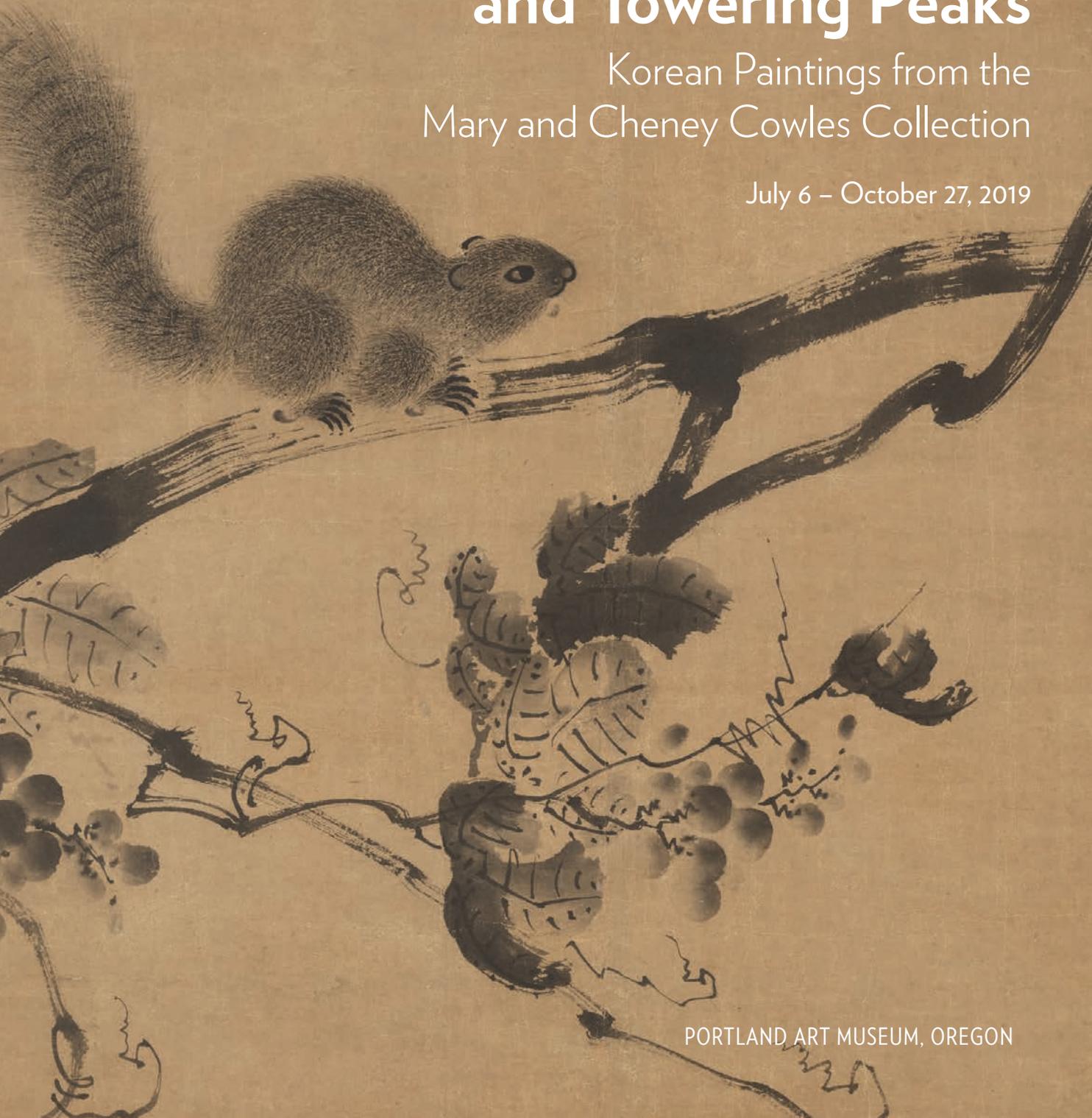


Squirrels, Tigers, and Towering Peaks

Korean Paintings from the
Mary and Cheney Cowles Collection

July 6 – October 27, 2019



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, OREGON

Squirrels, Tigers, and Towering Peaks

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by Sangah Kim

For five hundred years, Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) nurtured a profuse visual culture, with paintings created by and for different social classes and genres designed to suit a diverse array of contexts and occasions. Korean literati painters, as in China, were members of the class of scholar-officials for whom painting was primarily an avocation, while professional painters included those who worked at the royal court and for wealthy patrons as well as itinerant artists who created folk paintings for daily life. The variety of Joseon-era paintings can be attributed to the strong sense of national identity that prevailed for much of the period, when leading cultural figures were determined to develop uniquely Korean art forms while expanding their repertoire by adopting and adapting concepts and styles from China. This approach led to a new pictorial tradition in which distinctively Korean elements and belief systems infused stylized landscapes and images of the natural world.

This exhibition draws on the collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles of Seattle to illuminate aspects of Joseon aesthetics from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. The Cowles are no stranger to Portland audiences, having recently lent more than 100 artworks to *Poetic Imagination in Japanese Art*,

the Museum's mainstage exhibition for fall 2018. Like the objects featured in *Poetic Imagination*, the twelve paintings and single calligraphy on view here were largely acquired in Japan, and all are being introduced to the American public for the first time. The Portland Art Museum is honored to host the debut of these rare and important artworks. Most of the paintings are monochromatic studies in ink and focus on subject matter favored by the Joseon literati, such as landscape, orchids, and rocks, and more popular themes such as squirrels and grapevines, and tigers. A special feature of the Cowles Korean painting group is the inclusion of multiple versions of similar subjects, which allows us to study each work not only individually but also in comparison to its peers, savoring differences in brushwork and composition. Collectively, these artworks reveal an enthralling mastery of ink and gesture, as well as the humor and warmth which Joseon artists imparted to their subjects.

