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GORYEO DYNASTY: KOREA'S AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT, 918 TO 1392
October 18, 2003-January 11, 2004

Asian Art Museum Inaugurates Its Special Exhibition Program at Its New Facility by Presenting an Exhibition of Rare Korean Antiquities

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, SEPTEMBER 15 2003—On October 18, 2003, the Asian Art Museum will launch its special exhibition program at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center by presenting the groundbreaking exhibition *Goryeo Dynasty: Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918 to 1392*—the first exhibition of its kind outside Korea. Organized by the museum and curated by Dr. Kumja Paik Kim, the museum's curator of Korean art, *Goryeo Dynasty* offers a comprehensive examination of the exceptional artistic productivity in this dynastic era—from which Korea derived its name.

For nearly five centuries, arts and culture flourished under the patronage of the Goryeo aristocracy, whose taste for luxury and refinement was unprecedented in the history of the country. *Goryeo Dynasty* features 113 rare and superb artworks (seven are designated as National Treasures of Korea) from this period—many on view in the United States for the first time—including extraordinary celadon ceramics, Buddhist paintings and sculptures, illustrated sutras (sacred Buddhist texts), ritual implements, metal crafts, and lacquer wares. Because many of the objects—which come from more than thirty-five lenders throughout Asia, Europe and the United States—are too delicate to be on extended leave from their collections, the Asian Art Museum's presentation will serve as the public's only opportunity to encounter them in a single venue. A comprehensive and fully illustrated 320-page catalogue published by the Asian Art Museum accompanies the exhibition. After its mid-October opening, *Goryeo Dynasty* will be on view through January 11, 2004, and it will be presented concurrently with the museum's first exhibition of contemporary Asian art, *Leaning Forward, Looking Back: Eight Contemporary Artists from Korea*.

The significance of this Asian Art Museum exhibition cannot be underestimated. Presented during the centennial celebration of Korean immigration to the United States, *Goryeo Dynasty* serves as not only the museum's first special exhibition at its new home, but as a vital introduction to a remarkable subject often overshadowed by explorations of art from Korea's neighbors, China and Japan. The Asian Art Museum has been regarded as a leading advocate for Korean art ever since 1989, when it appointed Dr. Kim; at the time, hers was the only curatorship outside Korea devoted solely to Korean art. From the beginning Dr. Kim dreamed of presenting an exhibition devoted to Korea's great age of courtly and Buddhist arts, and *Goryeo Dynasty* and the accompanying catalogue represent the culmination of that dream. The efforts of Dr. Kim and

the museum to bring this unique exhibition together are even more noteworthy in light of the fact that relatively few works from the era remain. Unfortunately, because of the devastations of the Korean peninsula, many temple collections have not survived, and courtly collections have been lost and scattered.

“Goryeo Dynasty: Korea’s Age of Enlightenment, 918 to 1392 serves a critical role in bringing this beautiful material to the West for the first time, and underscoring the richness and sophistication of the dynasty’s artistic traditions,” states Emily Sano, director of the Asian Art Museum. “Now at last Korea’s achievements can be properly assessed against more familiar works, produced at the same time, in China and Japan. This exhibition shows us that the cultures of East Asia had significant commonalities, and also important differences, from country to country.”

The Goryeo dynasty, the middle period in Korea’s traditional history, emerged from the disintegration of the Unified Silla dynasty and ended with the rise of the Joseon dynasty. This era of dynamic internal refinement was also marked by a contentious relationship with the tribal peoples north of Korea. A sophisticated aristocracy standardized government operations and cultivated artistic expression during the Goryeo dynasty, which as a Buddhist state committed a sizable portion of its resources to the practice of this faith and to the creation of ritual implements and artworks as expressions of devotion. *Goryeo Dynasty* explores the period’s extraordinary production of ceramics, lacquer wares, Buddhist paintings and sculptures, illustrated manuscripts, and metal crafts in light of these themes.

Perhaps most familiar to the West from this dynasty are the pale green-glazed ceramics known as celadons. Many connoisseurs and scholars believe Goryeo celadons made during the twelfth century not only rival but also—because of their formal elegance and the quality of their glazes—often surpass the best Chinese celadons. The development of inlays and of copper oxide underglazes to decorate celadons is another of this era’s contributions to the art of ceramic production. *Goryeo Dynasty* features thirty-eight examples of ceramics including celadons, iron-glazed stonewares, and porcelains.

Only about fifteen inlaid lacquer objects from the Goryeo dynasty have survived to our day, and this exhibition includes four of them. The distinctive qualities of Goryeo works in this medium were described during that era in phrases such as “intricate and precious” and “extremely elegant.” Artisans refined a technique of decorating the surfaces of objects with mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell inlays. Used to form parts of larger designs, small pieces of tortoiseshell were painted on the underside in red and yellow; the painted colors would show through the translucent shell, creating a gemlike quality. Another characteristic feature of Goryeo inlay lacquer design is the use of single- and double-twisted wire. Made of silver or copper alloy, these wires served to create leaf branches, flower stems, decorative borders, and contour lines.

