



Unknown Korean artist
**Guardian of Hell in
Ksitigarbha's Court**
Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910),
17th–18th century
Wood with pigment
Museum purchase, funds
provided by the Robert H. and
Kathleen M. Axline Acquisition
Endowment
2018.65

EVERYDAY TO THE EXTRAORDINARY

Highlights from the Korean Collection

Tangible and Intangible Heritage

The traditional Korean dance form *Seungmu* provides a metaphor for the challenge of defining and representing the rich diversity of Korean art. In *Seungmu*, the story of a life is illustrated through seven distinct scenes, major events or experiences that summarize a person's existence. These pivotal moments—including birth and death—are meaningful and essential, but they cannot truly define a life in its entirety. There are so many memories, experiences, and relationships whose influence on our identities are more subtle—and yet can be powerful with their continuity or presence. So with the art of a nation which cannot be sufficiently represented by masterworks that may miss inherent complexities, diversity, and a multitude of tangible and intangible histories.

Everyday to the Extraordinary: Highlights from the Korean Collection makes visible the links between objects in the Harn Museum's permanent collection and broader networks of cultural influence, including other literature, performing arts, and the everyday experience.

The exhibition includes objects from a wide historical swath, dating from the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE–668 CE) up until the 20th century. By comparing the pivotal events of an era to the undercurrents of cultural norms and shared values, it becomes clearer how the aesthetics of an age intimately reflect the culture and values of the time.

With this framework in mind, in this guide a single object offers an entryway into each historical period. This approach by timeline can be applied to other Korean objects in the exhibition and beyond.

Please print the last page of this guide, featuring the Korean poetic form *sijo*. The activity was created by the Spring 2020 Harn Writers-in-Residence Debora Greger, Mirjam Frosth, and Angie Chirino.

Three Kingdoms Period

c. 57 BCE–668 CE

The three kingdoms of Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla occupied parts of Manchuria, present-day China and Russia, and the Korean Peninsula. Buddhism came to Korea from China, spread by Chinese monks to Goguryeo in 372 CE, and then to Baekje in 384 CE. Silla, whose relative geographical isolation in the southwestern part of the peninsula slowed the transmission of Chinese culture, did not officially recognize Buddhism until the 6th century.

Rustic in its construction and decorative modeling, this architectural model offers a glimpse of built structures in the Silla Kingdom. It was likely fashioned for a tomb that would serve as the occupant's spiritual dwelling in the next life, a reference to a Buddhist stupa or an astronomical observatory.



Model

Three Kingdoms Period
(57 BCE–668 CE),
Silla Kingdom, c. 400–600
Stoneware
Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Dale
and Patricia Keller
2016.52.11

Unified Silla

668–935 CE

Through a series of military and political moves, the Silla Kingdom achieved dominance over the Korean peninsula by the end of the 7th century. By 676, Silla succeeded in forcing the Chinese troops to withdraw into Manchuria, and for the first time the peninsula came under the sway of a single Korean government. In the succeeding Unified Silla Period, Korean culture flourished, creating a political and cultural legacy which was handed down to subsequent rulers.

This finely crafted bottle vase has intricately repetitive designs stamped horizontally across its bulbous body and tapered neck. Characteristic of pottery from the Unified Silla Period, double incised lines define stamped decorations into neatly organized registers.



Bottle

Unified Silla Period (668–935)
Unglazed stoneware
Museum purchase, funds provided by the Robert H.
and Kathleen M. Axline Acquisition Endowment
2010.40.1



Goryeo Dynasty

918–1392 CE

Some of the most outstanding achievements in Korean art and culture date to the Goryeo Dynasty. Goryeo potters produced elegant green-glazed ceramic ware, highly praised by contemporaneous Chinese and later known in the West as celadon.

Goryeo established close ties with China's Song Dynasty. Tribute was paid to China, but both state-sponsored and private trade included all manner of goods moving in both directions. China exported silk, books, spices, tea, medicine, and ceramics while Goryeo sent gold, copper, silver, ginseng, porcelain, pine nuts, and paper.

While inspired by Chinese traditions, Korean celadons developed several distinctive features. The elegantly curved body of this plum vase (*maebyeong*) illustrates one of these features in the use of black and white slip to create designs under the crackled sea-green glaze.

Maebyeong were functional vessels used for displaying flowers or holding liquids such as wine, honey, or sesame oil. Excavations of Goryeo-period shipwrecks have revealed that vases like this were accompanied by wooden tags describing their contents and were used extensively for trade.



Maebyeong Vase

Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392)
Glazed stoneware with inlay
Gift of General James A. Van Fleet
1988.1.4

Joseon Dynasty

1392–1910 CE

The advent of the Joseon Dynasty in the late 14th century brought major social and cultural changes. In their efforts to augment the power of the government and rejuvenate the country, Joseon rulers withdrew royal patronage of the Buddhist establishment, then seen as corrupt, and promoted Neo-Confucianism as the official state ideology.

