

K-Beauty

Beauté coréenne, histoire d'un phénomène

K-Beauty. Korean Beauty, Story of a Phenomenon

Exhibition

18th march – 6th july 2026

A major cultural powerhouse, South Korea is now setting trends and inspiring a globalized generation. At the forefront of this wave, K-Beauty is imposing a holistic approach to beauty that is typically Korean and establishing a true aesthetic. Going beyond simple cosmetics, it is forging new standards and creating striking and unique imagery.

Bringing together masterpieces from the collections of the Guimet Museum and major South Korean institutions (paintings, photographs, advertisements, dresses, and beauty accessories from the 18th century to the present day), the «K-Beauty» exhibition deciphers its codes and shows how they are part of a centuries-old tradition, between balance and virtue, naturalness and sophistication.

At the end of the 18th century, Korea, under heavy influence of the Neo-Confucian movement, celebrated a particular feminine aesthetic: flowing clothes, pale skin, refined makeup, and hairstyles. The painters who immortalized these beauties, such as Shin Yun-bok, contributed to the development of a visual heritage that has had a lasting influence on Korean popular culture. This refined culture, where cosmetics drew on traditional pharmacopoeia, linked beauty, harmony, and inner balance. Marked by successive foreign dominations and influences, the 20th century in Korea saw the emergence of new aesthetic codes.

Photography, cinema, and the emerging cosmetics industry spread and cemented these new standards, while the «Korean economic miracle» placed heritage, art, and cosmetics at the heart of cultural discourse.

Since the 2000s, Hallyu (the Korean wave) has cemented South Korea's soft power: K-Beauty, combining tradition and innovation, has made its mark on cinema, fashion, literature and K-Pop, conquering the whole world.

Through this exhibition, visitors will discover how a distinctly Korean aesthetic has been consolidated, with certain standards — forged since the late Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) — retaining their appeal to this day and becoming the subject of tributes and numerous reinterpretations. «K-Beauty» highlights the evolution and enduring nature of the concept of Korean beauty, from the second half of the 18th century to the contemporary globalized world.



The Guimet

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1. *Woman Doing Her Hair*, attributed to Kim Hongdo, Color on paper, 24.7×26.0cm, Seoul National University Museum.

2. *Miindo Hanbok*, Donation Lee Young-hee © Thierry Ollivier

3. *Three Boys in Front of Bogwang Karaoke*, 1993, © Heinkuhn Oh Courtesy of the Artist

4. Kim Eun-ho, *Beauté*, 1935, Collection of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea-Courtesy of the Artist Family

5. Kim Insoong, *Listening*, 1966, Collection of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea-Courtesy of the Artist Family

6. Yuni Kim Lang (née en 1986), *Woven identity I* (2015) ©courtesy of the artist

7. Magazine *Femme* volume 1-3 - © The Modern Bibliography Review Society.