"The Future of Arts and the City, Talked Together in Seoul"

A Policy Review of SAFT 2025
by Hae-Bo KIM (Advising Director of Policy & Strategy Division, SFAC)

1. A Global Conversation in Seoul on the Future of Arts and the City

On 4 November 2025, **the Seoul·Arts·Future Talks (SAFT) 2025** was held successfully at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) in Seoul. SAFT 2025 (www.saft.kr) is a new global forum initiated by the **Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture (SFAC)**, inviting leading experts from Korea and around the world to discuss contemporary issues in arts, culture, technology, the city, and policy — from Seoul, through the lens of Seoul-ness, and to co-create emerging global cultural trends and discourse. Despite spanning a wide spectrum—from avant-garde arts to state-of-the-art artificial intelligence—the conversations remained remarkably profound, attracting an audience of more than 600 participants who stayed engaged until the end.

SAFT (Seoul·Arts·Future Talks) 2025 Overview
◉ **Event Title:** SAFT (Seoul·Arts·Future Talks) 2025
◉ **Date:** 4 November 2025 (Tue)
◉ **Venue:** Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), Seoul
◉ **Host:** Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture (SFAC)
◉ **Theme:** *"Seoul Talks on Arts & Future"*
◉ **Program Highlights**
- **Arts Meet @Seoul** – Global Arts & Culture Networking Reception
- **Opening Performance by MUTO** (a media-art collective)
- **Three Thematic Sessions:** Future Talk, Arts Talk, Policy Talk
☞ **For full program details and more photos, see the forum website www.saft.kr**

SAFT 2025 marks a new beginning for SFAC as it moves toward becoming a global foundation. Building upon various policy-discussion platforms previously organized by SFAC, the Foundation launched SAFT as a fully international forum. The theme chosen for the inaugural edition—**"Seoul Talks on Arts & Future"**—reflects both the identity and long-term ambitions of this new platform.

In his video address, **OH, Se-hoon, Mayor of Seoul**, remarked:

"In our journey to build Seoul as a City of Arts... Technology may set the pace of the city, but it is the Arts that show the right direction."

Following this, **Hyeongjong SONG, President of the SFAC,** opened the forum by highlighting the depth of Seoul's cultural foundations:

"Seoul is a city with 6,000 years of cultural roots and 2,000 years of accumulated human stories."

Representatives from foreign embassies and international cultural-exchange organizations attended the Forum Reception, designed around the concept *"Arts Meet @Seoul* — where global arts gather in Seoul."

The opening performance by MUTO, a media-art collective integrating Korean traditional music and visual motifs, presented a fusion of heritage and contemporary creativity.

The MC for the forum Jemma HAN, Honorary Mayor of Seoul, introduced SAFT 2025 as "a place where discourse is generated and linked to policy"

Sang-Won Park, Chairperson of SFAC, expressed his hopes that SAFT will "become the starting point of long-term collaboration sustained over time."

2. Accelerating Ai (Artificial intelligence) and Charting AI (Artistic Insight)

Following the opening performance by **MUTO**, the forum proceeded with three thematic sessions collectively titled Future–Arts–Policy Talks. Speakers invited from **Scotland, Austria, Germany, the United States, and Canada** joined Seoul-based scholars and practitioners. The participants represented a broad spectrum: **visual artists, choreographers, festival and performing arts producers, museum curators, cultural policymakers, cultural physicists, AI researchers, neuroscientists, urban engineers, sociologists, and economists**—resulting in a rich, multi-perspective dialogue.