Landscapes

Landscape paintings, which reflect a culture's understanding of the relationship between humankind and nature, are a genre that first came



10a (detail)

into its own in China during the tenth century. Early Joseon-period landscape painters were aware of and embraced the styles of the great Chinese masters of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), such as Li Cheng (李成, 919–967), Guo Xi (郭熙, ca. 1020–ca.1090), and Mi Fu (米芾, 1051–1107), as well as painting styles of the Southern Song (1127–1279) court and the Zhe school of the early Ming period (1368–1644). Joseon artists absorbed elements from these diverse sources, creating their own personal interpretations of these styles.

For example, An Gyeon (安堅, active ca. 1440–1470), one of the most famous early Joseon painters, developed a personal landscape idiom inspired by Northern Song models. The lasting impact of his style is visible in the earliest painting in the current exhibition, a landscape painting bearing a seal reading Muncheong (文淸; in Japanese, Bunsei; no. 3). Its tripartite composition and ethereal atmosphere are conventional features of sixteenth-century Joseon landscape painting. Another early landscape painting in the exhibition,

one which again reveals the lingering influence of An Gyeon and various Chinese prototypes, is an eight-page album attributed to Yi Jeong (李楨, 1578–1607; no. 1). Yi Jeong was lavishly praised by contemporary critics, but his career was cut short by his early death and very few works survive that can be reliably attributed to his hand. The landscapes in this album, each of which bears a seal associated with Yi Jeong, are drawn with bold brushwork, fiercely executed.

Symbolism in Images of Nature

Images of nature motifs in Joseon painting are seldom straightforward representations, but rather encoded messages about the values of the literati class. Orchids (no. 4) and rocks (no. 5), for example, symbolize the virtues of fidelity and integrity, and here they are represented by famous artists: Yi Ha-eung (李晁應, 1820–1898), who wielded considerable political power as regent between 1863 and 1873, painted orchids his entire life. Chung Hak-gyo (丁學教, 1832–1914) concentrated on rocks, producing compositions that are astonishingly varied and often border on the abstract.