Another important development in the Joseon Dynasty was the growing challenge on the part of Korean intellectuals to the pervasive influence of Chinese thought and culture in Korean society. With the decline and fall of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Koreans became more interested in promoting their own culture. The art and literature of the period reflects this greater interest in native Korean traditions and everyday life.

Kim Hongdo is the most eminent painter of the later Joseon Dynasty. Kim's genre paintings typically deal with aspects of daily life, showing ordinary people at work or at play. Kim portrayed people of all classes and ages, whether engaged in various types of labor, relaxing after work, or playing games and sports. This hanging scroll depicts a group of men on horseback using falcons to hunt geese.



Kim Hongdo (Dan Won)

Korean, 1745–c.1806

Hunting with Falcons (detail)

Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), late 18th century, c. 1792–1795

Ink and color on silk

Gift of General James A. Van Fleet

1988.1.25

Conservation treatment completed by Jungjae Conservation Studio, Seoul, 2013.
Funded by the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (NRICH).

20th Century

1901–2000 CE

The modern art movement in Korea was shaped by the classicist leanings of the Joseon literati art tradition alongside the influx of Western ideas, aesthetic principles, and techniques. Japan's occupation of Korea (1910–1945) had an indelible impact on Korea. There was the emergence of a fervent Korean nationalist sentiment, which created tension in everyday life and in the arts. Finally, the devastation of the Korean War (1950–1953) left both North and South Korea in desperate need of postwar reconstruction.

With the dismantling of the Neo-Confucian class that occurred during the Japanese occupation, the boundaries between court and folk traditions began to blur. The arts of Korea during the 20th century reflect these pluralist influences, creating a spectrum of output from purely traditional to art that reflects a growing global consciousness of the postwar artists.

In certain mountainous regions where both Buddhism and Shamanism closely coexist within local communities, an intermingling of iconic depictions of important local deities occurs. One interpretation of the three deities depicted here suggests that the triad represents indigenous Shamanistic beliefs while visibly replicating artistic traditions in the Buddhist style. Native shamanistic practice is centered on the belief that the world is occupied by spirits who play an important role in individual and collective lives.



Shamanist Buddhist Monks (detail)

Early 20th century

Colors on silk, mounted on brocade

Museum purchase, funds provided by the Robert H.
and Kathleen M. Axline Acquisition Endowment
2011.39.1

What's a Sijo?

Sijo (pronounced *she-joe*) is a traditional Korean form of poetry. The earliest known one was written in the 14th century. *Sijo* are three lines long, each line 14–16 syllables. One type of *sijo*, called *sijo chang*, is sung so slowly, it has been called the “slowest song in the world.”

Sijo began as a sly political weapon. They were written at first in classical Chinese by *Yangban*, the male aristocrats of the Korean ruling class, who were typically military officials and civil servants. These writers disguised the political points they wanted to make by using nature poetry. By the 18th century, times had changed, *sijo* were written by everyone, and in Korean.

Poet Hwang Jin-i, 1506–1560, (there’s a K-drama about her!) often wrote *sijo* half in aristocratic Chinese, and half in Korean *hanja* used by women even though it was suppressed by the scholar officials. Take this one, for example, where the first half of each line is in Chinese, the second half in Korean:

Can you sense where the languages change?

Jade Green Stream, don’t boast so proud
of your easy passing through these blue hills.
Once you have reached the broad sea,
to return again will be hard.
While the Bright Moon fills these empty hills,
why not pause? Then go on, if you will.

—Hwang Jin-i, translation by David McCann

Seok Mo Ro-in
Korean, active late 19th century
Tiger
Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910),
late 19th century
Ink and color on paper
Museum purchase, funds provided by
the David A. Cofrin Fund for Asian Art
2011.41



Make your own Sijo! Use the word bank to fill in the blanks.

PRINT

old	tiger	forest	hide	listen	annoy
fly	river	maggie	teeth	stalk	regal
green	wince	stones	be	legs	wing
on	parent	dance	powerful	gull	deer
drink	snow	play	crane	bear	water
teach	leaves	baby	ugly	clouds	hungry
palace	fight	grow	eat	maple	stripes
in	rain	field	love	tall	hare
run	of	gawk			

So, the _____ growled, you’ve come to _____:
animal or person verb

the _____ emperor _____, locked in his _____.
adjective noun place

Nights I _____ the _____, eyes low, ears pricked.
verb place

Did some _____ _____ scurry off?
adjective noun

I would love a _____. Oh, for a _____!
noun noun

Poetry? I _____ it with my claws.
verb



If you get going and need to change some of the given words, go to it.

Created by the Spring 2020 Harn Writers-in-Residence Debora Greger, Mirjam Frosth, and Angie Chirino.

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