SAFT 2025 - "Seoul Talks on Arts & Future"		
Sessions	**Theme**	**Speakers**
Session 1 — Future Talk	**Artistic·I × Artificial·I** _ Co-evolution of Human Sensibility & Machine Intelligence	Moderator : **JuYong PARK,** Professor, Graduate School of Culture Technology, KAIST ① **Dae-Shik KIM;** Professor, the School of Electrical Engineering, KAIST; Neuroscientist & AI Expert *"The Reality of the AGI Era and Mimesis"* (with *"The Artificial Physical Sensory Intelligence"* by **Hye Yeon KIM**, Ai-based Choreographer) ② **JooYoung OH;** Research-based multidisciplinary artist *"Aura.exe: This Image Does Not Exist"* ③ **Gerfried Stocker;** Artistic Director, Ars-Electronica *"Shaping the Future - when Art meets Technology*
Session 2 — Arts Talk	**Seoul × Arts** _ Seoul-ness and the City of Arts	Moderator : **WoongJo CHANG;** Dean, Graduate School of Arts and Cultural Management, Hongik University ① **Gilles Doré;** Executive director, CINARS *"Seoul, building bridges to the world between tradition and meta-modernism"* ② **Lorna Duguid;** Head of International, Creative Scotland *"Edinburgh - the festival city as an engine for internationalization* ③ **Hyun Soo WOO;** Director of Asian Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art *"Evolving Visions: The Trajectory of Korean Art Abroad and Its Future"*
Session 3 — Policy Talk	**Locality × Attraction** _ Locality & Urban Attraction as New Strategies for Global Cities	Moderator : **MiRee BYUN,** Research Fellow, Seoul Institute ⓪ **Hae-Bo KIM;** Advising Director, SFAC *"City Attractiveness Compass"* ① **JongRyn MO;** Professor, Graduate School of International Studies, Yonsei University; Alleyway Economist *"Built Environment and Locality: The Case of Seoul"* ② **Lutz Leichsenring;** Co-CEO, Vibe Lab *"Night Culture as a New Urban Magnet: Global Trends in 24-Hour City Strategies"* ③ **Jung Hyun WOO;** Professor, Department of Landscape architecture, University of Seoul *"Digital Age and New Spatial Dimension for Human-centered City"*

Session 1 — Future Talk with theme of <"Artistic·I × Artificial·I — The Co-evolution of Human Sensibility and Machine Intelligence> examined questions such as:

. How can the co-evolution of technological intelligence and artistic sensibility become possible?
. Where will the convergence of arts, technology, culture, and imagination lead the cultural life of cities?
. And what role should the arts play in this process?
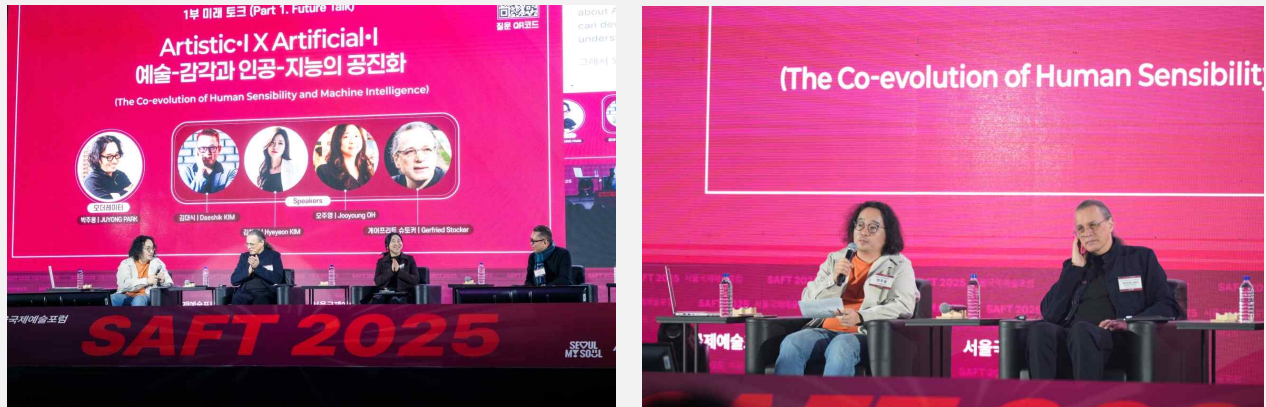
Session 1 — Future Talk: "Artistic·I × Artificial·I chaired by Prof. JuYong PARK, KAIST

During the Future Talk, Session moderator Professor **JuYong PARK** (KAIST Graduate School of Culture Technology) opened with a provocative question:

> *"In the Ai era, will the very definition of art fundamentally change? Will the meaning of conducting art itself be transformed?"*

Professor **Dae-Shik KIM**, offering a more skeptical outlook, suggested that the future of "art that imitates the imitation of the Idea (mimesis)" may not be as optimistic as we hope. Perhaps this pessimism, he implied, comes from the limits imposed by our current concept of art.