Another popular theme in Joseon painting, squirrels and grapevines, is especially well represented in the exhibition (nos. 7–11). Native to Western Asia, grapes were introduced to China through the caravan routes that crossed the Silk Road. In time, they became a symbol of fertility in Chinese art. First seen in Chinese painting in the thirteenth century, grapevines became a

favored subject of Joseon literati painters, in part because of the rich possibilities for individualized, calligraphic brushwork. Notable masters of this genre include Gang Hee-an (姜希顔, 1417–1464), Sin Saimdang (申師任堂, 1504–1551), Hwang Jipjung (黃執中, 1533–?), and Choi Seok-hwan (崔奭煥, 1808–?). One of the unique aspects of this group of grapevine paintings is the addition of squirrels. A member of the rodent family, squirrels share with mice and rats the positive association with fecundity; they also represent the playful nature of children. Together, squirrels and grapevines carry good wishes for affluence and abundant offspring. Many paintings depicting squirrels and grapevines have survived in Japan, where it seems to have been an especially popular subject.

The tiger is the most sacred animal in Korean lore, and images of tigers have long been used to ward off misfortune. The tiger painting in the exhibition (no. 6) portrays a mother tiger with her three cubs; she emanates both maternal affection and the fierceness of her species. Together with a pair of magpies, who chatter in the overhanging pine branch, this painting is the perfect symbol of good fortune. Paintings of a mother tiger with her cubs are found in Ming-dynasty China; they became popular in Korea in the nineteenth century, and similar compositions appear in Japan as well.

This exhibition also includes a calligraphy screen (no. 13) by Yi Bang-eon, an envoy who visited Japan in 1711 as a member of an official delegation. Periodic delegations from the Joseon government to Japan were welcomed with great ceremony

at every stage of their journey, and envoys played pivotal roles in cultural exchange. Yi Bang-eon's journey is well recorded, and a plaque that he wrote still remains at a pavilion in Fukuyama, Japan. This screen was presumably made during his 1711 sojourn in Japan and survives as a testimony to the mechanisms of cultural exchange in the Joseon period.

Although the scale of this exhibition is modest, the various subjects and diverse styles of ink play provide enticing and rewarding glimpses of the aesthetics of Joseon-period painting. Ink paintings of this age and quality are rarely seen in North American collections. The Portland Art Museum wishes to express its deep gratitude to Mary and Cheney Cowles for sharing their treasures with Museum audiences on this occasion and for underwriting the cost of this publication. I would like also to personally thank Dr. Maribeth Graybill for her encouragement on this project, and Professor Jeong-hye Park of the Academy of Korean Studies for her insightful commentary on the paintings. Thanks go also to Professor Lei Xue of Oregon State University for deciphering several seals and inscriptions.

This publication is made possible by a grant from Mary and Cheney Cowles.

NOTE: All of the works on the following pages are courtesy of the Mary and Cheney Cowles Collection. Dimensions are height followed by width.



5 (detail)

1. Album of Landscapes

Attributed to Yi Jeong (1578–1607)

창한산색도 화첩 蒼寒山色圖畫帖
전 이정 傳李楨

Late 16th/early 17th century

Accordion-fold album of eight leaves; ink on silk

Each painting: 14 ¹³/₁₆ x 10 ¹³/₁₆ inches

Born into a family of professional painters at the Joseon court, Yi Jeong was celebrated for his talent in Buddhist painting, figure painting, and landscape painting. His fans included government official Heo Gyun (許筠 1569–1618) and Chinese envoy Zhu Zhifan (朱之蕃 1546–1624), who visited Korea in 1606. A scholar, calligrapher, painter, and connoisseur, Zhu had authored the preface to *Gushi Huapu* (顧氏畫譜, The Gu Family Collection of Painting), a woodblock-printed book that would influence generations of Korean painters.

Very few of Yi Jeong's paintings are known to be extant, so this album—previously unknown to scholarship—is an extremely important contribution to our understanding of his oeuvre.





