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Josefa Green, Editor

It has been a great pleasure to dedicate this issue to the arts of Korea, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and South Korea. This has however created an impossible challenge: how to encapsulate the richness of Korea’s past and present artistic achievements in one issue of the TAASA Review? Of course, we have not attempted such an unrealistic enterprise. Rather, this issue aims to provide some sense of the range and richness of Korea’s cultural heritage and to touch on some of its more contemporary manifestations.

In this we are aided by a major exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum (PHM), Spirit of jang-in: Treasures of Korean Metal Craft, which will be launched late October. Drawing on iconic pieces from a number of Korean museums, its focus is on Korean metal craft but its brief is much wider. As PHM curator Min Jung Kim states in her review of this exhibition, the display of both historical and contemporary examples of metal craft offers an introduction to Korean history and culture and deep insight into the spirit of jang-in - the spirit or essence of Korean craftspeople.

Several other articles in this issue tease out aspects of Korea’s rich metal craft tradition. We are pleased to be able to offer an article by Dr Charlotte Horlyck from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, which summarises some of her recent research on Goryeo period (918-1392 CE) Korean bronze mirrors.

Dr Marian Hosking introduces us to the work of Youngmee Do, an Australian-Korean who spectacularly combines traditional techniques with contemporary materials and designs. A striking necklace by another Korean-Australian, held in the PHM, is discussed by Alysha Buss in our regular In the Public Domain feature. Its pared back modern design is belied by the complex traditional processes used in its construction.

Jackie Menzies’ article on Late Joseon Buddhist art (18th – 20th centuries), demonstrates a different aspect of Korean artistic achievement. Her survey of paintings found in the Tongdosa temple complex located in south Gyeongsang Province, illustrates the shift from the more refined aristocratic style of the Goryeo period to the more colourful and vibrant compositions found in later popular Joseon Buddhist art.

Christina Sumner takes us through some of the intricacies of another distinctly Korean traditional craft, namely bojagi – delightful patchwork and embroidered wrapping cloths which are, as she writes, deeply imbued with Korean aesthetic, cultural and social values. Readers may recall the 1998 exhibition at the Powerhouse which displayed some of these beautiful textiles.

The growing appreciation of the value of traditional cultural products is mirrored by the listing of extraordinary places of cultural or natural significance by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The Korean villages of Hahoe and Yangdong have been recently placed on the World Heritage List and we are fortunate to be given a sense of their enormous historical significance by Joan Domicelj, a heritage consultant who was involved in the listing process. Along with the surviving buildings originally founded in the 14th century, the wooden masks of Hahoe, used in the Hahoe masked dance-drama (still practiced today and an Important Intangible Cultural Property), are the only masks to be named Korean national treasures.

Moving to the contemporary, this issue offers a review of the recent major Australian – Korean art exhibition, Tell Me, Tell Me, from the perspective of Song Mi Sim, a Korean national living in Australia, and a practicing artist and graduate of the National Art School. The exhibition juxtaposed contemporary works with significant historical examples from the 1970’s by important artists of both countries. Jointly curated by Glenn Barkley from Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art and Kim Inhye from the National Museum of Contemporary Art (NMOCA) in Seoul, the exhibition moves from the National Art School to open at NMOCA in November.

Finally, we are very pleased in this special Korean issue to take the opportunity to introduce the newly established Korean Cultural Office (KCO) in Sydney. Its Director, Young-soo Kim, outlines its ambitious program of activity; both current and planned, aimed at promoting mutual understanding between Korea and Australia. KOFFIA – the Korean Film Festival in Australia – now works out of the KCO and will launch an expanded range of Korean films at its festivals in Sydney in August and Melbourne in September. Kieran Tully gives us a preview of what can be enjoyed at these festivals, as well as an entertaining overview of the current state of the Korean film industry.

I would particularly like to thank Min Jung Kim and Christina Sumner of the PHM for the expert advice and support they provided for this special Arts of Korea issue.
In October, a new exhibition opens at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, part of the Museum’s ongoing exploration of Korean culture. *Spirit of jang-in: treasures of Korean metal craft*, developed by the Powerhouse Museum in association with the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, celebrates 2011 as the Year of Friendship, marking the 50th anniversary of Australia-Korea diplomatic relations.

A wide range of exquisite Korean National Treasures in metal dating from the Korean Bronze Age to the end of the Joseon dynasty in the early 1900s, together with selected contemporary metalwork, will be displayed in *Spirit of jang-in*, offering through the medium of metal craft an introduction to Korean history and culture. While metal was chosen as the linking material thread for this exhibition, *jang-in*, the spirit or essence of Korean craftspeople, is the conceptual thread that introduces the aesthetic sensibilities of Korea. Together they weave an expressive narrative.

This is the third Powerhouse exhibition to bring significant Korean collections to Australian audiences. In 1998, *Rapt in colour: Korean textiles and costume of the Chosón dynasty* introduced museum visitors to *bojagi*, the delicate and lovely traditional Korean wrapping cloths. In 2000, *Earth spirit fire: Korean masterpieces of the Chosón dynasty* primarily showcased ceramics of the long Joseon dynasty. (In 2000 a revised and simplified system of romanisation of Korean was released which removed apostrophes and diacritics, as in the rendering of Chosón as Joseon.)

Although long known in the West as the ‘Hermit Kingdom’, Korea occupies a pivotal position in East Asia both politically and culturally. Korea’s role in facilitating trade in the region, as well as cultural and artistic exchanges, has had an ongoing impact on its culture. Korean people may have originated in southern Siberia and they appear to share many aspects of folk culture with the Altaic speaking Tungusic group of people in Manchuria and Siberia. Having an ethnically different origin from mainland Han Chinese may well have played a significant part in creating Korea’s unique and distinctive culture, despite heavy influences from China over the years. Furthermore, there is no doubt that enduring features of the Korean landscape, with its mountains, rice fields and its distinctive four seasons, have played a significant role in forming Korea’s artistic sensibility.

