Chang-hun's** "SHINE: Gwangju Soundscape" brings to Venice sounds from major sites of the 5.18 Democratization Movement – the old Jeollanam-do Provincial Office, the commercial agent's office, the 5.18 National Cemetery, and Chonnam National University – **Park Hwayeon** channels Gwangju residents' memories of 5.18 through a reconstruction of the square in front of the old Jeollanam-do Provincial Office in the exhibition space. Meanwhile, **Suh Dasom's** meal kit shares with viewers the history of Gwangju residents who made individual contributions to protect their community from the cruelty and horrors of May 1980.

Alongside the exhibition, the **Korean Cultural Center in Italy** has organized an educational program that includes a discussion with novelist Han Kang for students in Italy who are interested in Korean culture and history. Students who participate in the program will get to introduce the spirit of Gwangju to exhibition visitors from a local Italian point of view. **Having historically experienced that progress comes at a price, people pursue communal happiness and prosperity while contemplating from their own perspectives how to put the lessons of history into real practice.**

At a time when humanity is facing various challenges accompanied by increased discrimination and hate, the 5.18 Democratization Movement Special Exhibition "to where the flowers are blooming" will serve as an opportunity for us to share our thoughts and seek future directions with artistic language and imagination as our media.

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Notes to Editors

MAY 18 AS A HISTORICAL EVENT

In the Republic of Korea, 5.18 (O-il-pal, or “five-one-eight,” in Korean) refers to the civil uprising that took place in Gwangju from May 18 to 27, 1980, in protest of military violence under martial law. During this time, over 160 people were killed regardless of their age and gender, over 80 went missing, and some 5,000 were injured. The uprising was contained by soldiers, but the accounts of the massacre could not be suppressed. Many people risked their lives and even died to make what had happened in Gwangju known, and the various cultural, artistic, and political practices carried out in the spirit of the resistance culminated in the June Struggle (1987), which enabled Korea to achieve democracy, overthrow the dictator, revise the constitution, and hand-elect its presidents. As a way of establishing “transitional justice,” Koreans have fought to expose the truth about the incident, penalize those responsible for the killings, restore the honor of those involved in the protest, and receive compensation and an apology from the state. As a result, 5.18 is now mourned and commemorated on a national level. As a historical event, 5.18 is no longer solely associated with Korea. The tribute song “March for the Beloved” written in commemoration of the incident, is sung in numerous Asian countries and at rallies for democracy, human rights, and peace. Written and photographic records documenting the processes of the military suppression, civil activities, and investigations were added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2011 to be preserved as part of the history of humankind. Nevertheless, it is difficult to say that “transitional justice” has been fully served with regard to the uprising. As there have been no confessions or genuine apologies from the perpetrators, families who lost their parents, children, and siblings still suffer from the distorted narratives of history, and people who were robbed of normal life due to social stigma still suffer from trauma. The person who ordered for the soldiers to open fire and the names of the missing persons are yet uncovered. As such, for Korea and Asia at large, 5.18 isn’t an incident of the past but an ongoing event, or rather, a vision for a just future that can be recalled and stepped into at any time. The last verse of “March for the Beloved” sings as follows: “We are marching on; keep faith and follow us.”

HUMAN ACTS BY HAN KANG

Published in 2014, "Human Acts" is a novel written by Han Kang. The novel deals with the May 1980 Gwangju uprising and the death of the young boy Kang Dong-ho. It is composed of seven chapters including the final epilogue, with each chapter tracing the passage of time from the incident in the 1980s to the present day. At the same time, the narrative expands to describe the impact that this incident had on other people.

SPAZIO BERLENDIS

Spazio Berlendis is a space devoted to art in its countless forms and variations. A Former carpentry of Squero Fassi, one of the oldest shipyards in Venice, was restored to a contemporary space to host cultural events and exhibitions. The name Berlendis comes from the adjacent courtyard, in turn named after the Palazzo Berlendis. The restoration of space was led by Emanuela Fadalti and Matilde Cadenti, ever active in art and architecture in Venice.

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Exhibition Credits

ARTISTS

Ahn Chang-Hong
Kader Attia
Bae Young-hwan
Choi Sun
Ho Tzu Nyen
Hong Sung-Dam
Kim Changhoon
Jin Meyerson
Noh Suntag
Park Hwayeon
Suh Dasom

GWANGJU BIENNALE FOUNDATION

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CHIEF CURATOR

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EDUCATION TEAM

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PR & MARKETING DEPARTMENT

GENERAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

GWANGJU FOLLY DEPARTMENT

ARCHIVE SECTION CURATION

Yoo Kyoungnam

ARCHIVE SECTION DESIGN

Grayoval

PROJECT MANAGER

Park Bona

Partners

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Kim Jiwon Grace

ARCHITECTS

So Young Han, Barbara Pastor

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Everyday Practice

TRANSLATION

Seoul Selection

PR, COMMUNICATION & PRODUCTION CONSULTING

MAY, Communication & Events

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Han Kang

SUPPORT

5.18 Archives
The May 18 Memorial Foundation
The May 18 Institute CNU
Korea Democracy Foundation