1a *Rowing a boat on a quiet lake*



1b *Gazing at moon from a cliff*



1c *Reading a book in a cottage by the water's edge*



1d *Sitting in a pavilion gazing at the river*



1e *Crossing a bridge in the rain*



1f Cottages by a cliff



1g Pavilion nestled among pines



1h Reading a book in a thatched hut



2. Landscape

Artist unknown; formerly attributed to
Kim Gyujin (1868–1933)

산수 山水圖
작자미상; 이전에 김규진 (金圭鎭) 필
로 전칭

Cyclical date in accordance with 1832
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
23 ⁷/₁₆ x 15 ¹/₄ inches

This painting has previously been attributed to Kim Gyujin, a painter of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, because his sobriquet Haegang 海岡 can be found in the inscription and seal of the painting. However, Dr. Jeong-hye Park of the Academy of Korean Studies dates the painting to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, well before Kim Gyujin's time. It is possible that the artist is Kim Myeong-gi (金明錡), whose seal appears on the work; he is otherwise unknown.

The inscription is a poem about West Lake in Hangzhou, China.

步之隨

鞋

顯花

生歌

百雨中

唯從終南

開草堂北窗下





3. Landscape

Artist unknown

산수 山水圖
작자미상 作者未詳

16th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

33 ⁷/₈ x 11 ¹/₈ inches

This landscape painting bears a seal reading Muncheong 文淸 (Jp. Bunsei) in the lower left corner. Muncheong is known to have been active in Japan during the fifteenth century, but otherwise he is something of a mystery: even his national identity is a topic of debate.

Stylistically, the strong ink contrasts, wet washes, and misty atmospheric effects seen here place this painting in the first half of the sixteenth century, with other early Joseon landscape paintings inspired by the work of An Gyeon (see introductory essay) and Northern Song paintings. The seal was added at a later date.





4. Orchids

Yi Ha-eung (1820–1898)

난초 群蘭圖

이하응 李昞應

Hanging scroll; ink on satin

59 ¹³/₁₆ x 13 ³/₁₆ inches

In East Asia, orchids were regarded as one of the “Four Gentlemen”; along with plum blossoms, bamboo, and chrysanthemums, they represent the ideal virtues of the cultivated scholar. Orchids are known for their beauty and subtle fragrance, symbolizing both nobility and humility. The artist, Yi Ha-eung, was the father of King Gojong (r. 1863–1907) and a powerful political figure. He painted orchids throughout his lifetime. This work, with its suggestion of spatial recession through scale and ink tonalities, is an example of his mature style.

This painting bears a collector’s seal of Robert Hans van Gulik (1910–1967), a famous Dutch Sinologist, diplomat, translator, and novelist.

此地有香艸云誰目以蘭惜賢寸沈
淪也盡日樵山間芝蘭在東新歎懷
寶遜也自然豪國善奕葉殿秋
光喜晚節彌善也皆古人佳句也





5. Rock

Chung Hakgyo (1832–1914)

괴석 怪石圖

정학교 丁學敎

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

55 1/2 x 16 1/4 inches

In Korea as in China, collecting rocks of interesting shape was a popular hobby among the literati. As miniature mountains, rocks brought the majesty of nature into the scholar's studio. Chung Hakgyo, the artist of this work, is among the most famous Korean painters to specialize in this subject, and he is equally well known for his unique and unconventional calligraphy style.

In this painting, Chung's dry, light brushwork imparts a tactile quality to the rock, while the alteration of mass and void gives it an appealing eccentricity.

竹石





6. Tigers and Magpies

Artist unknown

호랑이와 까치 虎鵲圖

작자미상 作者未詳

Second half of Joseon period (1392–1910)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

62 ⁷/₁₆ x 30 ³/₈ inches

The tiger is the most revered animal in Korea, and images of tigers and magpies are associated with wishes for good fortune for the New Year.

