

서울문화재단 [문화+정책] 이슈페이퍼 SFAC Issue paper_Culture + Policy

Vol. 2025-8, Published on 8th September 2025

“A City Where the World Wants to Create Art : Seoul as a Place of True Belonging?”

A Policy Review of the 9th Seoul Arts and Culture Forum

by Hae-Bo KIM (Advising Director of Policy & Strategy Division, SFAC)

The 9th Seoul Arts and Culture Forum: Exploring Strategies to Become a City Where the World Wants to Create Art

On August 20, the 9th Seoul Arts and Culture Forum took place at Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) in Seoul. This forum was organized by the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture (SFAC), which aspires to position Seoul both as a globally attractive city and as a cultural leader. The gathering served as a platform to hear fresh perspectives and ideas that could be reflected in future policy, while also reaffirming SFAC's renewed commitment to international exchange.

The 9th Seoul Arts and Culture Forum

Date: August 20, 2025 (Wednesday), 3:00 PM ~

Venue: Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), Seoul

Host: Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture (SFAC)

Theme: Seoul MIX – Toward a City Where the World Wants to Create Art

Program Highlights:

- ▷ **Moderator:** Heejeong KIM (Professor, Sangmyung University)
- ▷ **Presentation 1:** Directions for Seoul's International Cultural Exchange
 - Myung-Gu SEO (Director of Policy & Strategy, SFAC)
- ▷ **Presentation 2:** Amsterdam Arts and Culture International Strategy 2025–2028
 - Araf Ahmadali (Director of Arts & Culture, City of Amsterdam)
- ▷ **Panel Discussion 1:** Recommendations for Expanding Seoul's Cultural Presence Abroad
- ▷ **Panel Discussion 2:** Creating a More Supportive Environment for Foreign Artists in Seoul
- ▷ **Joint Performance**

Co-Chair **Sangwon PART**, Chairperson of SFAC, reflected:

"As the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, we have worked to make Seoul a city where citizens can enjoy cultural life and where artists can thrive in their practice. This journey has unfolded in parallel with the global rise of K-Art and K-Culture."

His fellow Co-Chair, **Tae-ji CHOI**, former Artistic Director of the Korean National Ballet, spoke from her own experience as an artist who has worked across borders:

"In both Korea and abroad, I have felt firsthand how difficult and lonely the creative process can become when the environment changes. At such times, artists need courage. That is why building an environment where artists can create with confidence, no matter where they are, is so important."



Opening Remarks by the Co-Chairs:

Sangwon PARK, Chairperson of the SFAC and

Tae-ji CHOI, Former Artistic Director, Korean National Ballet

The forum's theme, **"Seoul Mix,"** was proposed by members of the planning committee and chosen after much reflection on how to define Seoul's aspiration to become *"a city where the world wants to create art."* The phrase highlights Seoul's role as a global hub of Hallyu (the Korean Wave), and its need to become a platform of cultural diversity—where differences freely mingle, sparking new creative energy.

An 'Open City' Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

: International Cultural Exchange Strategies in Seoul and Amsterdam

The forum was moderated by **Heejeong KIM**, professor at Sangmyung University, who is serving a member of the planning committee.

In Part I, cultural policymakers from Seoul and Amsterdam each presented their city's international cultural exchange strategies. Part II then shifted to the field, featuring lively panel discussions with curators and artists who are actively engaged in the dynamic flow of cultural exchange—both within Seoul and across its borders.

The first presentation, delivered by **Myung-Gu SEO**, Director of Policy & Strategy Division at SFAC, was titled “Directions for Seoul’s International Cultural Exchange.” He explained the Foundation’s ambition to evolve from a “city where it is good to make art” into a “city where the world wants to make art.”

SEO outlined the trajectory of SFAC’s international activities:

- . **Foundation Stage (2004–2009):** *Building networks and laying the groundwork focused on performing arts exchange*
- . **Network & Platform Stage (2013–2019):** *Establishing a network for cultural policy exchange*
- . **Restriction & Contraction Stage (2020–2023):** *A period of contraction due to the pandemic*
- . **Recovery & Relaunch Stage (2024–):** *Strengthening Seoul’s role as a global platform for cultural exchange*

He emphasized that SFAC is now on the phase of recovery and expansion, with a clear commitment to revitalizing international exchange.



