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# **The Lea Sneider Collection of Korean Art**

**Exhibition Catalogue by Robert Turley**

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**October 14 – November 21, 2014 at The Korea Society**

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1



early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Sansindo Mountain Spirit Painting, 33 x 39 inches, ink and colors on silk

Sansin, the mountain spirit, is an indigenous Korean deity, petitioned for centuries to provide fertility, long life, and good fortune. Most Buddhist temples in Korea have a separate shrine to him, called the Sansin-gak. This painting of the mountain spirit shows him in regal bearing and attire. The tiger by his side is the animal manifestation of Sansin, and his messenger and enforcer. The power and elegance of this tiger are captured in brushwork that is bold and finely detailed. This painting was previously exhibited in 1999 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Japan Society in the exhibition, *Crosscurrents: Masterpieces of East Asian Art from New York Private Collections*, and in *Auspicious Spirits: Korean Folk Paintings and Related Objects*, which traveled to major museums across America, beginning in 1983 at the Asia Society in New York, and concluding at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1985.

2



19<sup>th</sup> Century Eobyong Seongyongdo Dragon and Carp Painting, 43 x 27 inches, ink and colors on paper

According to the legend of Yong Mun Pokpo (the Dragon Gate Waterfall), carp gather downstream and try to swim upstream against the current and jump up the waterfall. The carp that succeeds is transformed, in a flash of lightning and thunder, into a dragon. The phrase “Teungyongmun” (going through the Dragon Gate) refers to advancement and success. The carp in this painting dream of becoming dragons. Paintings like this were hung in young students’ rooms to motivate them to pass the civil service examinations (and nowadays, college entrance exams). Once transformed from a persevering carp, the mighty dragon ambitiously chases through the clouds after the yeoiju, the flaming magical pearl of wisdom. Similar symbolism of advancement is seen in the lotus that rises above the mud of the pond, and in the Korean word for lotus seeds, yeongwa, which is pronounced the same as the phrase for passing multiple civil service exams in a row. A painting of three fish (samyeodo), as we have here, refers to the advice given by the scholar, Tong Yu, to a young student who complained that he did not have enough time for reading. Tong Yu replied that there are three times (samyeo) that are available for reading: nights, winter months, and rainy days. There is also wise counsel in this painting for the young student in the idea that fish never close their eyes, even when they are sleeping, which symbolizes eternal vigilance.

3



early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Painting of General Choe Yeong, 33 x 23 inches, ink and colors on silk

General Choe Yeong (1316-1388) is famous for successfully defending Korea against Japanese and Mongol invasion, and for his steadfast loyalty. This painting, from around the time of the Japanese annexation of Korea, shows General Choe and other Koreans scorning a Japanese naval officer. General Choe is depicted as a deity, wearing mythical dragon-scale armor and a winged helmet, and holding a halberd and trident.

4



19<sup>th</sup> Century Gammo Yeojaedo Spirit Shrine Painting, 42 x 29 inches, ink and colors on paper

Paintings like this were used in place of an actual shrine for Confucian ancestor worship rituals. It depicts the ancestor shrine and offering table. Ancestor worship was expected of all good citizens in Korea, so if one was far from the ancestral shrine, or just could not afford one, they could use an ancestral shrine painting to perform the rituals.

5



early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hwajodo Flower and Bird Eight-Panel Screen Painting, 41 x 160 inches, ink and colors on paper

Hwajodo were displayed in the newlyweds' room to encourage a happy marriage and fertility, and to bring serene beauty to the room. The birds in each panel are paired as a symbol of eternal love. They are accompanied by auspicious symbols, such as the pine tree and mythical bullocho plant (symbols of longevity), peonies (symbol of prosperity), and pomegranates (symbol of fertility, because of its many seeds).

