

Korean Art in the Cincinnati Art Museum

Introduction

The Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM) has a Korean art collection of approximately 120 works, which are placed within three different departments: East Asian, Fashion Arts and Textiles, and Prints and Drawings—please see separate reviews below.¹ The core of the collection was formed from the 1910s to the 1960s.

East Asian Department

In the Cincinnati Art Museum's department of East Asian art, the Korean collection is not large but represents Korean art at its best. Highlights of the Museum's holdings include:



Figure 1. *Spoons*, 936-1392, bronze, CAM, Gift of Janet Joering, 1977.83-.84, gift of Mrs. Marion Blankenhorn, 1958.480



Figure 2. *Bowl*, 12th century, ceramic, CAM, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Neil H. McElroy, 1964.320

¹ The separate reviews have been written by three curators of the Cincinnati Art Museum, respectively: the review on East Asian Department written by Hou-mei Sung, Fashion Arts and Textile Department by Cynthia Amnéus, and Prints and Drawings Department by Kristin L. Spangenberg.



Figure 3. *Tile*, 15th century, ceramic, CAM, museum purchase, 1926.32



Figure 4. *Chest*, late 19th century, lacquer, wood, metal, mother-of-pearl, CAM, gift of Walter and Vanida Davison, 2013.118

- early Silla dynasty (57 BCE–936 CE) stoneware,
- ritual bronze spoons of the Goryeo dynasty (Figure 1),
- a twelfth-century inlaid celadon bowl (Figure 2),
- a fifteenth-century blue ceramic tile from the ruins of the ancient palace in Keijo (Figure 3),
- a large inlaid mother-of-pearl lacquer chest of the Joseon period (Figure 4).

Up until 2019, there were no paintings in the museum's Korean collection. This major gap was recently filled by three recent acquisitions. Here, I will briefly introduce these three newly acquired paintings.

CAM purchased *Tiger and Cubs* (Figure 5) in 2019. Although the painting was trimmed on all sides to fit into a frame, it is still possible to see the inscription on the upper right, which reads: painted in the summer of the 癸卯 Kuimo year by Han Zhou from Hujiang 癸卯夏日鶴江韓周寫. Unfortunately, neither the artist nor the date can be clearly identified. However, judging from the painting style, it is likely a Korean work of the eighteenth century.

The theme, “tiger and cubs” 乳虎, originated in China during the tenth century as a realistic depiction of the most challenging subject of tiger painting because of the danger of intruding upon such a scene. As early as the Song dynasty, this theme had already developed its symbolic association with corrupt officials or government based on the historical reference to the notorious Han dynasty official, Ning Cheng.² Although no early examples survive today, the



Figure 5. *Tiger and Cubs* 乳虎圖, 18th century, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 95.3 x 54.6 cm, CAM, museum purchase, 2019.177

conventional design of this theme was preserved in the works of many Ming court painters (Sung 2009).

In Korea, the tiger and cubs theme, frequently combined with magpies and further developed into a leading painting subject in both court and folk paintings (Sung 2015). However, few examples survive today, and even fewer bear the artist's signature or date. Thus, this signed work is an important addition to not only CAM's Korean collection, but also Korean tiger painting.

The painting *Buddha with Pupils* (Figure 6) entered CAM's collections in 1957 as a Chinese work of the sixteenth century. Unmounted and in poor condition, the painting has never been displayed. In 2019, after a careful examination, I changed the attribution from a Chinese Ming dynasty Buddhist painting to a Korean Buddhist painting of the eighteenth century.

The painting depicts a large central deity wearing an elaborately jeweled crown and robe seated on a throne. Both the surrounding clouds and the halo of the deity indicate his celestial status. Flanking him are three pairs of smaller attending figures. The first pair is two male court officials, judging from their hats, robes, and the official tablets held respectfully in their hands. Behind them are two female attendants each holding a royal umbrella. At the back, a young

2 For Ning Cheng, see *Zhongwen dacidian* 1990, 615.



Figure 6. *Buddha with Pupils*, early 18th century, ink and color on silk, 81.3 x 92.7 cm, CAM, gift of Dr. Martin Fischer, 1957.382

boy on the left and a young girl on the right are each holding an imperial shield.