The Korean term *jang-in* may be translated as ‘artisan’, ‘craftsman’ or ‘master’. The term was applied to people who developed a particular skill, becoming dedicated masters of their chosen profession. Historically, however, *jang-in* were not accorded high status in Korean society. This exhibition seeks to encourage an understanding of the spirit of *jang-in* and to re-interpret this concept freed from its original caste connotations.

During the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), Korean people were divided into classes according to their occupation. According to the *Gyeongguk daejeon* (Complete code of laws of the Joseon dynasty), promulgated in 1485, there were four divisions of society, namely aristocrats, farmers, craftsmen and merchants. This division was known as *sa tong gong sang* and was based on the Confucian perception that the wise ruler was at the top, followed by the farmer who produced society’s wealth, the craftsman, who only reused this wealth, and the merchant, who only distributed goods, came third and fourth in the hierarchy respectively. For this reason, the term *jang-in* carried a negative caste weighting and there was a widespread view that *jang-in* were somehow inferior. However, in relation to the Korean aesthetic, *jang-in* also has a prevailing philosophical meaning, especially when used with *jeongshin*. Together, *jang-in jeongshin* means ‘the spirit of *jang-in*’ or perhaps ‘the essence of the master’.

*Jang-in* believed in setting high moral standards in their profession and the beautiful goods they made were not necessarily created with the intention of satisfying clients or the general public. Instead, their products were considered to be their ‘other-self’, made with whole-hearted devotion. Masterpieces produced by *jang-in* involved the inner passion and spirit of their makers and they touch the viewer’s heart. These superb craftsmen and their work ethic have in fact affected whole communities and the phrase *jang-in jeongshin* has now expanded to embrace professionalism in all fields in contemporary Korea.

An essential aspect of *jang-in jeongshin* is the deep respect that *jang-in* have for the...
natural order of things, which underlies their understanding of the materials they use. This appears to be in line with traditional thinking about craftsmanship in the East.

The fundamental attitude to science and technology in Eastern thought was that human beings cannot control nature and that they should respect and follow the natural order. In this context, craftsmen learn about the materials they are working with in order to express the natural order and harmonise with it rather than to control or manipulate it. Yi Kyu-bo (1168-1214), a scholar and poet of Korea’s Goryeo dynasty (918-1392), emphasised this in his Dongguksianggukji or A Collection of Writings, when he wrote: ‘Do you think that things are made by people? …Things are formed into being and changed by themselves. What dare I know and what dare I make? I don’t know if I was the creator.’

Similarly to the way jang-in learn about their materials, artists following jang-in jeongshin express their creativity in harmony with nature. The concept of ‘naturalness’ has been described as part of the prevailing Korean aesthetic by many scholars, including Ko Yu-seop and Kim Won-yong. Ko in particular points out the ‘natural approach to creating beauty’ (1986, p.166); he explains that in Korean architecture for example, the natural curve of the wood was often used without alteration and that this can be described as ‘Korean beauty.’ However, whereas Ko’s approach to naturalness concerns the visual, naturalness in jang-in jeongshin relates to the philosophical: the emphasis here lies in artists’ attitudes and their state of mind during the process of making. These artists believe that their ability to create imaginative works comes from nature and not from their own will.

The last of the most important qualifications for being a jang-in is to aspire to highly-developed skills. For jang-in, the acquisition of skills is considered more important than the finished product. Modern education often regards repetitive learning as mind-numbing, and the principle of building skills through practice therefore faces obstacles in modern society. In the arts, technical skill has been distanced from the creative imagination and divorced from the supposedly higher pursuits of the arts. Conversely however, the aesthetic quality of works created by hands with superior levels of skill will ultimately be greatly enriched.

The objects on display in Spirit of jang-in: treasures of Korean metal craft were not only selected to show Korean aesthetics and the skill of its craftsmen, but also to reveal their social context from the earliest days of metal working in Korea. The objects tell us how jang-in lived, what they believed in, and how they embedded these beliefs in the things they made.

It is assumed that bronze technology came to the Korean peninsula from China, as evidenced by the distribution of a particular type of Chinese bronze dagger called the Liaoning type, originally found in Liaoning province in China. During the Korean Bronze Age (c. 1000 - 300 BCE), the first metal craftsmen made a stylistic change from the Liaoning type dagger to a much narrower shape, producing what is now called the Korean-style slender dagger.

Little is known about the people who lived in Korea during this early period, and the exact function of many of the objects they produced is not yet clear. However, it would seem that the rare and precious metal crafts produced at that time must have been considered sacred objects; it is also likely that the craftsmen who made them believed in shamanism. Furthermore, it is not known why these ancient Korean craftsmen so intricately decorated the implements they made, as this entailed overcoming considerable technical difficulties. It would seem that they were inspired by their spiritual belief, rather than more mundane reasons such as functionality or beauty. Kim Won-yong suggests for example that the fine geometrically-patterned two-handled mirrors which have been found may have been designed for fastening to a garment, and possibly had a shamanic ritual purpose (1986:115).

The influence of animism and shamanism can also be seen in a hilt-shaped bronze piece from Namgongri featuring a small figure of a deer. Deer have special significance in indigenous Korean shamanism, still practised in Korea today. In addition, many art historians and anthropologists believe that the design of the magnificent gold crowns of the later Silla period may have developed from the Siberian shaman’s headwear, as its tree and antler symbols reflect Siberian shamanistic beliefs.

