

Italian Pavilion at the 16th Gwangju Biennale presents *The Look is A Li(k)e*

Italian and Korean artists on performed
identities and self-constructed realities



GWANGJU, South Korea, August 24, 2026 — The Italian Cultural Institute in Seoul presents *The Look is A Li(k)e*, the Italian Pavilion at the 16th Gwangju Biennale. Five Italian and Korean artists take up the look, reflecting on appearances circulating between physical and digital spaces, where people and objects are shaped to look increasingly alike. The exhibition runs from September 5, 2026 to February 14, 2027, following a preview on September 4. The exhibition is curated by Irene Campolmi, Curator for Art, Technology, and Society at Amos Rex (Helsinki) and Curator at Large at Yonder Art-Science, Niels Bohr Institute (Copenhagen).

Investigating the look as both a *digitally approved* like and a *socially constructed* lie, the exhibition frames appearance and disappearance as forces that actively construct reality, shaping perception, function, recognition, and belonging. In our constantly mediated reality, artificial intelligence produces increasingly polished texts, filtered images, and homogenized ideas circulated through algorithms. Appearances can no longer be taken as trustworthy, raising the urgent question of whether to appear in the world is, implicitly, to exist in it. Moving beyond national representation, the artists offer a critical inquiry into the politics of appearance, drawing a meaningful parallel between Italy and Korea, two countries that built modern cultural identities around style, reputation, and self-presentation. Most of the works in the show are new commissions for the pavilion, presented in new constellations for their Korean debut.

In dialogue with the Biennale's overarching theme, *You Must Change Your Life*, proposed by Artistic Director Ho Tzu Nyen, the Italian Pavilion reflects on the look as a constructed condition through which contemporary life is negotiated. In a globalized society, appearance has become a mode of existence, enabling individuals to function within a world that often privileges surfaces over what lies beneath them, and where changing one's life is not straightforward. The five artists explore distinct yet interconnected dimensions of the look: the disciplined body (SAGG Napoli), the fragmented self (Dew Kim), the pursuit of authority sustained by external validation (Ru Kim), the relational self (Raffaella Naldi Rossano), and the identity of functional objects displaced as readymades (Davide Stucchi).

"We live in a culture of permanent visibility: always looking, being looked at, and increasingly looking like someone or something else. Yet the anxiety of the gaze exposes a paradox: there is no single look to conform to, and no appearance capable of fully explaining who we are. Identity remains stubbornly irreducible: fragmented, fluid, and always becoming. The challenge now is not how to fit the images we see, but how to resist becoming identical to them," said Campolmi. "The exhibition is understood as a coded CD: a medium containing multiple soundtracks and genres, but existing within a single format. Although experienced through fragmentation, the artists' distinct narratives ultimately form a coherent whole."

Five artists on the body, desire, and the constructed self

In the video installation *AMEN* (2021), the first work encountered in the exhibition, Italian artist SAGG Napoli places the body at the center of her investigation, employing performance both as a medium and as a method for exploring trauma, physical limits, peer judgment, discipline, personal achievement, isolation, and concentration. *AMEN*, a word used in Catholic liturgy to affirm or accept a state of truth, shows the artist during an archery training session, a discipline she has practiced competitively for many years. As the camera gradually pulls back to reveal the surrounding landscape, her voice unfolds in a reflective monologue that navigates the tension between inward concentration and the unsettling awareness of observing herself from the outside. The work exposes the psychological demands of striving for precision while confronting the burden of self-imposed judgment. In *AMEN*, physical training becomes a metaphor for the continuous negotiation between body and mind, revealing how personal endurance can acquire a political dimension.

The second work the visitors encounter is *Legion, Nowhere Whole* (2026). It is a sculptural installation by Korean artist Dew Kim, which approaches the body as a site of resistance within contemporary systems of surveillance and normative power. The installation, inspired by a saying supposedly from the Roman Empire (27 BC – AD 284), comprises three mixed-media sculptures confronting visitors like soldiers prepared to fight an invisible enemy until their own disintegration. Yet the sculptures already present fragmented bodies—“nowhere whole.”

Kim connects this image of bodily dissolution to a digital world in which identities are transformed into data: disembodied, disassembled, and commodified within systems of surveillance and control. For Kim, fragmentation can become a strategy of resistance. Rather than allowing identity to be reduced to something fixed, recognizable, and exploitable, the work proposes becoming multiple, fluid, and impossible to fully reconstruct. The installation becomes an anti-monument to bodies that resist being made legible. Its scattered forms transform mechanisms of control into gestures of self-determination, reclaiming disobedience as both an aesthetic and political act.

