

Yang Gi-hun (1843-after 1919)

One Hundred Geese

Korea, Chosôn period (1392-1910), late 19th century

Ten-panel screen; ink and color on paper

On loan from Dr. Michael Chang

(L38762)

Geese have long been popular subjects in East Asian painting, dating back at the least to the Song dynasty (960-1279) in China. Migratory birds, they symbolize the changing seasons, and specifically, the coming of autumn. Seasonal subjects were a common theme in Korean art, as in the rest of East Asia, and this screen probably would have been displayed late in the year when relief finally came from the hot summer months, crops were harvested, and the leaves began to change.

Monumental in size, the screen is remarkable for its continuous landscape, unlike typical screen painting compositions in Korea that were divided into individual panels. The artist took advantage of the subject to animate the geese with different postures and activities, adding interest through the birds' varying interactions with each other.

Suh Byung-oh (1862-1935)

***Plum Blossoms, Orchids, Grapes, Chrysanthemums,
and Bamboo***

Korea, Chosôn period (1392-1910), late 19th-early 20th century

Ten-panel screen; ink on paper

On loan from Dr. Chester and Wanda Chang
(L38758)

Called the “Four Gentlemen,” plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums, and bamboo are among the most enduring subjects in East Asian painting. Each plant was valued for its symbolic connotations: plum blossoms were the first flowers to bloom in early spring, their fragrance heralding the changing seasons as snow lingered on the ground; representing summer, orchids grew in remote places, much like the noble recluse who eschewed corrupt society; chrysanthemums blossomed in the autumn, enduring beyond all other flowers; and bamboo remained green throughout the winter, bending but not breaking in the changing winds of fate. Each of these plants was considered a model for the Confucian gentleman-scholar.

Suh adds an exotic element in the grapes placed appropriately for their season between the orchids and chrysanthemums. Grapes became a popular motif in East Asian art over a thousand years before this screen was painted, as they spread to China along the Silk Road. With their many seeds, they eventually became symbols for fertility, although the artist’s intention in combining them with the “Four Gentlemen” here is unclear.

Anonymous

Tiger and Magpies (Hojakdo)

Korea, Chosôn period (1392-1910), 18th century

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Purchased with Funds from the Beatrice Watson Parrent Acquisition Fund, 2001

(9502.1)

A popular subject in Korean folk painting (*minwha*), the tiger and magpie motif refers to a well-known Korean story. A woodcutter passing through the forest encountered a tiger stuck in a deep pond. The tiger pleaded with the woodcutter to save him, offering in return to grant the man a wish. However, when the woodcutter freed the tiger, it promptly tried to eat him. The man first called upon a nearby ox as witness, but the ox, bitter at the servitude of its kind to humanity, encouraged the tiger to kill him. The man then called upon a magpie, and the magpie tricked the tiger into reentering the pond, thereby saving the man. From that point on, magpies were allowed to build their nests in people's homes, and were considered auspicious symbols (Yeolsu Yoon, *Handbook of Korean Art: Folk Painting*).

Kim Pilkwon (active 19th century)

Epitaph of Kim Jongsam

Korea, Chosôn period (1392-1910), 1819

Stone

On loan from Eddie Lee

(L40395)

Funerary epitaphs (*myoji*) chronicling the origins and achievements of the deceased were written on tablets and placed inside or in front of graves. Made of stone or ceramic, the tablets varied in number, depending on the importance of the person eulogized. These epitaphs provide valuable insight into the political system and mortuary practices of the Neo-Confucian society of the Chosôn period.

This epitaph tablet commemorates the life of Kim Jongsam (1735-1811) from the Hwakaek Kim clan, which produced a number of government and military officers during the late Chosôn period. Composed by Jongsam's grandson Pilkwon, the epitaph praises the life of the deceased and also honors the Hwakaek Kim family achievements.

Anonymous

Chest on Stand

Korea, Chosôn period (1392-1910), 18th-19th century

Wood, lacquer, metal wire, gold, silver, mother-of-pearl, tortoise shell

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter F. Dillingham, 1964

(3220.1)

The dragon is one of the most auspicious symbols in East Asia. Frequently paired with the tiger, the two respectively represent the eastern and western quadrants of the sky, spring and autumn, and *yang* and *yin*, the two contrasting principles of active and passive, male and female that define the changing movements of everything in the world from the seasons to the hierarchies of human society. Dragons often were employed as protective talismans to ward off disasters.

One of a pair, this chest is remarkable for its superb lacquer craftsmanship with mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell inlay, and its use of sumptuous materials such as gold and silver. These features suggest that it would have been made for a member of the imperial family.