Both the Koreans and the Chinese categorised metal into five types: blue (tin), white (silver), red (copper), black (iron) and yellow (gold), based on their understanding of the natural order of the universe known as the Five Movements (ohhang in Korean and wuxing in Chinese). In this system there are five elements borrowed from nature - wood, fire, metal, water and earth - as well as five directions and colours. Each of the five elements interacts with the others in an
endless cycle of creation and destruction. As gold is of premium quality amongst the five metals, Korean people simply called gold *gum*, which means ‘metal’, because gold did not need the qualifying adjective ‘yellow’.

The exhibition features many fine objects from the Silla period (57 BCE – 935 CE), which is strongly associated with metal working, in particular gold. The gold Silla crown and regalia, excavated in the Gyeongju area, demonstrate the powerful royal authority of the Silla kingdom and its rulers. Gold was used for many of the items found in the tombs, such as gold earrings, rings and necklaces, gold vessels and even gold shoes. The gold crowns of the Silla kings had religious symbolism as well as being indicators of rank. The crown was worn by the ruler, the maripkan, and his family, who initially ruled through the blood of sorggol (the sacred bone) and jirgel (true born), in the strictly hierarchical Silla society.

The gold crown and belt and the wing-like projection of the crown ornament were made from thin sheet-gold and twisted gold wire and decorated with pendant leaf-shaped gold and curved jade ornaments. Excavated from Cheonmachong (Heavenly Horse Tomb), these exquisitely fine objects clearly display the highly skilled metal-working craftsmanship practised in the Kingdom of Gold.

Metal craft practice flourished with the spread of Buddhism, introduced from China during Korea’s Three Kingdoms period (traditionally 57 BCE – 668 CE), that is the Baekje, Silla and Goguryeo kingdoms. Many Buddhist ritual objects were produced and this tradition continued into the Unified Silla (668 - 935) and Goryeo periods (918-1392).

Goryeo, from which the English name of ‘Korea’ is derived, is known as ‘the nation of craft’. The combination of ancient Silla traditions and the influences of Song and Yuan China inspired Korean metal craftsmen to create new works of exquisite beauty. The development of fine inlay techniques, for example, enabled them to transform a hard cold metal surface with what seems like soft warm paint. The inlay technique called ‘sanggam’, as seen in Goryeo celadon ceramics, may have been borrowed from widely-practised metal inlay designs.

During the Joseon dynasty which followed, Buddhism was suppressed and Confucianism became the Korean state ideology, in particular Neo-Confucianism. Among the principal ideals of Confucianism were the cultivation of virtue and the development of moral perfection. Frugality was one of the main virtues, with the result that highly sophisticated metalwork was not produced as in the previous Goryeo dynasty.

It was during the Joseon period however that metal craft objects were more widely used by commoners and became much more functional. The Gyeongdojapji of Yu-Deukgong (1749–1807), which documents seasonal customs in Seoul in the latter part of the 18th century, writes of the popularity of a particular type of metal alloy called *yugi*, a combination of 71.43% copper and 28.57% tin. It states that: “yugi is valued and favoured by the people; tableware including rice bowls, soup bowls, dishes for vegetables and dishes for meat are all made of yugi. Even basins and chamber pots are made of yugi.” During this period, almost all households used metal tableware and spoons and this tradition has continued into contemporary Korea.

During the first half of the 20th century, Korean craftsmen suffered from the peninsula’s unfortunate history. Japan’s occupation of Korea began in 1910, ending the Joseon dynasty, and lasted for 35 years. During these dark years, even though a modern education system started to form, artistic freedom for craftsman was limited and the Korean identity and Korean traditions were suppressed in favour of the Japanese alternative.

Furthermore, World War II had a tragic impact on metal crafts as well as other Korean craft practices. Household metal objects were melted down to make weapons, and the number of metal craftsmen was dramatically reduced. With the end of World War II, Korea gained sudden liberation from Japan. However shortly afterwards, Korea’s northern half was occupied...
by Soviet troops and the southern half by American troops. In the three-year Korean War which followed in June 1950, the Korean peninsula suffered huge loss of life and property. Both north and south were reduced to ruins and their populations plunged into absolute poverty. In such dire circumstances, only a very few could even think about the practice of metal craft.

The Korean people have overcome the pain of the first half of the 20th century and have achieved remarkable economic success with rapid industrialisation over the last decades.

This exhibition introduces selected contemporary metal craft artists who have been actively practising in Korea since the 1970s. Modernisation and the university education system have produced remarkable metal craft artists who engage with the international art world. Some borrow traditional design but use new techniques; some borrow traditional techniques to create new design. Some young artists take a truly inclusive, global approach, trying out both new techniques and new materials. In doing so, they challenge their own artistic, visual and conceptual creativity.

Korean artists living abroad have played a significant part in the preservation of Korean metal craft by creating magnificent pieces which borrow from their traditional heritage and also respond to the culture of their new home. Korean born Australian artist Joungmee Do strongly reminds us of ‘the spirit of jang-in’ in her practice of the traditional Korean metal making technique called josunipsa (chiselled inlay). Joungmee is a young artist who studied at Kookmin University in Korea and came to Australia in 1997, attaining her MFA from the Gold and Silversmithing Department at RMIT University in Melbourne.

A number of Korean craftspeople have been designated as Important Intangible Cultural Properties: the Korean government has officially labelled them ‘jang-in’. As part of the government’s strategy of conservation in the face of rapid modernisation, these craftspeople are expected to project ‘authentic Koreaness’ in their work. They face the dilemma of choosing between replicating historical objects or creating new forms that reflect contemporary society. As artists, should they adhere to strictly traditional methods or express their artistic creativity through the new materials and methods available today?