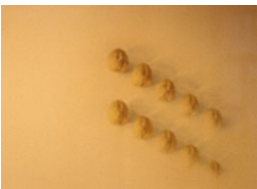
6



19<sup>th</sup> Century Chaekkori Scholar's Books and Accoutrements Two-Panel Screen Painting, 84 x 46 inches, ink and colors on paper

A chaekkori screen inspired scholastic diligence and adherence to Confucian principles of self-improvement. Chaekkori are uniquely Korean still-life paintings of a scholar's study. In addition to books, we see here ceramics, bronze vessels, melon and pomegranate (many seeds symbolize many descendants), plum blossoms (symbol of courage, because the plum blossom blooms early, before winter is finished), peaches (symbol of longevity, from the Daoist legend of Queen So Wang Mo's Peaches of Immortality), and two of the most important items to a scholar, paper and brush. Unlike folk paintings, chaekkori were mostly painted by professional painters. They used reverse perspective, where objects grow larger toward the back of the painting. This is because the picture is looking at the person, rather than the person looking at the picture. The scholar or student sits facing their desk, with the chaekkori watchful at their back.

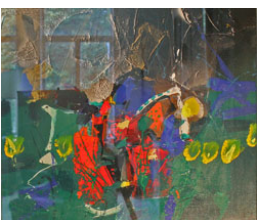
7



Walnuts by Po Kim, 1975, 14 x 19 inches, colored pencil drawing on paper

Pioneering artist Po Kim (1917-2014) was one of the first Korean artists to immigrate to America. Drawing walnuts was a form of meditation for him. He enjoyed spending time in a state of Zen as he went over the fine details that made each walnut unique.

8



Untitled by Lee Doo Shik, 17 x 20 inches, oil painting

Lee Doo Shik (1947-2013) was internationally renowned for his unique palette and for the large-scale murals that he painted in locations from Rome to Beijing. This painting is an excerpt from his mural in Gwangju's largest hotel. Lee Doo Shik was Dean of Fine Arts at Hongik University, Director of the Busan Biennale, and Chair of the Korean Fine Arts Association.

9



19<sup>th</sup> Century Nat-hwi Painted Wood Temple Sculpture, 18 x 29 inches

This monster glared down from under the eaves in front of the halls of a Buddhist temple, or from above the altar inside the temple. This guardian spirit scares off evil spirits with its sharp canine teeth and a frightening visage. It protects the temple and the Dharma Truth, and warns young visitors to behave while they are in the temple.

10



19<sup>th</sup> Century Kkokdu Painted Wood Funerary Figures, 21 x 37 inches

These seven sisters adorned a funeral bier, and brought hope and cheer to the mourners, by offering assurance that they would guide the deceased to an eternal heavenly paradise, and look after them.

11



1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Wajil Pot, 11 x 9 inches, earthenware

This Proto-Three Kingdoms Period earthenware wajil pot is from the Yeongnam region. Its name comes from the name for roof tiles (wa), because the texture is like that for roof tiles, due to a firing temperature of 900 °C (not quite high enough to form stoneware, but enough to form tile-hard earthenware). The pattern on the surface comes from a paddle wrapped in straw cord that was used to smooth and strengthen the walls. The paddle was wrapped in cord to prevent it from sticking to the clay, so the pattern was originally unintentional. Over time, the pattern was considered desirable and became more systematic in later pieces.

12



4<sup>th</sup> Century Gaya Storage Jar, 11 x 13 inches, stoneware

This jar has a vertical cord pattern with incised horizontal bands on the upper portion of the jar, and a lattice pattern on the bottom, created with a wood paddle that has a lattice pattern carved into it. It is likely from the Gimhae region of Gaya. Gaya existed in the time of the Three Kingdoms Period, but it was not one of the three kingdoms. It was a confederacy of states based around the Nakdong River valley on the southern coast of Korea. Though Gaya was a small area, its pottery was very influential on the pottery of the Three Kingdoms.

13



5<sup>th</sup> Century Gaya Water Jar, 12 x 9 inches, stoneware

The long neck of this jar would keep the water from spilling out as the jar was carried along on a person's head. The incised wave pattern within incised horizontal bands on the neck was created with a comb. This pattern can be found on Korean pottery going as far back as 5,000 BCE.

14



5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Century Gaya Mounted Bowl, 6 x 8 inches, stoneware

This vessel, with handles and a comb-incised wave pattern within incised horizontal bands, has a natural, accidental ash glaze that is the result of ash blowing through the kiln and depositing on the piece. The silica in the ash produces the glaze.

15



5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Century Silla Storage Jar, 19 x 16 inches, stoneware

This large jar was coil-built and wheel-thrown: built up from coils of clay, and shaped and smoothed on the potter's wheel. Onggi jars in Korea are still constructed this way. This jar has a cord pattern on the surface, and areas where the cord pattern was smoothed over.