Myung-Gu SEO, Director of the Policy & Strategy Division at SFAC, presented on ‘Directions for Seoul’s International Cultural Exchange’.

Since last year, SFAC has been reinvigorating its international exchange activities. In 2025, this included supporting overseas debuts for winners of the Seoul Arts Awards and co-producing a theater production with partners in the Middle East to mark the 80th anniversary of Korea’s liberation. Looking ahead, the presentation outlined new directions for SFAC’s international

exchange programs: leveraging the **Seoul Autumn Festa** as a global platform for artistic collaboration, and expanding **youth artist exchanges among Korea, China, and Japan** to strengthen regional partnerships across Asia.

After Seoul's strategy was outlined, **Araf Ahmadali**, Director of Arts and Culture for the City of Amsterdam, shared Amsterdam's approach. He presented "Amsterdam Arts and Culture International Strategy 2025–2028," highlighting the city's approach to sustaining diverse forms of creativity through international exchange.

He noted:

*"Amsterdam, is home to residents of more than **180 nationalities**, welcomes **over 25 million tourists annually** (the city's target figure for 2025), and hosts around 12,000 international students—making it a true hub that connects Europe with the wider world."*

At the heart of Amsterdam's cultural policy is the belief that *"access to culture"* and **the right to cultural participation** must come first. Diversity and inclusion, he emphasized, are the guiding principles of this vision. In 2023, the city recorded 20 million visitors, with nearly **40% citing culture as their primary reason for visiting**. To reflect the rhythms of contemporary urban life—"cultural experiences that don't end at 8 p.m., but often begin in the evening"—Amsterdam recently introduced a **Nighttime Culture Policy**. Backed by a budget of about **€3 million**, this strategy brings together departments such as urban planning, safety, and public health to foster a more vibrant after-dark cultural scene.



Araf Ahmadali, Director of Arts and Culture City of Amsterdam spoke on "Amsterdam Arts and Culture International Strategy 2025–2028,"

He emphasized that as Amsterdam marks its **750th anniversary** this year, the city has always been a “city of migration.” Its goal, he explained, is to ensure that people of many nationalities—whether long-term residents or newcomers—can each find their place and voice within the cultural sphere.

*“Amsterdam has always sought to be a city **where everyone is welcome**. For centuries we have served as a safe haven, and we remain so today. We are a tolerant city, and we have long been progressive—Amsterdam has often been the birthplace of new disciplines, innovative works, and at times even controversial or groundbreaking cultural movements.”*

He concluded with the following advice for Seoul:

*“Our constant goal is to remain **as open as possible**, because we believe that our city can only truly grow and flourish within an international context. That has always been part of our DNA and our history, and it is something we continue to cherish and nurture with cultural depth and conviction. I believe that for a city like Seoul, embracing this same kind of dynamism is essential.”*

Expanding Seoul’s Cultural Presence Abroad

: How Can Its Arts Continue to Thrive Globally?

After hearing the ambitious visions of city policymakers, the forum turned to panel discussions that examined whether such strategies are truly effective, and what improvements are needed—drawing on the vivid, firsthand perspectives of practitioners in the field.

As Moderator KIM introduced, “Panel Discussion 1: Recommendations for Expanding Seoul’s Cultural Presence Abroad” was a conversation that focused on the competitiveness, strategies, and role of public support in outbound international cultural exchange, as shared by key figures who have been driving Korean content onto the global stage.

The discussion opened with reflections on the changing global perception of Korean culture. Youchul KIM—now Director of the Content Development Division at Library Company and formerly a producer at the Wooran Foundation—was instrumental in the early development of the musical *Maybe Happy Ending*, which this year won six awards at the 78th Tony Awards.

He noted:

“In the past, pitching a Korean production required lengthy explanations... but now, it’s no longer the case.”