During the Goryeo dynasty exceptionally beautiful paintings were produced in the service of Buddhism; paintings of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Korean: Gwaneum Bosal) are especially noted for their elegance and spirituality. The images’ serene expression; their flowing robes painted with ink, mineral colors, and gold; and their diaphanous scarves and sashes evoke awe and admiration. *Goryeo Dynasty* features

twenty-four Buddhist paintings, including depictions of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha (Jijang Bosal), the buddha Amitabha (Amita-bul), and an Amitabha triad. A highlight is a seventeen-foot-high hanging scroll featuring a representation of Avalokiteshvara. Considered a monument of Goryeo dynasty Buddhist painting, the work is on loan from Japan's Kagami Shrine (through the Saga Prefectural Museum) and has never been on view before in the United States. Because of its delicate condition, the painting can only be on view for the first six weeks of the exhibition.

Sacred manuscripts of the time, both handwritten and printed, are closely related to Buddhist paintings in terms of patronage, functions, and artists. Goryeo was the epoch of the finest illuminated sutras. The patronage for such manuscripts was centered in the royal court and among powerful members of the aristocracy, who commissioned *bisikgyeong* (literally, "beautifully decorated Buddhist scriptures"), lavish versions of the sutras written in gold and silver characters. The period is especially noted for the carving—not once, but twice—of some 80,000 woodblocks containing the Tripitaka (the complete Buddhist canon of sutras, laws, and treatises). To meet heavy demands for various types of books, both religious and secular, Goryeo artisans invented movable metal type in the first half of the thirteenth century—well before Gutenberg created his press. Because the court and monastic communities both considered books to be treasures, libraries were built to house tens of thousands of volumes. The exhibition showcases sixteen examples of texts and frontispieces, illuminated sutras, woodblocks, and printed books.

In contrast to the selection of paintings, sutras, and lacquer wares, all of which were made exclusively to serve religious purposes, the twenty-three Goryeo metal crafts in this exhibition include both religious and secular objects, among them temple bells, a gong, a ritual bell (*vajra*), ritual ewers (*kundika*), reliquaries, incense burners, a portable shrine, a miniature pagoda, covered boxes, a ewer with a bowl, a basin, a mirror stand, a bottle, and a bracelet. In their simple forms and delicate designs, metal wares such as silver-inlaid bronze incense burners exude a quiet beauty.

The exhibition also features nine Buddhist sculptures—of bronze, gilded bronze, iron, and wood.

Media Preview

A media preview for *Goryeo Dynasty*, as well as *Leaning Forward, Looking Back: Eight Contemporary Artists from Korea*, will be held on Thursday, October 16 from 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM, with a gallery walk-through of *Goryeo Dynasty* at 10:00 AM led by Dr. Kumja Paik Kim, curator of the exhibition. A gallery walk-through of *Leaning Forward, Looking Back*, led by exhibition co-curators Jeff Kelley and Kang Seungwan, will begin at 11:00 AM. Complementary refreshments will be served. Please RSVP to pr@asianart.org or call (415) 581-3717.

SYMPOSIUM

Goryeo Dynasty: Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918 to 1392
Saturday, October 18 - Sunday, October 19, 2003

Saturday: 10:00 AM - 5:30 PM, followed by a reception at the Asian Art Museum

Sunday: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Symposium will be held at the California State Building Auditorium, 350 McAllister Street, San Francisco. Society for Asian Art and Asian Art Museum members: \$40, Seniors, Students, and Asian Art Museum Volunteers (please specify): \$30, General: \$50 Space is limited. Pre-registration is required. Your payment will reserve your space, please send checks to: Society for Asian Art, 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102. For a more information, please contact the Society for Asian Art office at (415) 581-3701 or email saa@asianart.org

The Asian Art Museum will host a symposium in conjunction with the exhibition. Scholars from all over the world will discuss the period's famed celadons, Buddhist painting and illuminated sutras, sculpture, and metalcrafts, as well as cultural history. Attendance includes a traditional Korean lunch on Saturday and a reception Saturday evening at the museum. Speakers include: Dr. Lewis Lancaster (Professor Emeritus, UC Berkeley), Dr. Edward Shultz (Director of the Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawaii), Ide Seinosuke, (Head of Archives Sections, the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo), Dr. Youngsook Pak (Chair, Department of Korean Studies, University of London), Dr. Junghee Lee (Department of Art History, Portland University), Choi Eung-Chon (Director, Chuncheon National Museum), Chung Yang-Mo (Former Director General of the National Museum of Korea), Dr. Kim Hongnam, (Professor, Department of Art History, Ewha Woman's University). Discussants include: Dr. Ahn Hwi-Joon (Professor, Department of Archaeology and Art, Seoul National University), Dr. Yi Song-Mi (Professor of Art History, Academy of Korean Studies), Dr. Kim Lena (Professor of Art History, Hong-Ik University), Dr. Robert Mowry (Arthur M. Sackler Museum). Co-sponsored by the Asian Art Museum and the Society for Asian Art.

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About the Asian Art Museum

The Asian Art Museum is a public institution whose mission is to lead a diverse global audience in discovering the unique material, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements of Asian art and culture. Holding nearly 15,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history, the museum is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Once located in Golden Gate Park, the museum now resides at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's new home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main library by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (designer of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris) into a showcase for the museum's renowned collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500 or www.asianart.org
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with extended hours Thursdays until 9:00 PM.
- **Admission:** \$10 for adults, \$7 for seniors, \$6 for youths 12–17, and free for children under 12. Thursday evenings after 5 PM admission is just \$5 for all visitors except members and those under 12, who are always admitted free.
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.