16



Painted Stoneware by Oh Chun Hak, 14 x 14 inches

Oh Chun Hak (1948–2005) creates forms that are inspired by organisms, such as his Sea Urchin here. *Ceramics Ireland* magazine said of his work, “Oh Chun Hak is a highly revered artist who produces glorious, sensuous, curvaceous shapes.” He was a professor at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul. His works have been exhibited at a number of major museums, including the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, the Honolulu Museum of Art, the Smithsonian, the Vancouver Art Museum, and the Seattle Art Museum, among others.

17



Kwiyal Buncheong Slip-painted Stoneware by Lee Kang Hyo, 5 x 13 inches

Lee Kang Hyo (born 1961) has created here a contemporary take on a traditional ritual bowl used to hold rice and other grain offerings in Confucian ceremonies. This is a fine example of the spontaneous spirit and lively, vigorous brushwork of Korean buncheong ceramics that were much admired by the influential Japanese scholar Yanagi Soetsu and by famous potters such as Bernard Leach and Hamada Shoji. It is this type of ceramic that Hamada wrote about in a letter to Leach in 1922, where he said, “I think there are hardly any pots in the world through which a people's life breathes as directly as Korean ones. Between pots and life, Japanese ones have ‘taste’, Toft wares have ‘enjoyment’, even the Song pots have ‘beauty’, and so on. But Korean pots have nothing in between; people's lives are directly behind the pots.” Elements of this type of pottery, such as the

form and the handles, can be seen on Neolithic Korean pottery dating back to 4,000 BCE. Lee Kang Hyo's works are in the permanent collection of numerous major museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Newark Museum of Art, the International Ceramic Museum in Italy, the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, and many others.

**18**



*Stoneware with Sgraffito Design in Brushed-slip Painting by Lee Jeong Do, 9 x 9 inches*

Lee Jeong Do (born 1953) creates contemporary interpretations of Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) buncheong ceramics, here using delicately applied brushed-slip painting. The sgraffito grain design puts a modern flair on a pot with a simple form, and evokes a feeling of “action within stillness.” Lee Jeong Do was born in Korea and resides in Canada. His works are in the permanent collections of several major museums, including the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum, the Musee Royal de Mariemont in Belgium, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Musee National de Ceramique in France, among others.

**19**



*Stoneware with Stamped and Incised Design in White Slip Paint by Lee Kyu Tak, 9 x 7 inches*

Lee Kyu Tak (born 1961) pays tribute in this piece to both the ceramic and painting traditions of Korea. The soft, humble quality of Lee's art is the result of great care, from the stamps that he creates himself to meticulously impress the surface of the pot, to the exuberant incising of his original compositions in the style of Korean minhwa folk paintings, all in a soft white clay slip.

**20**



*Incised and Inlaid Stoneware by Cho Chung Hyun, 15 x 9 inches*



Cho Chung Hyun (born 1940) is a retired professor and Dean of Fine Arts at Ehwa Womans University. Her work is inspired by Korea's onggi pots. This piece tells a 3,000 year-long story of Korean ceramics, from red-bodied Neolithic pottery, the triangle patterns of Silla ware, the inlaid work of Goryeo ceramics, the form of onggi pots from the Joseon Dynasty, right up to today with a modern sensibility and contemporary rendering. Cho Chung Hyun's works are in the permanent collections of the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, the National Museum of Scotland, and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul, among other museums. She has curated numerous exhibitions of contemporary ceramics, including the first exhibition of Korean contemporary ceramics to travel to major museums around the world, *From the Fire: A Survey of Contemporary Korean Ceramics*. Cho Chung Hyun is a leading figure in the world of contemporary ceramics, as an artist, educator, curator, and author.

21



early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Silk Jogakbo Sangbo Bojagi Patchwork Covering Cloth, 22 x 22 inches

The ribbon in the center of this bojagi indicates that it was used to cover food, keep it warm, and protect it from insects. The cotton backing protects the silk cloth from being soiled by the food. In a saekdongbo (colorful stripes bojagi) like this, strips of cloth of different colors were sewn together to create a harmonious pattern that appealed to the anonymous housewife who created it, and with its similarities to the work of artists like Mondrian and Klee, still appeals to modern taste.