Questions of empowerment and oppression also emerge in Korean artist Ru Kim's installation *Tails of Courage, or the Master's Pirouette* (2026), which continues the narrative of the earlier video *Courageous* (2026), in which Courage, a pink dog, escapes to join a community of other dogs. In the installation, the Master attempts to reclaim what has been lost by becoming the image of Courage himself: crawling on all fours, barking, and eventually growing a tail. The imitation exposes the instability of appearances, as the more he inhabits the other's image, the more his own identity dissolves. Oscillating between comedy and tragedy, the work reflects on the exhaustion of performing identities shaped by desire, power, and the gaze, suggesting that resistance begins not by perfecting an image, but by refusing to remain trapped within it.

Following the exhibition's score on desire as a force shaping how we look at ourselves and others, the visitor enters the second space of the show where multidisciplinary Italian artist Raffaella Naldi Rossano has set up an installation that functions as a room for blind dates. In *Partenope's Blind Date Room* (2026), the artist assumes the role of matchmaker, using the elements of her artistic practice to stage a space where visitors are invited to enter, lie down, and share an intimate environment with strangers. Interweaving Neapolitan and Korean domesticity with traces of the sea, the natural boundary shared by both peninsulas, the work proposes desire as a form of resistance that opens new relations between bodies, objects, and time. Renaming herself Partenope, the mythical siren and founder of Naples, the artist stages a space of collective re-narration set to a soundscape of reinterpreted Neapolitan love songs.

Staging encounters is also central to Davide Stucchi's practice, whose work is found in the concluding room of the path. In his practice, objects become performers and domestic space unfolds as a choreography of subtle displacements. Through minimal interventions, everyday elements are detached from their intended function and drawn into new relationships, where utility gives way to ambiguity, desire, and fiction.

Works such as *Rise & Shine*, *Light Switch*, and *Rising, falling, looking for (all from 2026)* revolve around light and reflection, transforming familiar domestic devices into unstable perceptual situations. Mirrors disappear behind window frames, are embedded within electrical outlets, or are mounted on ladders that invite an impossible ascent. Windows, mirrors, plugs, ladders, and sources of lighting no longer perform their intended tasks, operating instead as actors within carefully staged environments where seeing itself becomes uncertain.

ARTISTS



SAGG Napoli (b. 1991, Naples) is the artistic persona of Sofia Ginevra Gianni, a multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans performance, video, sculpture, installation, fashion design, and sound. A graduate of Camberwell College of Arts in London (2014), she investigates the intersections of gender, economics, class, and ethnicity across both popular and high culture. Central to her work is the body, both her own and the body as a collective social and political entity, through which she examines power, representation, and belonging. Championing what she calls #SouthAesthetics, she draws on the cultural narratives of Southern Italy while engaging the visual languages of performance and digital culture. In 2020 she also began a parallel path as a competitive archer, extending her research into focus, embodiment, and self-determination. Her work has been shown at zaza' (Naples and Milan), Galerie Champ Lacombe (Biarritz), the Fiorucci Art Trust, and the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, and she was a finalist for the Arts Foundation Futures Awards in Visual Arts (2020).



Dew Kim (b. 1985, Seoul) explores how the body is transformed and reconstructed at the intersection of religious and queer identities. Drawing on a religious upbringing, he approaches the body as a ritualistic site where faith, resistance, and transformation converge. Through sculpture, video, and performance, he investigates the tensions between power and desire, using hybrid personas that fuse religious symbolism with the grammar of pop culture to seek creation beyond suffering. He has held solo exhibitions at CR Collective (Seoul, 2026), Alternative Space Loop (Seoul, 2023), and Various Small Fires (Seoul, 2023), and has shown at SeMA, Art Sonje Center, MMCA, MoCA Busan, the Malta Biennale, and documenta 15 (Kassel, 2022). His work is held in the collections of the MMCA

Government Art Bank and the Sunpride Foundation (Hong Kong). He holds an MA in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art and a BFA from Konkuk University.



Ru Kim (b. 1995, Hamburg) works across performance and video installation, exploring the intersections of power, gender, history, and trauma. Using the body as a site where personal and collective narratives meet, they construct performances and immersive audiovisual environments that examine how authority and social structures shape memory and identity. Their projects challenge dominant narratives while opening space for reflection on resistance, vulnerability, and transformation, treating the body not only as a subject of inquiry but as a tool for reclaiming agency. Recent solo exhibitions include *I KNOW WHAT I'VE DONE* at TINC (Seoul, 2024) and *a fist is a fist* at Space 413 (Seoul, 2023), and their work has featured internationally at the Millennium Film Archive (New York, 2023), the Coimbra Biennial of Contemporary Art (2022), and the Centre Rhénan d'Art Contemporain (France, 2021).