In this painting, the mother tiger has emerged from behind a pine tree (itself a symbol of longevity) to watch over two of her rambunctious cubs, while a third cub hovers shyly in the background. Magpies are perched on a branch overhead, one of them chirping as though in conversation with the tiger. The warmth and affection in this painting set it apart from the more usual depictions of tigers.





7. Grapevine and Squirrel

Artist unknown

다람쥐와 포도 靑鼠葡萄圖
작자미상 作者未詳

Second half of Joseon period (1392–1910)

Hanging scroll; ink on silk

41 x 9 ⁷/₁₆ inches

After grapes were introduced to China from Western Asia, they became a popular subject in Chinese art as a symbol of fertility and prosperity. Grapes were painted as a single subject or, less commonly, in combination with squirrels, which are associated with children because of their playful nature. Together, grapevines and squirrels embody wishes for abundant offspring and wealth.

In this painting, a squirrel eats grapes from his perch on a curved grapevine. Note how the artist uses the “boneless” technique to create the grapes: each grape is a rounded disk of ink wash, defined by unpainted margins.





8. Grapevine

Artist unknown

포도 葡萄圖
작자미상 作者未詳

Second half of Joseon period (1392–1910)

Hanging scroll; ink on silk

48 ¹/₈ x 20 ¹¹/₁₆ inches

Ink paintings of grapevines are thought to have originated with the Chinese Chan Buddhist monk Wen Riguan (溫日觀), who was active in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Korean literati painters of the Joseon period adopted this subject matter as an ideal medium for displaying tour-de-force brushwork.

This painting bears the signature and seal of an artist who is as yet unidentified, as well as a cyclical date of the earth rooster year (己酉 *giyu*). Seals of Chinese painter Wang Hui (王翬, 1632–1717) on the left side of the painting are a later interpolation.





9. Grapevine and Sun

Artist unknown

포도와 해 葡萄圖
작자미상 作者未詳

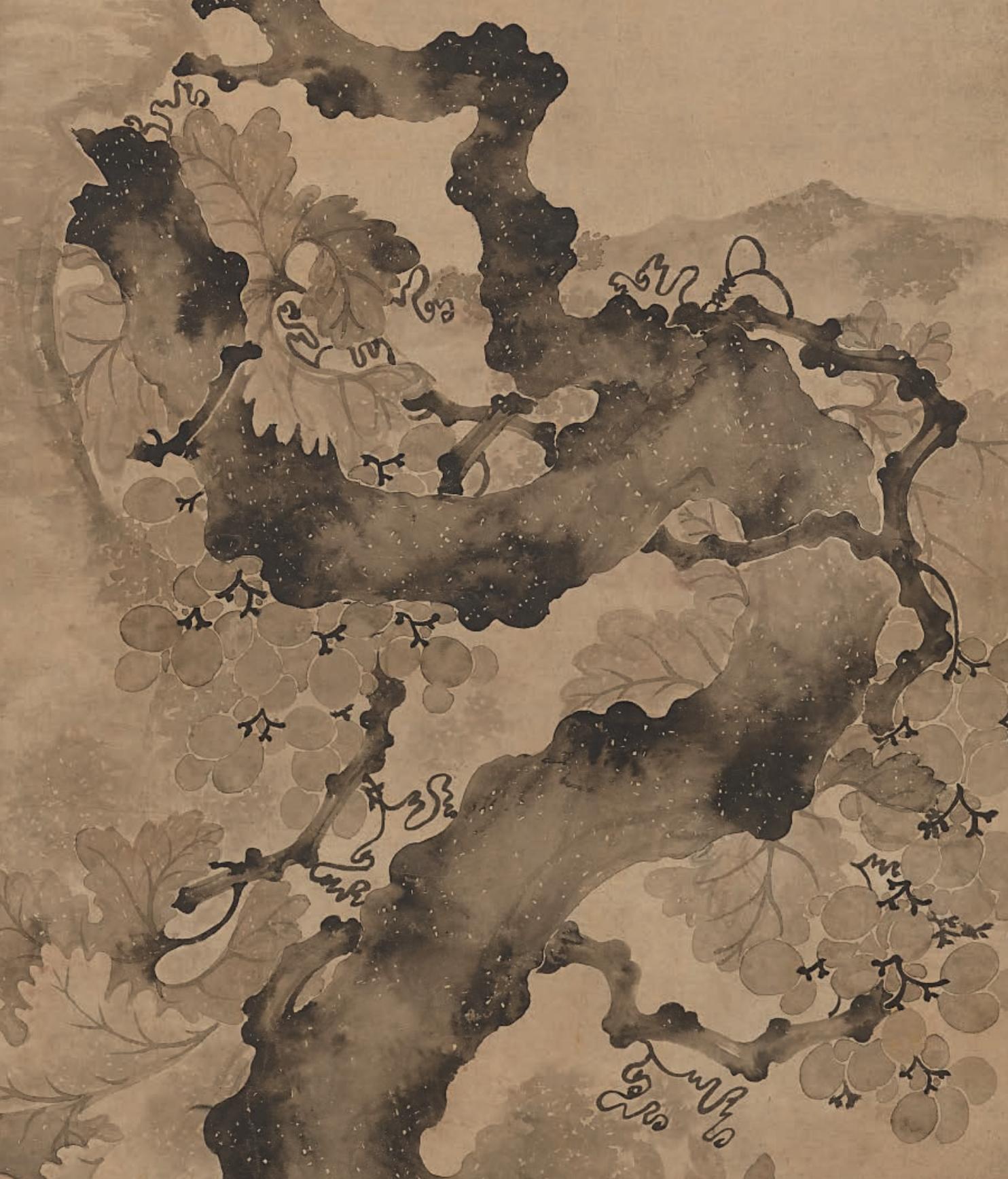
Second half of Joseon period (1392–1910)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

