

Bae Yoon Hwan: Heavy Breathers

27 June—31 July 2026

Through painting, Bae Yoon Hwan (Korean, b. 1983) has long explored the relationship between image and narrative. In recent years, he has increasingly reduced narrative elements while expanding the use of emptiness and omission, turning his attention to bodily states and the density of sensation. In this exhibition, elephants, noses, and detached bodies and objects emerge as forms that continue to breathe under the pressures of time, presenting landscapes of survival in which bodies and objects, sensation and structure, sustain one another.



Bae Yoon Hwan, *Baritone*, 2026, charcoal on canvas, 162.2 x 130.3 cm

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Gallery Baton is pleased to announce *Heavy Breathers*, a solo exhibition by Bae Yoon Hwan (Korean, b. 1983) from 27 June to 31 July 2026. Bae Yoon Hwan has long expanded the narrative possibilities of painting by reconstructing accumulated experiences and collected images into forms of pictorial storytelling. In recent years, his attention has shifted toward the irreversible transformations of the contemporary world, registering the conditions of the Anthropocene through his own perceptual and imaginative lens. Newly introduced motifs—including elephants, noses, and functional objects—project landscapes of survival onto the artist's field of perception, presenting liminal terrains in which bodies and objects, sensation and structure, sustain one another.

Since the early 2010s, Bae has examined the position of the artist as a producer of images, the conditions through which artworks occupy space, and the point at which the private space of the studio encounters the external world. Images and materials within his work do not remain fixed in meaning but move, accumulate, and enter into new relationships. These concerns are equally evident in his video works including *Self-Portrait* (2017), *Road to Studio B* (2018), and *A Dance at 3 O'Clock* (2024). Working across painting and video, Bae has explored the ecology surrounding artistic production, tracing the circulation between production and exhaustion, accumulation and disappearance, image and material.



Bae Yoon Hwan, *Breathe*, 2026, oil on canvas, 130.3 x 193.9 cm

In the present exhibition, the elephant, the nose, and objects detached from the body emerge as central motifs. The elephant appears as a figure unable to fully assimilate into the speed and order of the contemporary world, while simultaneously reflecting the burdens and anxieties carried by the individual. Socially displaced bodies and private forms of unease converge, allowing external conditions and internal sensations to condense into a single image. Here, the elephant no longer functions as a symbol of strength or authority, but as a body subjected to the pressures of time and weight. The nose, meanwhile, operates as an organ of instinct and sensation that precedes thought, revealing a layer of bodily memory that responds before language or cognition.

Recent works mark a gradual reduction of narrative elements. Charcoal-based paintings, in particular, introduce a more compressed and sensory visual language through relationships of line, surface, light, and shadow. In *Baritone, 222MHz*, and *March*, recognisable forms are partially dismantled, while tension and density within the pictorial field come to the foreground. These developments reflect the artist's increasing interest in omission, emptiness, and restraint, asking what kinds of states or sensations may emerge once narrative has been withdrawn from the image.

The exhibition title, *Heavy Breathers*, begins with breathing as the smallest unit of being alive. In ***Breathe***, an elephant remains alone within a desolate landscape, repeating a learned gesture and suspending a small breath in the air. Breathing here does not function as a metaphor for hope, but as a sustained response to pressure. The body becomes a site where social conditions and personal memory intersect, while repetition persists as a mechanism of survival. Across the exhibition, Bae traces forms of existence situated within the irreversible conditions of the Anthropocene. Between the desire to endure and the gradual objectification imposed by the environment, an allegorical tension unfolds across the surface of the works.

- About Artist

Bae Yoon Hwan has developed a distinctive artistic practice across painting, video, installation, and graffiti, constructing a densely layered visual language that moves fluidly between different media. His recent solo exhibitions include *Deep Diver* (Space K, Seoul, 2025); *What? In My Back Yard?!* (Gallery Baton, Seoul, 2022); *Record of Destruction* (Chapter II, Seoul, 2019); *At The Old Ball Game* (Doosan Gallery, New York, 2018); *Like a Snake Like a Wild Dog* (Space O'newall, Seoul, 2015); *The Man Hunting For The Point To Smear Gasoline*, Space Mom, Cheongju (2014), and *Was It a Cat I Saw?* (Insa Art Space, Seoul, 2014).

Bae has participated in numerous institutional exhibitions in Korea, including presentations at the Seoul Museum of Art, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Cheongju Museum of Art, Daegu Art Museum, Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art, Jeju Museum of Art, OCI Museum of Art, SongEun, and Geumcheon Foundation for Arts and Culture. His works are held in the collections of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), Seoul Museum of Art, Busan Museum of Contemporary Art, Cheongju Museum of Art, and Space K Seoul.



Bae Yoon Hwan, 2026