

Korea's only & largest 2024 Overseas Koreans Literary Awards

Representative Korean authors Gu Hyo-seo, Park Sang-woo, Lee Kyung-ja and Mun Tae-joon share their words

504 writers from 53 countries: 81 pct (225) more applicants and 84 pct (597) more entries than last year



The front cover of the Anthology of the 2023 Overseas Koreans Literary Awards

The Overseas Koreans Agency has announced the 2024 Overseas Koreans Literary Awards, which are open to overseas Koreans around the world, with an 81 percent (225) increase in the number of applicants and an 84 percent (597) increase in the number of entries compared with the previous year. A total of 1,304 entries were submitted by 504 writers from 53 countries. The number of entries and submissions increased by over 80 percent on-year, despite the fact that the number of awards was significantly reduced this year due to budget cuts.

Now in its 26th year, the literary awards have been held annually since 1999 to foster the Korean identity and enhance bonding and mutual understanding as one people by encouraging creative activities in Korean literature. This year's contest was held in the three categories of Poetry, Short Story and Essay/Memoir.

Results announced in late September

The winners of the Grand Prize (5 million won), Honorable Mention Prize (2.5 million won) and Runner Up Prize (1 million won) in each category will be announced at the end of September on the websites of the OKA (oka.go.kr), Korean Net (korean.net) and Sotong24 (sotong.go.kr). The winning works will be included and distributed in the anthology 2024 Window to Overseas Korean Literature. The judges are novelists Gu Hyo-seo, Park Sang-woo, Lee Kyung-ja, and poet Mun Tae-joon.

The OKA conducted a public verification of the nominees for the 2024 26th Overseas Koreans Literary Award in accordance with the Regulations on the Operation of Competitions by Administrative Organizations.

A total of 13 works nominated for the 26th Overseas Koreans Literary Awards were subject to the verification. The nominees were ▲ "The House," "Moshi," "My Village Is Burning" and "Seaweed Root" in the Poetry category; ▲ "Go West," "Malbok's Summer," "I Will Be in Paradise" and "Palma de Mallorca" in the Short Story category; and ▲ "My Bucket List No. 1," "The Stars Make Me Dream," "A Nearby Heaven," "Fifth War in the Middle East" and "Linda, the Woman Next Door" in the Essay/Memoir category.

The full text of all the works can be viewed on the Sotong24 website (sotong.go.kr).

Link to the full works: <https://me2.do/GEXNaxS>

Gu Hyo-seo: 'Literature by overseas Koreans is passionate encounter with another me'



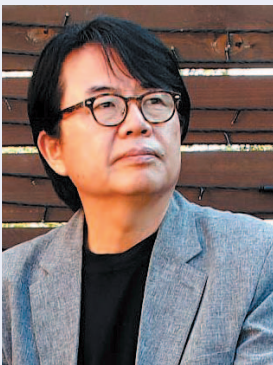
How did you feel about being a judge for the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards?

"The indescribable feeling when you hear Korean on the street in a foreign country, it's an instantaneous surge of feeling that goes beyond happiness and is just instinctive. Reading the literary works of overseas Koreans is an intense encounter with the 'other me' that exists in another country, and I expected that the 'Overseas Koreans Literary Awards' would be a very practical opportunity for me as a Korean writer to explore the issue of 'language' that we share as Koreans. On the other hand, I believed that the works of overseas Koreans are like foreign correspondent reports, and their works can endlessly stimulate and enlarge the outskirts of perception of a Korean writer, deepening and broadening our perspective and view of the world."

Is there anything special that distinguishes the Overseas Koreans Literature Awards from other literary competitions?

"Just like Korean literature and world literature, both the Annual Spring Literary Contests and the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards are linguistic products that are written freely in terms of form and content without any restrictions or limitations. However, while Korean literature is limited to works written in Korean, the Overseas Koreans Literary Award is more distinctive because it targets works written in Korean while living abroad. Even though they are still free to play with content and form, they are characterized by the fact that Korea, Koreans and Hangeul loom in the background of the works as if by fate."