If craftspeople follow this approach with integrity, their work will naturally reflect their roots and their own history, regardless of their conscious intention.

This exhibition aims to revisit the concept of jang-in and to reflect on the meaning of the term. I hope that visitors will begin to view these craftspeople and their work in a different way, that they will come to understand the true essence of jang-in and may find some of the spiritual qualities of the jang-in within themselves. Lastly, I will leave you with a phrase by the American intellectual Walter Lippmann (1889 – 1974) which I believe reflects the spirit of jang-in: ‘Let a human throw the energies of his soul into the making of something, and the instinct of workmanship will take care of this honesty.’

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Buddhist paintings in the late Joseon period of Korea (c1600s-1800s) are distinguished by their colour, vibrancy and dense compositions. In contrast to the refined elegance and understatement of the court-commissioned images of the previous Goryeo period (918-1392), Joseon Buddhist paintings constitute a more robust and popular expression of Buddhist beliefs. This article will consider some of the Buddhist paintings in the collection of the major temple of Tongdosa, located in Yangsan district in south Gyeongsang Province (west of the major port-city of Busan).

Buddhism had flourished in Korea from the introduction of Mahayana teachings in the late 4th century through to the Goryeo period. Korean Buddhism was an amalgam of different teachings. For example, one of the most popular teachings was the Avatamsaka (K. Hwaom; E. Flower Garland) Sutra, the basis of the Pure Land belief in the Western Paradise of the Amitabha (in Korean Amitabul) Buddha. Also popular were meditation-based schools of practice, called Seon, which prospered throughout the Goryeo period. The Goryeo period also saw the influx of Tibetan Buddhism following the Mongol defeat of Korea and their rule of China during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368).

Regrettably the Buddhist sangha deteriorated towards the end of the Goryeo period due to corruption and neglect. This resulted in a persecution of Buddhism that was expanded in the succeeding Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) when Neo-Confucianism was adopted as the state ideology. Buddhism suffered, with the number of temples and monks greatly reduced.

However popular support grew for the religion for various reasons. For example, Buddhist ceremonies for the salvation of souls and the praying for rain, were held regularly and with great enthusiasm since Confucianism had nothing to offer against natural disasters, disease, invasions and other calamities (Korean Buddhist Research Institute 1995: 180).

Buddhism gained further support when monk militia, rather than the government army, held off foreign invasions, notably those of the Japanese in 1592 and the Chinese in 1627. The destruction of temples wrought by the Japanese invasion was a catalyst for the outburst of regional painting by groups of monk painters that saw a flowering of Buddhist art in the early 17th century.

By the second half of the 17th century, patronage of Buddhist art had shifted to the broader community whose taste shaped a different style of Buddhist imagery. Paintings became more colourful and vibrant, compositions more crowded as Bodhisattvas appeared alongside Buddhas (a practice not seen in Goryeo painting), and additional personnel from shamanist and popular Buddhist beliefs such as the Ten Kings of Hell got into the picture (literally). As well, silk was no longer the only medium for paintings which could appear on other materials, such as hemp.

Subjects for Buddhist paintings include individual Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and narratives illustrating the passage to salvation. Within a temple complex such as Tongdosa, paintings appear on external and internal walls as well as on large hanging scrolls, which can be either the focal image on an altar, or serve as a so-called ‘platform painting’ - the backdrop to a single or group of Buddhist sculptures seated on a platform.

The impact of the interior of a temple is an overwhelming and uplifting experience of redemption on the path to paradise, each stage graphically illustrated. The path to paradise starts when the deceased are taken into the care of Messengers from the Underworld who escort them to the court presided over by the Ten Kings of Hell. After appearing sequentially before each one of the Ten Kings of Hell for assessment, they can be re-born into one of the Six Realms of Transmigration that constitute samsara. Thus a deceased can become a denizen of hell, a hungry ghost, an animal, a human, a demi-god (asura) or a god. Illustrations of these differing realms are rendered with imaginative relish and uncompromising realism. The Bodhisattva who presides over this realm and who has the power to save souls and lead them to nirvana is Kshitigarbha (K. Jijang), an ubiquitous figure in Buddhist pantheons. As much as the hells and punishments are terrifying, the Buddhist paradises are serene, bejewelled realms of blissful plenty. Depictions of the Kings of Hell, Kshitigarbha, and the Realms of Transmigration can be traced back to 9th century China through surviving scroll paintings from the caves of Dunhuang.

The most popular and influential Mahayana texts across all of East Asia has been the Lotus Sutra which stresses the eternal nature and omniscience of the Buddha. The Sutra purports to be a discourse delivered by Shakyamuni on Vulture Peak (K. Yeongsanhoesangdo) to a huge audience. A signal event of the Sutra is the meeting on Vulture Peak of Shakyamuni...
and the past Buddha Prabhutaratna (in Korean Seokgamoni and Dabobul). Images of the two seated alongside each other occur repeatedly in East Asian art.

Illustrated is a detail of the scene as it appears on a wall painting in one of the halls of Tongdosa. Mural painting had a long tradition in Korea and in this valuable example of that tradition Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna can be seen seated together in a multi-levelled pagoda. According to the text, this great event occurred as Shakyamuni rose before the assembled crowds on Vulture Peak to teach the Dharma. At that moment a sparkling, jewelled stupa, decorated with banners, bells and flowers appeared in the sky. Inside was Prabhutaratna who had vowed to appear whenever the Lotus sūtra was preached. Upon its appearance, Shakyamuni rose up in the air, opened the door, seated himself beside Prabhutaratna, and continued his sermon. The wall painting captures this magical event, with the multi-coloured bands of light surrounding the aureoles of the Buddhas reflected in the clouds and celestial beings surrounding this iconic image.