This change, he said, is clear evidence of Korea’s rising cultural stature. Yet, Prof. KIM also

opened the first debate topic—"Is the support system for international exchange sufficient?"—by highlighting the practical challenges that cultural professionals still face.



Panel Discussion 1: Expanding Seoul's Cultural Presence Abroad

The first panel brought together leading figures in international cultural exchange, including Soleine JANG (South Korea Project Manager, CINARS), Junghun LEE (Executive Director, Seoul Music Week), and Youchul KIM (Director of Content Development Division, Library Company). Professor Heejeong KIM of Sangmyung University chaired the sessions throughout the forum.

The discussion began with candid reflections on practical challenges. Soleine JANG (South Korea Project Manager, CINARS) pointed out the difficulties of navigating the government funding system:

"Local receipts often don't match Korean formats, and grant managers refuse to accept them. Preparing for international expansion takes two to three years, but government's one-year fiscal cycle makes this extremely difficult."

Junghun LEE (Executive Director, Seoul Music Week) followed with an urgent call for professional talent development:

"Korean content is of excellent quality, but we lack those who can promote it globally. We need to cultivate international exchange producers. No matter how good the work is, it won't matter unless there's someone who knows the networks, understands where it fits, and can distribute it properly."

Youchul KIM shared lessons he drew from the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) in the U.S.:

"Private organizations need time to fail in order to succeed. Each stage must have clear objectives, and only when those objectives are achieved should you move to the next stage."

His point underscored the need for public institutions like SFAC and other cultural support agencies to rethink how they nurture creative risk-taking.

Creating a More Supportive Environment for Foreign Artists in Seoul : How Can More Global Arts Take Root in Seoul?

The second panel discussion turned the spotlight on foreign artists actively working in Korea, inviting their perspectives on the city's creative environment. The panel featured Jocelyn Clark (Gayageum Sanjo master), Michael W. Hurt (fashion photographer and sociologist), and Rémi Klemensiewicz (media artist).

Moderator Heejeong KIM began by asking: "What is the unique appeal of K-content for you as foreign artists?" **Jocelyn Clark**, the first foreigner to be officially recognized as a master of Korea's Intangible Cultural Heritage (Gayageum Sanjo), spoke of the singular power of traditional Korean music:

*"Gugak (Korean traditional music) is a sound unlike any other in the world. K-pop is music you can find in similar forms across the globe, but Gugak is something you won't hear anywhere else. It's a deeply rooted art form that must be preserved—it is the very **wellspring of K-content**."*

By contrast, **Michael W. Hurt** has devoted his work to documenting and sharing with the world the darker sides of Korean society—subcultures that many Koreans prefer not to discuss or even remember, dismissing them as "national embarrassments." He noted:

*"Outside of Korea, there is actually great interest in these **less-visible aspects**. The international success of the film like "Parasite" reflects precisely that fascination."*

The following debate topic, *"Is Seoul's Creative Environment Sufficient from a Global Perspective?"* turned into a pointed discussion about visa issues—the most pressing concern for foreign artists in Seoul. **Rémi Klemensiewicz** highlighted the mismatch between official visa categories and the realities of creative work:

"The conditions for an E7 (specialist) visa don't align with what I actually do. There is no visa category suitable for freelance creative artists."

Michael W. Hurt added further criticism, pointing to inconsistencies in immigration administration practices:

"Immigration officers at Incheon Airport often apply arbitrary standards when deciding whether someone qualifies as a model. Those who are shorter or non-white frequently face rejection. This reflects not only inconsistent administrative criteria but also deeply ingrained Korean assumptions and biases toward foreigners."



Panel Discussion 2: Creating a More Supportive Environment for Foreign Artists in Seoul
Foreign artists invited to this session included Jocelyn Clark (Gayageum Sanjo master), Michael W. Hurt (photographer), and Rémi Klemensiewicz (media artist).

Rémi Klemensiewicz described the reality of Korea's cultural support system as *"generous, yet frustrating."* Because current funding programs require foreign artists to apply only in partnership with Korean collaborators, he has often had to alter his working process in order to qualify.

