



Special Review

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Editor's Note

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In the Special Review section of the *RKS*'s Winter 2018 issue, we provided readers with a collection of insightful reviews on academic activities that took place that year to commemorate the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of the Goryeo dynasty. The section also included reviews of events celebrating the dynasty's artistic aspects. This experience inspired us at the *RKS* to expand our coverage on Korean Art in general, in the form of reviewing not only studies of Korean Art History but displays and exhibitions of artifacts as well. For this occasion, we hoped to be enlightened by the insights of professional experts serving at the very heart of Korean material culture, the National Museum of Korea. Four outstanding specialists graciously agreed to contribute their reviews on specific areas of Korean art and on how things have been since the year 2000 up to the present.

Dr. Lee Soomi, who serves as Head of the Gwangju National Museum, reviews the area of premodern Korean painting in general. She observes that the first two decades of the 21st century witnessed a noticeable surge in displays and exhibitions in this field. By examining several aspects of these activities, including the painters, the method of *silgyeong* ("real-scenery landscape paintings"), the creators' exchanges with the outside world, portraits of individuals, palace art, and how the environment surrounding the creation of paintings changed over periods, she provides a comprehensive review of these events. Her review ends by pointing out that displays of simple relics of the past have recently evolved into well-staged exhibitions based on the knowledge and information provided by academic circles, which benefits both the artistic society and the general public.

Dr. Jeong Myounghee, who serves as Curator at the National Museum of Korea, reviews recent studies and exhibitions of Korean Buddhist paintings, which only continued to grow during the past twenty years, similar to the trend seen in the field of general paintings reviewed here by Dr. Lee. As is well known

in the academic community, there are not that many remaining Buddhist paintings of the past (in fact, only one from the ancient period of Korea has so far been reported), and 75% of the remaining Buddhist paintings of Goryeo are, regrettably, in Japan. Nevertheless, Dr. Jeong notes that studies and exhibitions on the Buddhist paintings of Goryeo and Joseon have significantly increased starting from the 2000s. Her meticulous review of the events and efforts dedicated to the study and promotion of these Buddhist paintings reminds us of the important role institutes play and the significance of the impressive data they strive to accumulate.

Dr. Heo Hyeong Uk, who also serves as Curator at the National Museum of Korea, chose to review the studies and exhibitions on Korean Buddhist sculptures from the year 2000 onward. The studies and exhibitions—and consequently his review—focus mainly on items from the periods of Goryeo and Joseon. While praising all the scientific methodological advances made in the field of examining artifacts, such as CT scans and XRF techniques, he also stresses the importance of properly interpreting the meaning and nature of these artifacts and, to that end, of the coordination between sculpture experts and preservation technicians, who should also be well versed in historical perspectives. He then concludes his review by reminding us that a historical review of Korean Buddhist sculpture would only be complete with the examination of relics in North Korea as well.

Finally, Dr. Shin Suk, who serves as Instructor at the Korea National University of Cultural Heritage, reviews studies of Korean handcraft since the year 2000. She observes that scholars in this field continued to study artifacts related to the Silk Road as well as Buddhist relics, while at the same time expanding their research to include newly reported items from both the ancient period of Korea and the more recent Joseon and modern periods. According to Dr. Shin, recent studies of Korean traditional handcraft culture continue to evolve, examining not only the aspect of production techniques but the meaning of certain patterns and shapes as well as the overall range of artistic circulation. She wraps up her review by emphasizing the need for new methods and methodologies to be developed in the near future for this particular field of Korean art.

As the reviews mentioned above eloquently summarize, Korean art studies and exhibitions are showing huge leaps and advances in terms of themes, methods, and vision. New topics are being explored as new relics are found,

while new ways are being developed to make them accessible not only to the academic society but the general public as well. Most importantly, research and exhibitions are coming together, creating a coherent cycle whirling to find the right way to present artifacts and interpret them in the appropriate tone and context. The end results have been outstanding; yet such efforts and accomplishments were yet to reach foreign scholars and artistic communities around the world. Thanks to the efforts of these four experts, who graciously agreed to contribute their professional reviews on the collective achievements of their respective fields, we can now begin an actual conversation about the artistic legacy of Korea with foreign scholars who would like to learn more of Korean art studies and exhibitions.