

## **A Rare Pair of Imperial Korean Screens from the Honolulu Academy of Arts Permanent Collection**

Korean art has played a key role in the Honolulu Academy of Arts since the opening of the museum in 1927. On opening day, one of the galleries in the museum was called the “Korean Room,” possibly the earliest gallery dedicated exclusively to Korean art in the United States by several decades. The founder of the Academy, Anna Rice Cooke, was an avid collector of Korean art, and one of her important legacies to the museum was the gift of over one hundred Korean works, establishing what has since become one of the finest collections of its type outside Korea.

One of the Academy’s, and Mrs. Cooke’s, greatest coups was the acquisition in 1927, the same year as the opening, of a monumental pair of Korean screens. At over seven feet in height, the impressive scale of these screens, together with the lavish use of gold and expensive mineral pigments, clearly indicates that they were for imperial use. Their title, *Cranes and Peaches* (*Haehakbandodo* in Korean), comes from the prominent featuring of these two motifs, both symbols of longevity in East Asia. From this, we can speculate that they may have been made to commemorate the birthday celebration of a prominent member of the imperial family, or to otherwise offer wishes for long life. The screens were first presented to the public in the Korean Room in 1928, and this exhibition marks the eighty-first anniversary of their display in Hawaii.

Despite the fact that these are among the largest and most opulent paintings to have survived from the imperial court of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), they suffered from significant condition problems and were displayed at the Academy only infrequently. In 2006, the Academy had the rare honor to be offered support from the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (NRICH), an agency of the Korean government, for the conservation of these screens. They were sent to the Gochang Conservation Institute, one of the top conservation centers for paintings in Korea, where they underwent treatments for over a year. When the treatment was completed, the screens were displayed in the new National Museum of Korea in Seoul as part of a special exhibition dedicated to them in Fall 2007. The screens have now returned to the Academy, where this is the first time they have been displayed in decades. This is an exceptional opportunity to see one of the world’s most important works of Korean art, which has its home right here in Hawaii.

The staff of the Academy would like to take this opportunity to recognize the support of the Government of the Republic of Korea, the National Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, and the National Museum of Korea in Seoul for their efforts in making these screens once again accessible to the Hawaii community.