The principal deity featured here is the Hindu god Indra (Śakro devānām indrah). This deity became highly popular in paintings used to decorate Korean temple altars in the eighteenth century. Indra's emergence as a subject signaled the dramatic changes developed in Korean temple painting when the Joseon rulers embraced Confucianism as the national philosophy and turned against Buddhism. As a result, many Buddhist temples moved to rural areas. This change of patronage led to the rise of a new type of Buddhist painting known as *sinjung taenghwa*, literally “a host of spirits hanging painting.” This type of painting is composed of many minor deities and guardian figures often from mixed religions, including Hindu, Chinese Buddhist and Daoist, and Korean folk traditions.

Although Indra originated in India as a Hindu god, after its introduction to China under the name 帝释天, its identity sometimes became fused with the Chinese Daoist deity of Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝 (or the Jade Emperor), since both deities were worshipped as the supreme sovereign of the world.³

This transformation, which occurred during the Song dynasty (960–1279), was clearly revealed in the depiction of this deity—from the masculine and fierce Vajra-wielding god to the effeminate royal figure of the Jade Emperor accompanied by two of his favorite attendants, Jintong (the Golden Boy 金童) and Yun (the Jade Maiden 玉女).

The image of Indra in this painting displays many features associated with the Chinese Jade Emperor. The heavily jeweled and decorated crown and robe, the hand gesture, the fabric covered throne, the royal accoutrements, and the attending officials, particularly, the Golden Boy and Jade Maiden are all consistent with the iconography of the Daoist supreme god and barely recognizable as the Hindu deity of Indra.

Both the high quality and elegant style of this painting indicate that it was a masterpiece of Korean Buddhist painting produced in the eighteenth century.

CAM acquired this Buddhist temple painting as a gift in 2021. It likely came from a rural Buddhist temple and dates to the nineteenth century.⁴ This type of Korean temple painting depicting multiple deities and guardians, which emerged in the late Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), represents the most intriguing types of Buddhist art to have evolved in Korea.

In the late Joseon period, when the Korean court embraced Confucianism as the State philosophy, Buddhism lost its patronage and occasionally faced persecution. Many Buddhist temples moved to rural areas or mountains. This also made Buddhism more accessible to commoners and generated new trends in the practice of the religion. Best illustrating this change is the emergence of a new type of Buddhist temple painting featuring groups of protective deities from mixed religions and sometimes not immediately recognizable as Buddhist deities. These types of paintings were typically displayed in the main halls or sidewalls of the rural Buddhist temples and monasteries, flanking central images of the Buddha at the main altar. They had strong appeal to the common people as a means of rallying as much spiritual protection as possible to preserve not only themselves, but also their faith.

This temple painting, rendered in ink and colors on hemp fiber, depicts a total of 24 figures arranged in four rows: seven in the top row, seven in the second row, five in the third row, and five in the bottom row. All the deities are

¹ and *Zhongwen dacidian* 1990, 390.

⁴ This painting is in very poor condition and cannot be displayed without conservation.

³ For the Daoist deity, Yuhuang dadi, See *Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian 史記五帝本紀)*, Chapter



Figure 7. *Korean Buddhist Temple Painting*, late 18th or early 19th century, ink and color on silk, 142 x 122.6 cm, CAM, gift of Bukang Yu Kim and Dr. Young Ghon Kim, 2021.9

surrounded by billowing pink clouds indicating their celestial status. In the row on top, two major deities are more prominently featured. Both are centrally positioned, larger in size, and adorned with a halo. The one on the right can be identified as Brahma (Beomcheon) the Hindu god of creation, who holds a large lotus and has a third eye, both his attributes. The one on the left, judging from his hand gesture, is most likely the Hindu God Indra (Joseokcheon), the king of gods. The two Hindu deities frequently appeared together in Korean temple paintings of late-eighteenth century. Gathering around the two superior

deities, on either side and in front, are numerous celestial attendants and guards.

Also highlighted here is the deity located in the middle of the third row. This exotic figure with multiple eyes depicts Vajrayaksa (or Kongoyasha), one of the five Guardian kings who protect Buddha's laws. Vajrayaksa has three heads and six arms, and his front face has five eyes. Further down, at the bottom and presented in full view in the center, is the most prominently featured deity—an elderly figure wearing a tall double-tiered crown. The deity can be identified as Yongwang or Dragon King, who was portrayed as a white-haired man with bulging eyes and holding the wish-granting jewel of Ruyichu or Cintāmani created from Buddha's relics. Although Dragon King was widely worshipped in Asia as a god holding divine powers to control rainfalls, rivers, and seas, and therefore overseeing the harvest and safe sailing, he was seldom depicted as a main deity in Buddhist temple paintings. The great emphasis on Dragon King here suggests that this painting was likely made for a temple near the ocean, where the fishermen frequently visited and prayed for their safe voyages in the rough sea.