Park Sang-woo: 'May you unfold your talents toward a literature that is joyful, a literature for sharing'



What would you like to say to the writers participating in the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards?

"Literature is a great tool to improve your life, depending on how you use it. If you are only driven by the desire to become a famous author who sells a lot of books, it is very likely that literature will become a tool of painful self-torture. If you understand that all literature in the world is about human beings and their lives and you see its intrinsic value, it is an incomparable tool for enriching your life and communicating with others. Literature knows no borders, so I encourage you to use your talents to create literature that is enjoyable, informative, entertaining and for sharing."

What's different about this year's Overseas Koreans Literary Awards?

"Since being elevated to work at the OKA, there

have been many changes in the management system, practical approach, public relations and judging panel organization. I feel very sad that the funding for the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards has been drastically cut, and it is operating at a limited scale at a time when K-culture is spreading around the world, and from the perspective of overseas Koreans, I think that consideration for their own compatriots should be a much higher priority than actively promoting K-culture overseas. Nevertheless, I was surprised to learn that the management of the Literary Awards has systematized its public relations system, and that this year's entries increased by 84 percent compared with last year. I sincerely hope that by increasing governmental support in this area, overseas Koreans will not live as shadows of K-culture but will be able to live with pride as Koreans anywhere in the world."

Lee Kyung-ja: 'It is something very special to write a literary work in your native language from the place you are living'



You've been a judge for the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards for many years. What do you think should happen with regards to the direction of the competition?

"Rather than being a one-time event, literature is something that is expressed through the tool of the written word and remains forever as long as the written word exists. There is something very special about it, something that you can take out and look at whenever you want and need it, but it does not get old like a photograph. That's the greatness of art expressed through letters."

What distinguishes the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards from other literary prizes?

"In the case of essays and life memoirs, there is a specificity to the subject matter, which reflects the reality of the particular life of an overseas

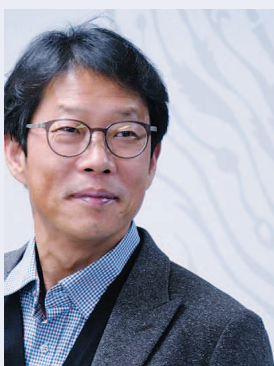
Korean. To reason and write in one's native language with literary quality from the scene of that life is something very special."

What are your hopes for the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards?

"Overseas Korean literature should reflect the particularities of people who have left the country of their birth and upbringing and are living elsewhere, speaking a different language and imbued with different customs.

"If it is also outstanding in its literary quality and touches the lives of people of other ethnicities or languages, then it is truly commendable. There are so many reasons to applaud the OKA's celebration of the mother tongue for overseas Koreans. Therefore, the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards are a national undertaking that deserve even greater recognition."

Mun Tae-joon: 'I hope Overseas Koreans Literary Awards can become a festival of solidarity and unity'



This year, you became the first winner of the inaugural Musan Cultural Award in the literary category. How do you feel?

"This year marks the 30th anniversary of my debut publication, and I think the award is an encouragement and a call to me to not be lazy in writing poetry, not to set my eyes elsewhere, and to broaden and deepen the scope of my poetry world. I will try my best to contribute even a little to the renewal of Korean poetry."

In your work, you've been exposed to poetry by poets from many different countries. Do you think there are characteristics of each country, and what are the characteristics of overseas Korean literature?

"Of course, each country's local customs and local flavors are reflected in the works, but I think there is an overall characteristic that is even clearer

than this. In the past, submissions were often based on nostalgia for the homeland and memories of the past, but now there are many works that have gradually moved away from that tendency and are actively expressing their daily life and poetic experiences in their current place of residence. The enthusiasm for creating and the quality of the works are also very high. If we were to translate these submissions back into the language of their country of residence and publish them in that country's poetry magazine, I think they would be very well received by readers of that country."

What are your hopes for the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards?

"I hope that more and more overseas compatriots around the world will continue to respond, and that the literary prize will become a celebration of solidarity and unity." 🇵🇰