50 ³/₁₆ x 14 ¹³/₁₆ inches

This grapevine is a masterpiece of rhythmic ink play, all achieved with boneless washes. The convoluted branches are rendered in wet ink, applied with crisscross strokes of a brush to leave small areas of unpainted paper, adding a sense of texture. Darker shades of ink were dropped onto the branch forms and allowed to bleed, creating contrasts that suggest volume and depth. The grapes are rendered in the shades of pale gray.

The sun is an auspicious symbol in Korean painting, and it is rare to have both the sun and grapevines depicted together.





10. Grapevine and Squirrels

Artist unknown

다람쥐와 포도 靑鼠葡萄圖
작자미상 作者未詳

Second half of Joseon period (1392–1910)

Pair of hanging scrolls; ink on paper

Each: 18 ³/₈ x 24 ⁵/₈ inches

On the left, one squirrel pauses while dashing across a branch, its arrested motion suggesting that something has caught its eye. The squirrel on the right appears to have just landed on a branch after a flying leap.

The artist revels in capturing two very different points of view, as well as his display of a range of brushwork: countless short strokes of varying densities of ink realistically capture the texture of the squirrels' fur, while the grapevine branches are rendered almost abstractly in the fast-paced brushwork style known as "flying white." Plump grapes are painted without any outline, using the "boneless" style.





11. Pine Tree, Bamboo, Grapevine, and Squirrel

Artist unknown

소나무, 대나무, 포도, 그리고 다람쥐

松竹葡萄青鼠圖

작자미상 作者未詳

18th/19th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

41 ¹/₈ x 11 ⁷/₁₆ inches

This painting presents an ensemble of auspicious symbols. The pine tree represents longevity, while bamboo—one of the “Four Gentlemen”—embodies tenacity and modesty. The grapevine and squirrel together convey wishes for prosperity and many offspring.





12. Pyrography Landscape

Bak Byeong-su (1890–1952)

낙화 산수 烙畫山水圖
박병수 朴秉洙

Hanging scroll; pyrography on paper
38 ⁷/₈ x 11 ¹¹/₁₆ inches

Pyrography, or burnt painting, is a technique that uses a hot iron stylus instead of brushes and ink, resulting in brown tones rather than the familiar shades of black and gray. Pyrography became popular in the late Joseon period and Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), and one of its best-known practitioners was Bak Byeong-su. Bak's works were included in an exposition organized by the Japanese colonial government, which led to a growing demand for Korean pyrography in the Japanese market.