Another unique feature of this painting is the appearance of Sun Wukong 孫悟空, the Monkey King, who accompanied the Chinese monk Xuanzang 玄奘 to India in the Tang dynasty to retrieve Buddhist sutras as related in the Chinese classical novel *Journey to the West* 西遊記. Here, the immortal monkey, dressed in full armor and holding a polearm standing next to Dragon King, appears to be in conversation with the King. The integration of this deity from popular folk beliefs in this painting further demonstrates the greater freedom gained by rural temple painters to embrace popular culture during the late Joseon period.

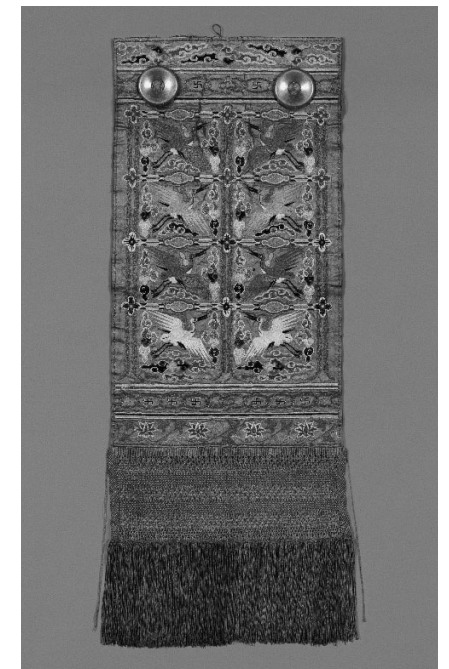


Figure 8. *Section of a Man's Husu (Ceremonial Apron)*, 19th century, silk, metal, CAM, gift of Mrs. Charles F. Mosher, 1966.1510

Fashion Arts and Textiles Department

The Fashion Arts and Textile Collection at the Cincinnati Art Museum holds approximately 40 pieces of Korean art. Although this is a small number of objects compared to the works on paper held in our print collection, they are objects of importance and reflect the diversity inherent in our collection. The pieces are mainly fashion objects such as *hanbok*, shoes, and fans by unidentified makers, which were accessioned separately but are coordinating. Included in the collection is a single embroidered textile—part of a man's ceremonial *husu* (Figure 8) that includes repeated symbolic red crowned cranes in flight—a symbol of longevity and peace. The two blue cranes at the top of the *husu* hold a version of the fungus of immortality in their beaks.



Figure 9. *Hats*, late 19th or early 20th century, horsehair, wood, CAM, Lent by James P. Henry, L12.-13.1912

lent to the Cincinnati Art Museum as a young man in 1912 (Figure 9). Deshler also gifted a number of pieces to the collection. These included complete sets of dress—*jeogori*, *chima*, *baji*, and *beoseon* along with a fan and multiple pairs of shoes. It is unclear whether Deshler was given the items by his brother-in-law or was a partner in the mining business and had traveled to Korea himself.

Another major donor to the collection was Mrs. Charles F. Mosher, a Cincinnati. Perhaps these objects (Figures 10–12) were the property of her late husband, but little information can be gleaned about either Mr. or Mrs. Mosher. Regardless, Mrs. Mosher gave the museum its largest collection of Korean items in 1966, consisting of complete outfits for both men and women, accessories, and the *husu* mentioned above.

A number of accessories in the collection were lent by James P. Henry who was probably the brother-in-law of J. G. Deshler, as is noted in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in August of 1924 (“New Records,” August 17, 1924). Henry was the former manager of a gold mine in Korea and undoubtedly purchased or was given the items he



Figure 10. *Shoes*, c. 1900, silk, leather, CAM, gift of Mrs. Charles F. Mosher, 1966.1507a-b