Raffaella Naldi Rossano (b. 1990, Naples) is a multidisciplinary artist working across installation, video, sculpture, text, drawing, and performance. Grounded in her psychology studies and an MA in Photography and Moving Images from Goldsmiths, her practice investigates memory, intergenerational transmission, desire, domesticity, and interspecies kinship, often in relation to the Mediterranean. Her research-driven, process-based works act as relational platforms, fostering new psychological and socio-political connections among spaces, bodies, and objects. She has exhibited at the Lofoten Biennale, Villa Medici, the Quadriennale d'Arte in Rome, Istituto Svizzero Milan, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, and Manifesta Palermo. She received the XIX New York Prize and, in 2024, the Special Prize for an Emerging Talent at the SMAFF St. Moritz Film Festival, and in 2025 presented the first iteration of her ongoing installation *Tentacular Bed* at the Sharjah Biennial.



Davide Stucchi (b. 1988, Vimercate) works across installation, scenography, and exhibition-making through subtle gestures of subtraction and reconfiguration. Built around minimal interventions, his works engage the tension between presence and removal, intimacy and distance, activated through carefully choreographed objects and spatial atmospheres. Each installation operates as an environment in its own right, layered with deliberate references to fashion, advertising, and domesticity that unsettle normative representations of identity and the body. Through this refusal of resolution, Stucchi constructs fragile architectures of perception where meaning is continuously destabilized and reassembled. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at the Triennale (Milan, 2026), Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci (Prato, 2025), Grazer Kunstverein (2023), Museion (Bolzano, 2024), and MACRO (Rome, 2014).

CURATOR

Irene Campolmi



Irene Campolmi is a curator, art historian, and researcher whose practice explores the intersections of art, science, technology, and performance through a decolonial lens. She is Curator for Art, Technology and Society at Amos Rex in Helsinki, Co-founder and Curator at Large of Yonder Art•Science at the Niels Bohr Institute in Copenhagen. Previously, she served as Senior Curator at MAPS (Museum of Art in Public Spaces) and Head of the Art Program at Enter Art Fair. With over eighteen years of experience, she has curated exhibitions internationally, including the Estonian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and at institutions such as MAAT Lisbon, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, The Power Plant Toronto, and TANK Shanghai. She is currently completing a PhD on curatorial ethics at Aarhus University and is a faculty member at IED Florence.

PAVILION COMMISSIONER

Italian Cultural Institute in Seoul

The Italian Cultural Institute in Seoul is the official cultural institution of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Its mission is to promote the Italian language and culture in the Republic of Korea while fostering cultural exchange between the two countries. In collaboration with Korean cultural institutions, the Institute develops and presents a wide range of cultural initiatives spanning the performing and visual arts, music, cinema, literature, design, architecture, and craftsmanship. In recent years, the Institute has placed particular emphasis on the promotion of contemporary Italian art, supporting the work of internationally recognized emerging and mid-career artists. Its collaboration with the Gwangju Biennale and the Bomun Welfare Foundation represents an important initiative aimed at strengthening the ongoing cultural dialogue and expanding opportunities for international cooperation between Korea and Italy.

VENUE PARTNER

Donggok Museum

Established by the Bomun Welfare Foundation, the Donggok Museum is the first private museum and art museum in Gwangju. It opened in 2020 with the mission of advancing cultural welfare and enriching the local community through art and culture. Guided by the motto *Finding the Future through the Past*, the museum presents both Korea's cultural heritage and contemporary art, serving as a cultural platform where history and the present coexist. Each year, the museum organizes special exhibitions dedicated to Korean cultural heritage alongside curated exhibitions of contemporary art by Korean and international artists. Through its educational programmes and academic initiatives, it actively engages with and contributes to the local community.

Italian Pavilion, 16th Gwangju Biennale

DATES	September 5, 2026 – February 14, 2027
OPENING RECEPTION	2-5 pm, September 4
VENUE	Donggok Museum, Gwangju (Google Map)
HOURS	10 am – 6 pm (Tuesday - Saturday)
ARTISTS	SAGG Napoli, Dew Kim, Ru Kim, Raffaella Naldi Rossano, Davide Stucchi
CURATOR	Irene Campolmi
ORGANIZED BY	Italian Cultural Institute in Seoul
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR	Valentina Buzzi
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Soyoung Kwon
EXHIBITION DESIGNER	Tobias Foged Permin
PRESS CONTACT	Ji-eun Seo, JESPR, j.seo@jes-pr.com

[Press Kit Download](#)