

Curatorial Statement

ASIA NOW 2025 — Grow

Under the evocative title *Grow*, the 2025 edition of ASIA NOW articulates a vision of art as a fertile ground for transformation, dialogue, and collective flourishing. More than a theme, *Grow* becomes a framework through which we engage with the shifting landscapes of identity, culture, and belonging, urging us to move beyond the constraints of geographical, historical, and cultural binaries. Growth here is not a singular trajectory but a multiplicity of roots, extending across borders and traditions, entangling the local and the global, the ancestral and the contemporary.

At the heart of this edition lies an invitation to reflect on how perceptions take shape, expand, and alter the way we encounter each other in an increasingly fluid world. *GROW* calls attention to the transformative potential of art—its capacity to plant seeds of empathy, to germinate connections across difference, and to cultivate the imagination required for new modes of living together.

Aligned with Leela Gandhi's evocative concept of "affective communities," ASIA NOW 2025 foregrounds the fragile, often understated gestures through which bonds of solidarity and friendship emerge. Gandhi reminds us that communities are not forged solely through shared origins or histories, but through unexpected affinities and ethical attachments that cross cultural divides. An artist working with material from their ancestral soil, for instance, may encounter a viewer from another geography who recognizes in that gesture the light of their own memory—whether tied to earth, craft, or ritual. In this moment, an affective community takes root: not grounded in sameness, but in a resonance that links distinct origins through shared sensibility. These affective threads—woven through acts of sharing, listening, and remembering—become essential sites of ethical and aesthetic engagement.

This expansive vision is propelled by a curatorial team bringing diverse expertise and regional knowledge to the project. Among the curators are Natasha Ginwala, Artistic Director of COLOMBOSCOPE and curator of Sharjah Biennial 16; Hajra Haider, Guest Curator of COLOMBOSCOPE Festival 2026; Arnaud Morand, Head of Arts at Afalula; John Tain, curator of the Lahore Biennale 2024; Anissa Touati, a researcher at Brown University and curator of the BCK Biennale in Greece, who collectively shape a program that amplifies voices from the Global Majority, weaving multiple perspectives into a cohesive dialogue on contemporary artistic growth.

Asia NOW unfolds at La Monnaie de Paris with around 70 international galleries, from established names like Esther Schipper, carlier | gebauer, and Tang Contemporary Art to newcomers including Arario, Capsule Shanghai, and BAIK Art. The NOW ON section spotlights young galleries founded after 2015. The newly inaugurated Third Space section, inspired by Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, foregrounds South Asia

with projects such as *We Were Always Neighbors* curated by Sahil Arora, and installations featuring collaborations across Mumbai, Seoul, Paris, Los Angeles, and Jakarta.

Positioned prominently within the fair's framework is the recognition of the Global Majority as both presence and horizon. This approach deliberately places West Asia and South Asia at the core of programming, recognizing that regions once considered "peripheries" are now vital, dynamic forces reshaping contemporary discourse. Works such as Ahaad Alamoudi's performative installation *Ghosts of Today and Tomorrow* (presented Arnaud Morand and the Saudi Visual Arts Commission), which uses light and sound as carriers of memory and dialogue, and John Tain's *Of Mountains and Seas* from the Lahore Biennale Foundation disrupt and reimagine geography, ecology, and memory, opening profound poetic and political spaces for new narratives.

It is not about reorientation, but about understanding that notions of East and West are fluid and inherently relative—every place can be the East of another, and vice versa—challenging fixed binaries and inviting us to embrace a world where boundaries overlap and meanings shift.

Beyond the exhibitions, GROW is embodied in a multidisciplinary public program of performances, screenings, and conversations. These include Reenactments of *Lost Rhythms* (Colomboscope, Sri Lanka) curated by Natasha Ginwala and Hajra Haider, Han Mengyun's lunar-inspired performative installation *Under the Aegis of the Moon* for AFALULA (Saudi Arabia), Pascal Hachem's *The Cut Line*, supported by ALSERKAL Advisory of Dubai and the launch of Cinema NOW, featuring film selections by NOWNESS, Shwetal Patel, and Zohreh Deldadeh exploring Iranian diaspora themes of displacement and home.

The performance segment of GROW presents works by Mella Jaarsma's costume-based exploration of cultural and racial diversity and the soulful music and Sufi ritual Samā' by MTO Zendeh Delan. Craft remains a vital thread with artists such as Sumakshi Singh and Racso Jugarap expanding the dialogue between the ancestral and the contemporary through textile and embroidery practices, reaffirming craft as an interface of living memory and innovation.

Bringing together galleries, independent initiatives, and institutional voices, ASIA NOW cultivates a shared terrain where traditions are reworked, futures imagined, and solidarities nurtured. To grow, in this context, is not expansion in a market sense, but an embrace of multiplicity, reciprocity, and new affective communities. GROW becomes not only an exhibition but a living ecology—flourishing through encounters, alliances, and the weaving together of many horizons.

Anissa Touati

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