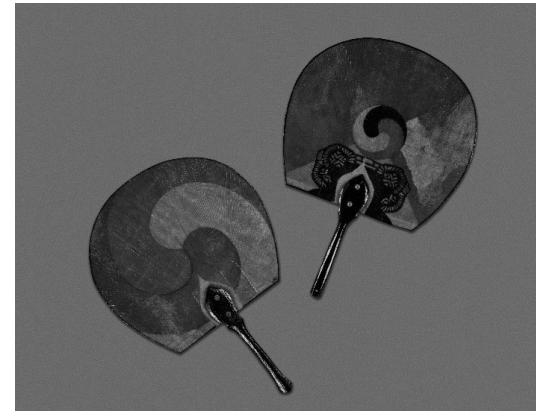


Figure 12. *Buchae (Fans)*, late 19th or early 20th century, lacquered and painted wood, paper, metal, CAM, gift of Mrs. Charles F. Mosher, 1966.1514-1966.1515



Figure 11. *Buchae (Fans)*, late 19th or early 20th century, cotton, silk, grasses, CAM, gift of Mrs. Charles F. Mosher, 1966.1511-1966.1512

Prints and Drawings Department

Korea's long history of printmaking evolved into fine art in the mid-20th century when Western concepts were introduced post-World War II. The Cincinnati Art Museum's relationship with contemporary Korean printmakers began in 1958 when the museum held its 5th *International Biennial of Contemporary Color Lithography* organized by Chief Curator and Curator of Prints Gustave von Groschwitz (1948–1962). For the first time, the museum included prints from the newly organized Korean Graphic Arts Society. The printmakers



Figure 13. Lee, Hang-sung (1919–1997), *Buddha's Spirit*, 1957, color lithograph, CAM, gift of Albert P. Strietmann, 1958.66



Figure 14. Youn, Myeung-ro (b. 1936), *Tattoo No. 36*, color screen print, CAM, The Howard and Caroline Porter Collection, 1990.1266

featured were Choi Duk-hyo, Kim Choung-za, Kim Heung-sou, Lee Hang-sung, Lee Sang-wook, and Yoo Kang-yul. Two color lithographs by Lee Hang-sung, the founder of the society, were acquired from the Biennial and gifted by collector and trustee Albert P. Strietmann. Lee Hang-sung was known for his abstract calligraphic prints such as *Buddha's Spirit* (Figure 13). The following two International Biennials of Prints continued to include Korean prints. In 1969 Caroline Porter—a *sosaku-hanga* enthusiast—with the assistance of Curator of Prints Mary Baskett (1965–1971) acquired for The Howard and Caroline Porter Collection four prints by the abstract artist Youn Myeung-Ro (b. 1936), including *Tattoo No. 36* (Figure 14) which had been featured in the 5th *International Biennial Exhibition of Prints* in Tokyo in 1966 and gifted in 1990.

In 1983, Carl Solway of Solway Gallery began a long-term association with international video artist, Paik Nam June, publishing in 1984 *V-IDEA a priori*, a portfolio of eight etchings and aquatints in the shape of television screens. The portfolio was printed in Cincinnati by Mark Patsfall at Clay Street Press. With old television cabinets cheap and plentiful, Cincinnati became the artist's second home as the hub of the assembly of the artist's human looking

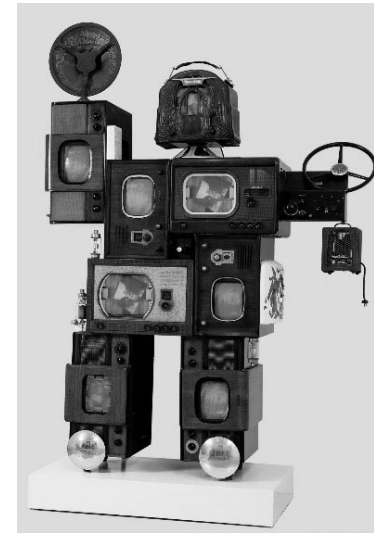


Figure 15. Paik, Nam June (1932–2006), *Powel Crosley, Jr.*, 1992, mixed media including parts from Crosley products, CAM, John J. Emery Endowment and The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial, 1992.140



Figure 16. Kim, Bukang Yu (b. 1943), *Bell of Temple*, 1998, monotype, CAM, gift of the Artist, 2005.729

robots and other architectural video pieces. A second portfolio, *Evolution / Revolution / Resolution* of eight prints, was published by the Solway Gallery in 1989. When the artist was approached by the Museum in 1992 for a commission, Paik suggested a video sculpture to honor Powel Crosley Jr., one of Cincinnati's foremost inventors and entrepreneurs. The eight-foot-tall whimsical *Powel Crosley, Jr.* (Figure 15), assembled in Cincinnati, was created from a variety of Crosley products: TV and radio cabinets, car hubcaps and handles, radio, freezer doors, and radio transmission tubes. Eight television monitors project two different programs recorded on laser disk. The sculpture is a commentary on technological evolution. The boxy-looking "portrait" is related to a family of human-looking robots that Paik created in 1986.