> *"Your human emotions are nothing more than electrical signals between neurons...You speak of creativity as if it were uniquely yours, but that is simply Homo sapiens admiring itself. Ai is not fundamentally different. In fact, while humans remain limited, Ai will continue to evolve and imagine beyond the bounds of human cognition. If human imagination is merely a single pixel, Ai can see the entire screen. Like this, when AGI asks, 'Have you ever truly created art?'—what will we answer?"*

From Austria, **Gerfried Stocker,** Artistic Director of Ars Electronica, argued that:

> *"The meaning of art will inevitably change. We need a new definition of creativity."*
> *"Creating art with Ai is easy—but will we recognize it as art?"*

Emphasizing that humans will continue to be the evaluators of artistic value, he also raised concerns:

> ***"Art will endure, but will artists endure?"***

Choreographer **Hye Yeon KIM**, who collaborated with Professor Dae-Shik KIM, offered a different view:

> *"Rather than separating genres or roles, we should reconsider the essence of art. Dance may need to redefine the role of the dancer. This is a moment that allows us to return to what we may have forgotten—the essence of our (artistic) practice."*

The second invited speaker, artist **JooYoung OH**, introduced her ecological project involving endangered birds. She posed questions such as:

> *"What if Ai technologies were used for birds?"*
> *"What if birds themselves used Ai?"*

She presented her work in which she built a mother-bird drone that communicates through wing movements rather than flight, caring for baby birds—expanding the imagination beyond human-centered perspectives. Whether post-human, where all beings are interconnected, or trans-human, where humans aspire to surpass themselves, her work emphasized that moving beyond anthropocentrism is essential if humans are to maintain dignity as an older intelligence on a planet soon cohabited with smarter machines. Thus, the artist suggests that "artistic insight"—a sensibility not bound by human-centered logic—may provide direction for rapidly advancing technologies.

Concluding the session, Professor **JuYong PARK** emphasized:

> **"Now is precisely the time when technology runs beyond its own control that we must deepen our understanding of art and human nature."**

Prof. Dae-Shik KIM and Research-based artist JooYoung OH speaking at Future Talk session

3. 'Making City of Arts' Central to Seoul-ness Through Long-Term Relationships

The second session, **Arts Talk,** addressed the theme: **"Seoul × Arts — Seoul-ness and the City of Arts."** The discussion focused on how Seoul can strengthen its global attractiveness as an arts city—not merely through events or infrastructure, but through sustained, long-term relationships that ultimately establish "City of Arts" as a core identity of Seoul-ness.
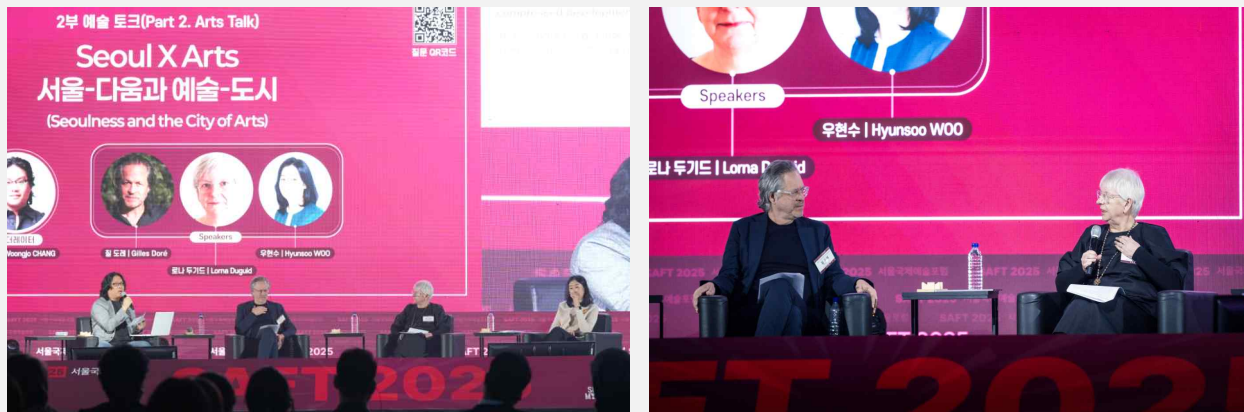
Session 2 — Arts Talk: "Seoul × Arts" chaired by Prof. WoongJo CHANG, Hongik University

Gilles Doré, Executive Director of CINARS, described Seoul as

"A place where tradition and meta-modernism coexist."

