

Watch Out for These 5 Ascendant Artists at Art Basel Paris 2026

Hailing from London to Dubai and working with everything from analog photography to 3D-printed ceramics, these five artists are poised to break out or level up at the Grand Palais this week.

By Ella Martin-Gachot

October 19, 2026

Moka Lee

Age: 30

Based in: Seoul

Showing at: [Carlos/Ishikawa](#)

Why They're Worth a Look: The classically trained painter trawls social media to source images for her uneasy portraits and still-lifes, immortalizing her subjects' coquettish pouts, flashed peace signs, and empty stares in oil paint. Lee's inquiries into the "surface tension" of our digitized selfhoods, rendered in a palette akin to the stages of bruising, have garnered her sustained attention from the Internet and beyond. This past year alone, she was nominated to [Forbes Korea's 30 Under 30 list](#) and opened her first U.S. solo with David Kordansky; her solo booth with Carlos/Ishikawa is the first time her work is shown in France.



Moka Lee. Photography by Jeff McLane. Image courtesy of the artist, Carlos/Ishikawa, and Jason Haam Gallery.



Moka Lee, *Innuendo 06 (Composition)*, 2026. Image courtesy of the artist, Carlos/Ishikawa, and Jason Haam Gallery.

When did you first see yourself as an artist?

Around 2018, during my third year of college [at Sejong University in Seoul]. I was spending a lot of time in my studio, trying to find my own language as a painter. I had been trained in drawing, primarily with pencil and watercolor, but it was in college that I began working seriously with oil paint. I was interested in finding beauty in the things around me and figuring out how to translate what I saw onto a canvas. I remember making a painting called *Night Flash and Girls*. When I finished it, I felt that it contained all the elements I had been looking for in my work. I still have that painting today.

What do you make art for, and what do you make art against?

I make art for myself, first and foremost. I have my own standards for what I consider a good painting, and I paint because I want to satisfy those standards. I also make art for my family. Painting is what I do for a living, and it allows me to provide for the people I love. I think that is an equally honest answer. I do not think I make art against anything in particular.

Where did the body of work you are showing at Art Basel Paris begin?

The five paintings I am presenting at Art Basel Paris are extensions of ideas and subjects I have been exploring since the beginning of my career. Although they belong to different series, they are connected by my ongoing interest in the relationship between the self, the ego, and the persona we construct and present to the world. These are subjects I have returned to repeatedly, often through different kinds of imagery.

For Paris, however, I wanted to approach these ideas with a more conscious consideration of art history. Paris has an extraordinary relationship with the history of painting, and I was thinking about that context while making these works. I wanted the paintings to remain recognizably my own, while also placing them in conversation with the paintings and painters who came before me.

What went into making this work?

It is difficult for me to calculate exactly how many hours went into making these paintings. Certainly hundreds, and probably well over a thousand across the entire body of work. In terms of physical resources, there are the usual things: canvases, oil paints, materials, and the time I spend working in my studio. But I do not think those numbers really explain what goes into making a painting. The greatest resources I put into my work are my heart, my soul, and my ego. I care enormously about what I make, and I want every painting to meet the expectations I have for myself. For this particular presentation, there was also my affection for Vanessa Carlos and my desire to make something that she and the gallery I work with could be proud of.