The conversation also shed light on structural barriers that many Koreans may overlook. For citizens, the resident registration number is a taken-for-granted identifier from birth. For foreigners, however, its absence can become a major obstacle—blocking access to opportunities and benefits that are taken for granted by Korean citizens.

These discussions raised an uncomfortable but important question: *Are systems designed only for Koreans making it harder for "global arts" to truly take root and remain in Seoul?*

The session closed on a hopeful note, however. As the three artists joined together in a collaborative performance, they offered a living vision of what a "city where the world wants to make art" could look like—foreign and Korean artists blending freely, without the weight of bureaucratic restrictions or ingrained assumptions, and creating something vibrant together.



Jocelyn Clark and Rémi Klemensiewicz closed the forum with a collaborative performance blending traditional Korean music and electronic sound, joined by Korean traditional musician Seung-kyun SHIN, a designated holder of the Namhaean Byeolsingut ritual.

Beyond Visa Issues: The Question of Names — The Feeling of Belonging as Myself

At the informal gathering after the official program, an icebreaker emerged around the name of Rémi Klemensiewicz. He explained that in Korea his name is often written in Korean as **“래미(Remi)”** rather than **“해미(Hemi)”** which more closely follows the French pronunciation. He noted that about half of the publicity materials issued by the institutions he worked with used one version and half the other.

Meanwhile, Jocelyn Clark, whose Korean name is officially written as “조세린(JO, Se-rin), raised a deeper issue. She remarked:

“People call me ‘Joslin’ or other variations as they please. If my identity is not consistently recognized, I cannot even collect mileage points. Korea’s Romanization system has recently changed, creating yet another complication. In today’s digital age, when online searchability is essential, the lack of consistency makes the problem even more serious.”

Her point was clear: having one’s identity brushed off as ‘close enough’ is not the same as being truly recognized. It is not merely about being liked or accepted, but about the deeper and far more important matter of fundamental identity.

As a French national, Rémi Klemensiewicz shared that being asked "What's your English name?" must feel the same as when Koreans in Europe are greeted with 'Ni hao (你好).'

With that in mind, it is easier to understand the sentiment of Jocelyn Clark, who remarked:

"Even the question 'Where are you from?' contains the message that you are being viewed as an outsider. My answer? 'Why? I'm from Daejeon (the city in Korea where I live) — so what is your point?'"

Master **Seung-kyun SHIN**, Korean traditional musician and designated holder of the Namhaean Byeolsingut ritual, added his own experience:

"For foreigners interested in Korean traditional music, how should they even search for the '대금(Daegum)' online? As 'Korean Bamboo Flute,' 'Daegum,' or 'Taegŭm'? When I performed abroad, no one could recognize that the name printed in the local program referred to me standing on the stage."

The lesson is clear: people naturally feel closer to those who call them by the name they themselves use. A truly open social system is one that allows individuals to build their identity and sense of accomplishment in the way they define themselves.

Prejudices embedded in public administrative systems often reflect the stage of social progress within a society. Looking back 25 years, we entered the 21st century full of excitement about a '**Century of Culture**,' yet at the same time we were gripped by fear of the **Millennium Bug**. That bug stemmed from the assumptions of computer programmers and the pursuit of mechanical efficiency—using only two digits instead of four to record years, in order to save processing capacity." It was the result of clinging to old habits from the punch-card era instead of updating societal awareness to match the times.

Thus, in the very year proclaimed as the dawn of the Century of Culture, the world trembled over a simple problem: the failure to distinguish between 1900 and 2000. History, of course, continued beyond the year 2000. And just as names need not be confined to three syllables, as typical Korean names are, it is the everyday common sense of global citizens that must reshape global systems if we are to truly live in a 'Century of Culture.'

For Seoul to become a city where the world also wants to make art, it must cultivate the power to draw people to a place where they are recognized as themselves. I believe this is precisely the force that sustains the enduring appeal of Korean culture.

Written by Hae-Bo KIM

(Advising Director of Policy & Strategy Division, SFAC) (Contact: sea@sfac.or.kr)