Clockwise from this picture, the yoga hall; the restaurant, with custom walnut furniture by Teo Yang and windows facing Gyeongbokgung Palace; Elmgreen & Dragset’s *Human Scale (Zero)* sculpture, 2018, on the gallery’s roof terrace.
Kukje Gallery, Korea's leading contemporary art gallery, has a proud history of introducing Korean audiences to new art experiences. With last summer's reopening of its K1 building, which now encompasses exhibition spaces, a café, a restaurant and a wellness centre, it is rethinking how and where art should be experienced.

The 1987 building is one of three spaces that Kukje operates in Seoul's upscale Samcheong-dong enclave. The original structure comprises a midsection with Gehry-esque glass façades sandwiched between two rectilinear volumes, all of which have undergone a two-year makeover orchestrated by local practice Ourstudio, which was also brought on board to create the new café and exhibition areas on the ground floor.

The idea, which has proven prescient, was to create open spaces throughout, with as few dividing walls as possible so that the greenery outside is always in view: ‘The interior is closely connected to its surroundings, which I believe serves as a relief to people who live in a time of isolation and social distancing. In a post-Covid-19 society, we can really only find solace in art and nature,’ says Bo Young Song, the gallery’s managing director.

Meanwhile, designer Teo Yang, an avid art collector himself, was tasked with transforming the rest of the building, which includes a restaurant and a members’ wellness centre with gym and yoga hall. ‘I hope the gallery evokes the curated atmosphere of a collector’s home,’ says Yang. ‘Visitors are encouraged to imagine living with the works.’ Pieces by Kukje’s roster of Korean and international artists are present in every space: visitors can dine under a Haegue Yang installation, meditate in front of an Ugo Rondinone painting, or lift weights beside a Julian Opie digital piece.

“We believe that art transcends the visual,” explains Song. “As multidisciplinary integration is increasingly relevant today, it was necessary for the gallery to keep up with and even try to move ahead of our times.”

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