With its layered peaks and idyllic lakes, this landscape draws on centuries of literati landscape traditions in China and Korea. The accompanying poem, written in classical Chinese, likewise pays homage to that tradition.

道春山
聖蹟深處

第十松

朝鮮金印

道山寫





13. Calligraphy

Yi Bang-eon (1675–after 1711)

서예: 遏人慾存天理
이방언 李邦彦

Early 18th century

Six-panel folding screen; ink on gold paper

28 1/8 x 94 1/2 inches

During the latter Joseon period, cordial relations between Korea and Japan were sealed by the diplomatic missions periodically dispatched by Korea to Edo. In 1711, Joseon sent 500 envoys to Japan to congratulate Tokugawa Ienobu on his accession to the position of shogun. Yi Bang-eon, the artist of this screen, was a member of that delegation, and it is likely that he brushed this screen during his visit. The six characters on the screen, each with its own panel, mean “restrain [from] human avarice, embrace divine reason.” The third and fourth characters from the right, 天 and 存, are reversed, an error that probably occurred during remounting.



1. Album of Landscapes

Seal (each page)



懶翁
Naong

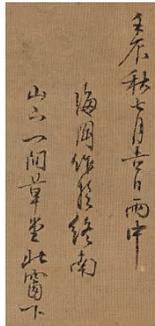
Title slip on album cover



懶翁李楨蒼寒山色圖
Naong Yi Jeong Changhan sansaekdo
[Naong Yi Jeong Winter Landscape
Paintings]

2. Landscape

Signature



壬辰秋七月吉日雨中海岡作於終
南山下一間草堂北窗下
[In the] year of water dragon (*imjin*),
[on an] auspicious day in the seventh
month while it was raining, Haegang
made [this painting] by the north
window of a one-bay thatched hall at
the foot of Jongnam mountain]

Seals



畫槐長春
Hwagwaejangchun



金明錡
Kim Myeong-gi



海岡居士
Haegang geosa

3. Landscape

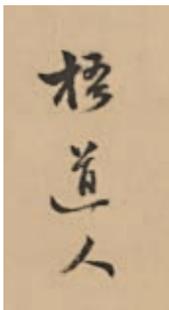
Seal



文清
Muncheong (Jp. Bunsei)

4. Orchids

Signature



梧道人
Odoin

Seals



undeciphered



老安堂
Noandang



高羅佩藏
Golapae jang
[Collection of
Robert Hans
van Gulik]

5. Rock

Signature



朝鮮夢中夢人丁崔喬
*Joseon Mongjungmong'in Chung
Hak-gyo*
[Joseon dream man in dream,
Chung Hak-gyo]

Seals



崔喬私印
Hakgyo sain



化慶
Hwagyeong

7. Grapevine and Squirrel

Seal



undeciphered

8. Grapevine

Signature



青潘祖焜藜
Yeocheong Banjogon

Seals



藜青
Yeocheong



潘祖焜
Banjogon



王翬之印
Wanghwi jiyin



字石谷
Ja Seokgok

10. Grapevine and Squirrels

Seals



undeciphered



undeciphered

11. Pine Tree, Bamboo, Grapevine, and Squirrel

Seal



undeciphered

12. Pyrography Landscape

Signature



朝鮮全州焦山寫
Joseon Jeonju Chosan sa

Seals



火畫
Hwahwa



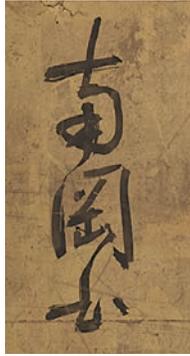
焦山
Chosan



朴秉洙印
Bak Byeong-su in

13. Calligraphy

Signature



南岡書
Namgang seo

Seal



南岡居士
Namgang geosa

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