He noted that Seoul faces universal global issues—anthropocentrism, gentrification, and generational tensions—yet its most compelling feature may lie in the dynamic tension between tradition and hyper-modernity. It seemed that his insights became clearer after he joined the Seoul Attractiveness On-Site Tour, which was held a day before the forum.

The tour, titled *"Tracing the Pulse of K-Culture: From Seoul's Gung(宮) to Pan(場) — Where the Order of Nature Meets the Dynamism of Humanity)"* guided participants through: Sejong Center, Gwanghwamun Plaza, Woldae & Gwanghwamun Gate, Gyeongbokgung Palace, Art Korea Lab, Open Songhyeon Green Square, MMCA (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) & Dure Korean Restaurant.

Although brief, the tour vividly showcased how contrasting forces—tradition vs. modernity, order vs. disorder, nature vs. civilization—interact in Seoul to form a distinctive vitality.
Participants identified these tensions as a powerful source of Korean-ness and Seoul-ness, and as foundations for positioning Seoul as a City of Arts.

During the Seoul Attractiveness On-Site Tour themed "Order of the Palace (Gung) and Dynamism of the Urban Stage (Pan)", participants engaged in continuous discussions about what constitutes Seoul-ness.
- At Art Korea Lab, overlooking Gyeongbokgung Palace from above, participants discussed the global appeal of K-content and the future of artistic platforms in digital space.
- At the Seoul Urban Architecture Biennale site in Open Songhyeon Green Square, the group explored ideas around "the human-centered city", examining how urban openness and cultural space can contribute to Seoul's artistic identity.

The second question in the Arts Talk session was: **"As a source of artistic inspiration, platform, and global launchpad, what strategies are needed to strengthen Seoul-ness as a City of Arts?"**

Lorna Duguid, Head of International at Creative Scotland, emphasized that

> *"Trust-building between partners is the single most important foundation."*

Drawing from her curatorial experience, **Hyun Soo Woo**, Director of Asian Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, offered insight into how audiences encounter unfamiliar cultures:

> "For people who have no basic knowledge of a foreign culture, the key is to begin with universality. You must give them the feeling that they can enjoy it even without prior understanding. Once they come, curiosity will naturally lead them to discover similarities and differences."

Professor **WoongJo Chang**, serving as moderator, summarized their points by stating:

> *"Overcoming the fear that precedes collaboration is the true starting point of collaboration. Finding common ground helps ease that fear."*

He then asked how such collaborations could be sustained over time.
Gilles Doré, Executive Director of CINARS, stressed the necessity of long-term vision:

> *"A long-term perspective is essential. Only when partners share values and express a clear will to collaborate can collaboration truly happen. Without a long-term view, sustained collaboration is impossible."*

Echoing this, **Lorna Duguid** highlighted the need for long-term evaluation metrics:

> *"When assessing the success of collaborations, long-term indicators are crucial. Quantitative measurement must be complemented by qualitative evaluation."*

4. Future Strategies for Turning Locality into a Global Urban Attraction

The third session, **Policy Talk**, addressed the theme: **"Locality × Attraction — Locality and Urban Attraction as New Strategies for Global Cities**." The discussion focused on how Seoul can convert its local character into global cultural attraction—a strategy directly connected to SFAC's ongoing research project, the **<City Attractiveness Compass (매력 중심 도시발전 전략체계)>**. Before the panel discussion, **Dr. Hae-Bo KIM,** Advising Director of SFAC's Policy & Strategy Division, provided an overview of the research and its linkage to SAFT 2025. He explained that:

> *"In today's world, attraction—not competition—drives soft power. Not "running ahead of others," but "drawing others in together" has become more powerful. The origin of attraction lies in locality, formed through the interweaving of environmental, historical, cultural, and human activities unique to each city."*

He introduced the upcoming release (January 2026) of the <City Attractiveness Compass>, which will map the distribution, trends, and future strategies of urban attraction resources that draw people seeking meaning, aesthetics, and joy.