The subject of Shakyamuni Buddha preaching on Vulture Peak appears in a format unique to Korea within the East Asian repertoire: a huge hanging scroll (up to 12 metres long) known as gwaebul, used only a few times a year on such occasions as Buddha’s birthday and ceremonies for a Passage to Paradise. The ceremonies for these enormous, and consequently heavy, paintings are held outdoors in order to accommodate large gatherings, and the tall poles required to hang them can be seen in many temple compounds.

Apart from Korea, the only place where proof exists of the tradition of hanging huge Buddhist banners outside for special ceremonies is Tibet. Reynolds (1999: 187) shows a 1920 photo of a giant appliquéd banner unrolled down a hillside in northeastern Tibet. She explains how such banners were in the class of great spiritual icons called Mš on gro, ‘liberation through sight’. Undoubtedly the tradition entered Korea at the time of Mongol influence.

In Korea, such large banners were used in diverse ritual ceremonies, including suryyakyoe rituals ‘to sooth all the souls who had to die from unjustifiable causes, or without proper memorial ceremonies’ (Kim S. 2009: 19). So many people were killed at times such as the Hideyoshi invasion that the only way of accommodating audiences wanting to attend rituals for the deceased to enter paradise were outside ceremonies with huge Buddhist banners. The Tongdosa Museum, within the grounds of the temple complex, has a specially designed high foyer to accommodate this type of painting, of which one is always on show. A detail of one such painting is illustrated. (The candles at the bottom of the picture are on the altar placed in front of the image). It depicts a monumental imposing central Shakyamuni flanked by the Bodhisattvas Samantabhadra (K. Bohyeon) and Manjushri (K. Munsu) with other Bodhisattvas and luminaries.

The two Bodhisattvas are larger in scale than found in earlier Joseon painting. The red and green colouring that dominates the palette is typical of Joseon paintings, while the handling of the Buddha too has distinctive Joseon features. Characteristics of Joseon Buddhas include the coloured sphere at the peak of his ushnisa (the cranial protuberance that is one of the 32 attributes of a Buddha), the fineness, sometimes smallness, of facial features, and the decoratively restrained handling of hair. Despite its size, the quality of the brushwork, colouring and detailing of clothing, jewellery and facial features is maintained.

Many Korean Buddhist paintings destined for temple display are large and squarer rather than long and narrow in shape, reflecting their transition from an earlier tradition of mural painting. Some were created to hang on their own but many were created to hang behind the central Buddhist sculpture(s) on the altar of the main hall of a Buddhist temple, enhancing the power and glory of the
Another uniquely Korean Buddhist type of painting is the ‘Nectar ritual’ painting used in rituals to lead souls to paradise, such as the ‘Amitaba triptych’, which represents the different offerings made to deities during ceremonies to propitiate them. Below them, against a backdrop of fluttering white banners inscribed with the Buddhist ‘hail’ invocation, is a long altar piled with offerings. The altar and the abstracted shapes on it, evoke a specific Tibetan genre of offering painting called ‘host of ornaments’, representing the different offerings made to deities during ceremonies to propitiate them.

In the original Tibetan version, what here is a row of white ‘bowls’ is a row of skulls. Such ambiguity extends to the vertical piles of offerings, attractively abstract in this image. The two graphically depicted demons in the lower centre of this detail are hungry ghosts, sinners condemned to eternal hunger. They fervently clasp their bowls, hoping to receive from the Buddhas the nectar (amrita) that will release them for the painful level of transmigration into which they are locked.

The Buddha Amitabha, the focus of worship in Pure Land Buddhism, maintained his popularity throughout the Joseon period. Illustrated is a detail of a later painting of Amitabha, flanked by the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara (K. Gvaneum) and Mahaasthamaprapta (K. Daeseji) who symbolise compassion and wisdom. The central figures maintain the hieratic arrangement popular in the Goryeo period with the scale of the central Buddha overwhelming that of the two disproportionately small Bodhisattvas flanking him. However in a Goryeo painting this triptych would appear against an empty space whereas what distinguishes a Joseon painting (as in this example) is the host of figures surrounding the main image. Another difference is that the gold detailing used to embellish Goryeo paintings is not found on Joseon paintings, whose patrons lacked the wealth of the aristocrats commissioning Goryeo images.

Buddhist paintings of the Joseon dynasty are attracting more attention as temples such as Tongdosa bring them to the notice of the wider public, and as they enter museum collections. This article has presented only a few images from the enthralling world captured in such images.

I am indebted for some of my information to conversations and lectures by numerous individuals connected to Tongdosa and to lecture programs organised by the Korea Foundation for their Art Curators’ workshops. I am particularly grateful to the chief abbot at Tongdosa, the Ven. A San Sunim, and to Shin Yongchul, Chief curator of the Tongdosa Museum. In Sydney I am grateful to Won Seung Sunim, Ta Won Sunim and Yung Yoo of The Korean Buddhism Joghopsa Society Inc.

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AMITABA TRIPTYCH, [DETAIL], JOSEON DYNASTY, 1740, COLOURS ON HEMP, 295 X 235CM, TONGDOSA. PHOTO: JACKIE MENZIES

sculptural image as well as the surrounding ambience of the temple interior. Regarded more as a craft than high art, such images were painted by monk painters, following a tradition whereby a novice monk evincing talent would be trained to paint the various images mandatory in the main and subsidiary temples of a temple precinct.

In later Joseon, paper stencils were often used as the first stage in creating an image, with the ink outlines then coloured in by selected monk painters. Typically the colours used were bright and flat, a taste arguably indebted to folk traditions.