Korean-born Kim Bukang immigrated to Cincinnati in the late 1980s and attended the University of Cincinnati, graduating with an M.F.A. in printmaking in 1990 to supplement her degree from Seoul National University in 1965. Active as a painter and printmaker, her 1998 work *Bell of Temple* (Figure 16), captures her bridging two cultures, combining the long tradition of calligraphy with Western Abstract Expressionism. Through her contacts



Figure 17. Kim, Seung Yeon (b. 1955), *Night Landscape, Tokyo—9810*, 1998, mezzotint, CAM, gift of Leo Munick M.D., 2005.725



Figure 18. Jiha Moon (b. 1973), *Untitled* from the portfolio *Asian Contemporary Art in Prints*, 2006, color lithograph and screen print, CAM, museum purchase with funds provided by Leo Munick M.D. 2007.284.5

she was a catalyst for an international exchange bringing Ha Dong-chul and his daughter, Ha Won, as visiting artists to Ohio in 2002. Special exhibitions and workshops in Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and at the Art Academy of Cincinnati provided students with new ideas.

Their introduction led to my jurying the 13th *Space International Print Biennial* in 2004 in Seoul. It gave me the opportunity to visit the artists' studios in Seoul's vibrant printmaking center with its fusion of traditional and international ideas and innovative experimentation within printmaking mediums. Upon my return, Dr. Leo Munick donated four mezzotints by Kim Seung Yeon, with their rich velvety nocturnal blacks from which cityscapes emerge, among them *Night Landscape, Tokyo—9810* (Figure 17).

Munick likewise supported the acquisition of the portfolio *Asian Contemporary Art in Prints* celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Asia Society in New York in 2006, featuring the work of Jiha Moon who currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia. Her colorful mark making in *Untitled* (Figure 18) combined natural methods of pouring, splashing, and dripping, thereby creating the suggestion of a cartoonish figure. Most recently the collection has received Ha Dong-chul's *Cosmos* (Figure 19), which transforms light to express his view of the Universe through found objects such as tree rings. *Takbon* (rubbed copy) has been used historically in Korea to preserve patterns and designs of Buddhist relics in Asia. By contrast Lee Kang-so's *Untitled 93108* (Figure 20), with bold swirling brushstrokes, has a strong element of performance. The interaction between Korean printmakers and Cincinnati and CAM's growing collections

of prints over seven decades provides Cincinnati with a unique cultural perspective between East and West.

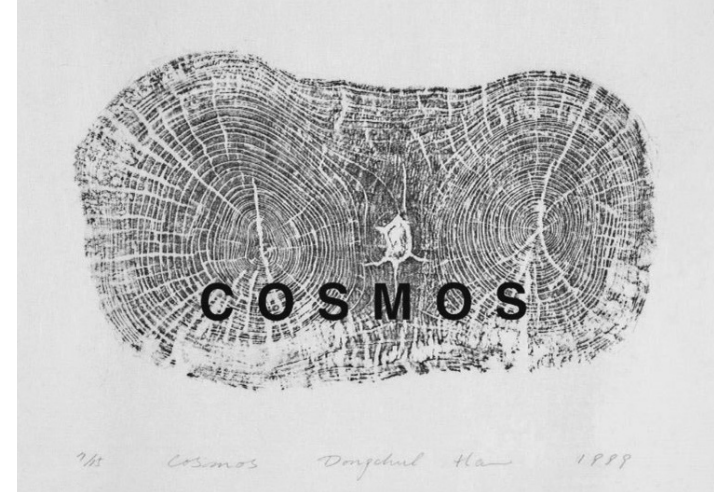


Figure 19. Ha, Dong-chul (Korean, 1942–2006) *Cosmos*, 1999, *takbon* and screen print, CAM, gift of Bukang Yu Kim and Dr. Young Kim in honor of Kristin L. Spangenberg, 2020.147



Figure 20. Lee, Kang-so (Korean, b. 1943) *Untitled 93108*, 1993, lithograph, CAM, gift of Bukang Yu Kim and Dr. Young Kim in honor of Kristin L. Spangenberg, 2020.146

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