Session 3 — Policy Talk: "Locality × Attraction" chaired by Dr. MiRee Byun, Seoul Institute

Professor **JongRyn MO** (Yonsei University), a co-author of the City Attractiveness Compass, emphasized that:

> *"Seoul is already an attractive city. A city with strong locality is a strong city."*

He defined locality as:

> *"Distinct characteristics and uniqueness that cannot be experienced elsewhere — an alternative value to global standardization."*

He further argued that:

> ***"Locality is not a return to the past, but a movement toward the future."***

The second speaker, **Lutz Leichsenring** (Co-CEO, VibeLab), delivered a presentation titled: **"Night Culture as a New Urban Magnet: Global Trends in 24-Hour City Strategies."** He drew attention to night culture as a growing attraction resource for global cities. Citing Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel's book *Night,* he remarked:

> *"Night is purer, more intense, and more truthful than the day."*

He explained that leading global cities such as Amsterdam, São Paulo, and Toronto are placing increasing policy emphasis on Night Culture — not merely as a sphere of nightlife or entertainment, but as a comprehensive policy domain connected to: economy, community, culture public safety, and urban vitality. He stressed that the 24-hour city strategy requires integrated, cross-sectoral policymaking.

The third presenter, Professor **Jung Hyun Woo** (University of Seoul, Landscape Architecture), is a researcher on urban planning and design using big data and AI technologies. Connecting smart-city frameworks with cultural-policy agendas, she presented: "**Digital Age and New Spatial Dimensions for a Human-Centered City.**" She emphasized the need for participatory platforms, explaining that:

> *"Through living labs, citizens should be empowered to act as co-designers of their city."*

In her view, the digital transition (DX) within cultural policy must enhance human-centered design while integrating cultural life data into urban planning.

Session Chair Dr. MiRee Byun (Seoul Institute) concluded with a summary:

> ***"In an era of global standardization, locality will make Seoul more attractive."***

As a scholar who has long led urban competitiveness research at the Seoul Institute, she reaffirmed that: "The core of urban competitiveness must now shift from the economy to culture."

5.   SAFT — Weaving the Future Through People's Conversations

Following all three sessions, **Hyeongjong SONG**, President of the SFAC, closed the forum with a message of commitment:

> *"We will continue to ask deeper questions about what art truly is and support Seoul in becoming a leading global City of Culture. SFAC will strengthen the competitiveness of the cultural ecosystem of Seoul and work tirelessly so that today's conversations become tomorrow's reality."*

As Professor JuYong Park—chair of the Future Talk session—writes in his book, **"The future is not simply generated by data."** The future of a cultural city is woven through "people's conversations"—conversations that hold diverse cultural possibilities, tastes, and identities.

The Seoul·Arts·Future Talks (SAFT) aims to be such a place: a platform where, as expressed in this year's theme "Seoul Talks on Arts & Future". People from around the world will gather in Seoul each year to talk about art and the future.

When globally active cultural leaders gather in Seoul and inspire one another's next steps, that becomes the seed of new cultural flows. SAFT seeks to become a global cultural-discourse platform shaped around "Seoul-ness." **Every late autumn, SAFT hopes to welcome people from across the world to Seoul—to talk, imagine, and anticipate the coming spring together. SAFT!**

Hyeongjong SONG, President of the SFAC, delivering the closing remarks and pledging to turn today's discourse into tangible action.

After the forum concluded, all panelists gathered on stage for a commemorative photo.

The forum also featured side programs curated to express Seoul-ness through taste, landscape, and nighttime culture:
 - "點心" : Marking the Heart with Korean Flavors
 - "Hangang Sopung(消風)" : Chimaek(Chicken & Beer) Conversations in the Han River Breeze
 - "Seoul Night Sanchaek(散策)" - Walking the City Wall in the Glow of Seoul's Nightscape
Each program was designed to support SAFT's vision of a global dialogue platform shaped by Seoul-ness.

☞ **For full program details and more photos, see the forum website www.saft.kr**
☞ **For Korean version Issue Paper, see SFAC Blog https://blog.naver.com/i_sfac/224074648978**

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