Another uniquely Korean Buddhist type of painting is the ‘Nectar ritual’ painting used in rituals to lead souls to paradise, such as suryukjae, and the rituals on the 49th day after death. A detail of one such painting in the Tongdosa collection is illustrated to present its fascinating iconography. The composition comprises various levels, starting from the top row of seven Buddhas that features Shakyamuni in the centre, flanked by the Six Buddhas of the Past. The monk like figure depicted upper right is Kshitigarbha (K. Jijang), the Bodhisatvva who presides over hell.

Below them, against a backdrop of fluttering white banners inscribed with the Buddhist ‘hail’ invocation, is a long altar piled with offerings. The altar and the abstracted shapes on it, evoke a specific Tibetan genre of offering painting called ‘host of ornaments’, representing the different offerings made to deities during ceremonies to propitiate them.
In East Asia bronze mirrors were manufactured and used for more than 2500 years, and there is little doubt that they served an important function within the secular and ritual lives of people living in this region. Archaeological finds and historical writings suggest that over the course of time they were used not only as reflectors of the human body but equally, if not more frequently as ritual objects, tomb goods, gifts, talismans and collectibles.

The objects are typically in the form of discs that were polished to a high sheen on one side, and on the other were cast with an array of decorative schemes that in various ways enriched the symbolic meanings of the objects. Bronze was the preferred medium used, and its shiny and durable qualities not only had a practical purpose, it also enhanced the metaphorical and ritual connotations of the objects. Many mirror inscriptions allude to this, as exemplified in a Chinese mirror excavated from a third century tomb in Pyongyang. Its inscription is formed by four Chinese characters that say “[May you] live as long as metal and stone” (shou ru jinshi). Such wishes for longevity were frequently cast on mirrors, suggesting that their owners believed in their efficacy. Clearly, mirrors were not only everyday objects. They took on powerful sacred roles that were rooted in their reflective qualities.

The durability of bronze has resulted in thousands of mirrors having survived till today, and they are housed in many museum and private collections around the world. Mirrors found on the Chinese mainland and to a lesser extent those from the Japanese archipelago have been the subject of scholarly attention for decades. Characterized by their unique designs and superb casting, especially early Chinese mirrors from the Han (206 BCE-220 CE) and Tang (618-906 CE) periods, they have been very popular among collectors, and extensive studies have been published on them.

In contrast, mirrors found on the Korean peninsula are little known to the scholarly community. This may partly be attributed to the fact that for historical reasons Korean artifacts are generally less well known than their Chinese and Japanese counterparts, and in museums they are often outnumbered by them. Over the past decade, however, there has been increased interest in Korean bronze artifacts, in particular those of the Goryeo kingdom (918-1392 CE). During this time, decorative arts including celadon ceramics, textiles and bronze wares, flourished under the patronage of the royal court. Indeed for their translucent glazes, fluent shapes and delicately inlaid patterns, celadon ceramics have especially come to be seen as one of the highpoints of Goryeo’s artistic traditions. The manufacture of bronzes also increased dramatically, leading to the production of many different types of objects: from Buddhist artifacts such as sculptures, relic containers, gongs and bells, to secular wares, in particular hairpins, spoons, chopsticks, and bowls. Many bronze mirrors were made during this time, and they form the focal point of this article which explores some of their key characteristics, and questions the symbiotic relationship between mirror designs and mirror uses.

More than a thousand bronze mirrors from the Goryeo kingdom have survived and many are now held in museums and private collections in Korea and elsewhere. Mirrors from this period continue to surface in South Korea as a result of excavations being carried out in the wake of construction works. It was not uncommon for elite members of Goryeo society to be buried with a bronze mirror, and over the past decade, several mirrors have been discovered in such contexts.

That mirrors formed an integral part of Goryeo culture is not only evidenced by their sheer numbers, but also by the fact that their manufacture in part was controlled by the central government-run administration of arts and crafts workshops. Two virtually identical mirrors, now in the collection of the National Museum of Korea, were cast with a cartouche bearing four Chinese characters with the meaning ‘made in Goryeo’, indicating that they were manufactured in such a government-run workshop. Decorated with a simple scroll motif, the contours of the design appear soft and in some cases slightly blurred, suggesting that the mould had been re-used many times, pointing to mass-production of this particular type of mirror.

There is little doubt that the casting of bronze mirrors increased significantly during the
Goryeo kingdom, bringing with it new styles, shapes and designs. Unlike earlier Korean mirrors which were predominantly circular, Goryeo ones were cast in a wide spectrum of sizes and shapes, such as circles, squares, flowers, clouds and bells. In contrast to earlier times, when mirrors chiefly carried cosmological motifs, during this period various kinds of auspicious patterns became popular, as represented by pictorial subject matters as well as stylised flower, bird and animal patterns. Yet, certain motifs are more prominent than others, indicating that they had special appeal for people at this time.

Foreign mirrors, which entered the peninsula through trade and tributary relations, also had a strong influence on Goryeo mirror production, as craftpeople incorporated and adapted earlier and contemporary Chinese and to a lesser extent Japanese mirror designs to suit local taste and traditions. In fact, many of the motifs which appear on Goryeo mirrors, such as the dragon, phoenix, and peony were imported from the mainland over several decades and were gradually included into the Korean iconographical scheme as demonstrated by the fact that many mirrors with these decorations no longer closely resemble their foreign prototypes and instead can be said to be local variations of them.

Some of the largest mirrors that were made during this time feature a central pattern of two dragons chasing flaming pearls. Traditionally the use of dragon motifs was reserved for the royal family, since in accordance with Chinese custom, it denoted power and authority. In this case too, their size and skillfully cast designs suggest these kinds of mirrors were made for an exclusive clientele who could afford and were allowed to use such items.

Several mirrors of this type, which are now housed in the National Museum of Korea, are recorded to have been found near Kaesong, the capital of the Goryeo kingdom, indicating that they may have come from the royal and aristocratic tombs located in this area. Prior to them being placed in the graves, they may have been used as secular objects in upper class homes where they would have been placed on mirror stands. A few such stands have survived till today and they are elaborately decorated with repoussé designs and inlaid patterns. A string would have been inserted through the knob on the back of the mirror, and it would have hung with the reflective side upwards over the knob on the mirror stand.

Comparably smaller in size, one of the most popular mirrors made during this period was decorated with the so-called ‘double-bird-auspicious-flower-motif’ (K. ssanggeunseohwamun) which features two birds with outstretched wings flanked by stylised floral scrolls. They have been excavated from sites located throughout the peninsula, testifying to their widespread appeal. Early examples date from the mid 11th century but they have also been found in later tombs of the 12th century.

The floral scrolls are made up of lotus, while the birds can be identified as phoehines. Goryeo people were fervent believers of Buddhism and within this faith the lotus carries great symbolic significance. Its growth in a muddy pond is likened to the spiritual path of the devotee, whose mind is initially shrouded in darkness but who with time and devotion gains clarity and finally blossoms like a lotus. The lotus was therefore a much-loved decorative motif on Buddhist as well as secular objects, where it was often combined with other auspicious patterns, as in this case.

The phoenix is one of the most mythical and legendary of creatures in East Asia. In accordance with Chinese tradition, it is a bearer of good omen as it is believed to appear in times of peace and prosperity. It therefore came to be associated with the royal family, benevolent rule and immortality, and was used as a decorative pattern, especially on objects used by the queen or the empress. In some variations of the ssanggeunseohwamun the birds are more reminiscent of doves or ducks which were likewise seen as auspicious creatures as they symbolised faithfulness and marital love. Signifying spiritual purity, benevolence, and harmony, these mirrors were well-suited as presents to loved ones, and it may account for their widespread use as burial gifts.

Peonies were also widely used as a design scheme during this time. Their frequent appearance on Goryeo mirrors may have been influenced by China, where they were known as the ‘king of flowers’ due to their exquisite blossoms and fanciful forms. Peonies were traditionally exchanged as farewell gifts and as tokens of love. It is therefore appropriate that they appear on mirrors and other Goryeo funerary objects, including stone coffins that were sometimes used by members of the aristocracy.

Since their inception mirrors were associated with longevity and immortality and this tradition continued in the Goryeo period when many mirrors carried motifs symbolising such notions. Particularly prevalent are cranes, associated with endurance and long life due to their long life span and long migratory habits. As legendary figures, cranes permeated folk
consciousness at an early date and many Korean folk tales centre on them.

Several circular mirrors with flying cranes amidst cloud scrolls have been excavated from 12th century tombs. With their long, thin necks, straight legs and outspread wings, the rendering of the birds is characteristic of this period, when they also appear repeatedly on ceramics. Though cranes were also popular as a decorative motif in Japan and China, their pictorial treatment in Goryeo mirrors is considerably different. In Japanese mirrors of the Heian (794-1185 CE) and Kamakura (1185-1336 CE) periods they are usually placed in an ornate landscape setting. On Tang and Song (960-1279 CE) mirrors, cranes tend to be depicted in a landscape setting with a pine tree, an immortal and a tortoise – all symbols of longevity. In Goryeo their rendition was much simpler, reflecting the general fondness for understated decorative schemes that characterise much 12th century Korean art.

On the Korean peninsula bronze mirrors were made since at least the 4th century BCE, and they continued to be in use until the late Joseon dynasty when they were replaced by mercury mirrors imported from China and Japan. It was during the Goryeo kingdom that the production of mirrors underwent a significant transformation in their shapes, sizes and in particular their motifs, suggesting that their manufacture and use was governed by new ideas and concerns.

In contrast to earlier times when mirrors were predominantly used in ritual settings, in the Goryeo kingdom they took on different, though not mutually exclusive roles. As in pre-Goryeo times, mirrors were used in Buddhist rituals and in burial contexts, but they also came to be seen as desirable secular objects. The multiple functions of mirrors led to an expansion of their decorative schemes which often carried auspicious messages of longevity, benevolence and harmony. Many patterns were borrowed from China, and to a lesser extent Japan, where they had similar meanings, but craftsmen adapted them to suit local aesthetic traditions, giving rise to objects which in many cases were significantly different from their Chinese and Japanese counterparts.

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Cooking smoke rises straight above each house . . . 
In the evening it joins the mountain mist.
It fades in the spring rain.
It screens the glare of the autumn glow.
from 16 beautiful sceneries in Hahoe, poems by Ryu Won-ji [1598-1674]

Last year, in a crowded meeting in Brasilia, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the Historic Villages of Korea: Hahoe and Yangdong on the World Heritage List, as places of ‘outstanding universal value’. I had visited both places in 2008 in that ‘glare of the autumn glow’ – shimmering red, gold, citrus foliage on mountainsides on arrival; red, gold, citrus beds of fallen leaves a week later.

UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention celebrates and protects those extraordinary places around the world that best convey outstanding cultural and natural values. Its Committee has, over recent years, considered the subtleties of cultural landscapes and the intangible cultural associations that infuse them with meaning.

After due consideration, the Committee determined that these two villages, in their very fabric, epitomise the Confucian principles of the Joseon Dynasty (1392 - 1910), in particular through their harmonious composition within their landscape settings and through their formal structure for living.

Both villages lie to the southeast of the Korean Peninsula and were founded by noble, or yangban, families in 14th-15th century. They expanded to their current size in the 18th-19th centuries. The founder of Hahoe created a new settlement. In Yangdong, a nobleman married and settled into his wife’s hometown. The location of each village was carefully selected according to the rules of pungsan - the art of choosing an auspicious site. Each nestles below forested mountains and faces flowing water and nearby fertile fields of crops. Each is so shaped as to reflect the distinctive clan social structure and is divided into three principal areas: for agricultural production, residential living and spiritual development.

The village of Hahoe is said to resemble a floating lotus flower, with the loop of the Nakdong River and the mountain range behind it forming the yin-yang symbol. Its geographic form has protected Hahoe from foreign invasions several times. Yangdong, on the other hand, takes the form of spread fingers along the small valleys lying between its mountain ridges. Yangdong has preserved the largest concentration of yangban houses in Korea. With their pattern of tile-roofed noble family houses and supporting thatch-roofed commoners’ houses, their secluded academies and study halls, both villages reflect Confucian social structures and philosophical traditions.

Joseon Culture and Society
To appreciate the extraordinary survival of these two villages and their living traditions, it is important to understand something of the Joseon era. Joseon’s culture was based on the philosophy of Neo-Confucianism, emphasising morality and practical ethics. As a dynasty, it profoundly influenced the development of the Korean peninsula over some five centuries.

Respect for scholarship was expressed through private Confucian academies and other facilities for the literati, such as the study halls and pavilions of Hahoe and Yangdong. As more and more documents were produced - on history, geography, medicine and Confucian principles - so too the arts flourished in painting, calligraphy, music and ceramics. Notably, the simplified Korean alphabet Hangul was developed by King Sejong the Great in 1446 for the benefit of the populace.
During this era, society was hierarchical and hereditary, with king and royal family at its pinnacle. The next tier of nobles consisted of Confucian scholars, government officials and land owners, supported by tenant farmers and slaves. It was this highly educated yangban class that established the numerous clan villages now exemplified by Hahoe and Yangdong. The middle class, jingin, were scribes, technicians, artists and musicians, who lived in walled towns. Commoners, or peasant farmers, were the largest class. The lowest class included hereditary slaves (their mistreatment was strictly forbidden), prostitutes, labourers, shamans, soldiers and criminals.

Government and military institutions of Joseon Korea were controlled by the yangban and the king. The yangban became an hereditary nobility, whose status was based on a unique mixture of family position, a series of examinations in Confucian learning and the civil service system. If, over three generations, no member of a yangban family succeeded in becoming an official, the family reverted to commoner status.

Although by the 19th century the yangban class structure had weakened considerably, much of modern Korean etiquette, attitudes and language reflects its legacy. In Hahoe and Yangdong, the original families, together with evidence of Joseon social structure and practices, remain relatively intact. This is particularly remarkable, given the destruction experienced by Korea in its troubled history including during Japanese occupation from 1910 – 1945, the war between North and South Korea from 1950 – 53 and ongoing tensions since then.

**Key Components of the Villages**

The villages are, of course, made up of all the physical components of a small urban settlement - housing, gardens, farming, schooling, connecting roads and pathways and idyllic pavilions and study halls, together with many associated intangible traditions and ways of life. The village vernacular architecture is distinctly Korean, such as the form of timber structures or the ondol under-floor heating.

Only three aspects will be highlighted here: the clan family house, the Confucian Academy and the living traditions of ritual and folklore. One example of each is taken from the village of Hahoe, with house and academy both relating to the one yangban from the founding Ryu family - Ryu Seong-ryong. Similar enchanting sites and human stories abound for Yangdong village.

**The Clan Family House**

The head family house of Hahoe, typically, stands on a slightly elevated site at the centre of the village. The equivalent house in Yangdong lies at the heart of the village’s innermost valley. Clan households are responsible for maintaining the family genealogy and performing ancestral rituals, many related to the family shrine. Each village clan is also custodian of a variety of ancient artefacts, including invaluable records, early documents, book printing tablets and drawings. In Hahoe, many are housed with the Ryu family, others in the Confucian Academy nearby.

Chunghyodang in Hahoe village, is listed as Treasure no.414 for the excellence of its architecture. Its structure is typical of houses of high-ranking officials of the mid Joseon dynasty. It is the head family house of Ryu Seong-ryong (1542-1607), also known as Seoae, who was important in the defence of the kingdom during the Japanese invasions under Hideyoshi of 1592-98. He wrote the Jingbirok (War Memories) based on that experience. The house was named Chunghyodang (hall of loyalty and filial piety) out of respect for his dying words to his children, and is sited so as to be shielded front and back by Mounts Wonjisan and Hwasan.

In Ryu Seong-ryong’s time the house was small, but it was enlarged by his grandson Ryu Won-ji (1598-1674), district chief officer, and further extended by Won-ji’s son to its present size of 52 rooms. The main gate is a single structure, with the women’s courtyard (the anchae) a little behind. The men’s quarters (the sarangetae), with wooden floored hall, extends outwards from a corner of the anchae. The walled ancestral shrine lies beyond that and faces Manuelbong Peak in accordance with pungsu and ritual observances. All buildings in the complex are tile roofed and finely decorated. Within the precinct, a building was erected in 1974 to house vital relics and documents such as the Jingbirok, Seoae’s relics and documents of the Ryu family. Oddly, Queen Elizabeth of England celebrated her birthday here in 1999.

**The Confucian Academy**

Lee Sang-hae in his fine book Seoaeon, the architecture of Korea’s Private Academies (2005), describes the Confucian Academy as the crowning glory of Korean Neo-Confucianism, a philosophical tradition based on respect and learning, that originated in China but was absorbed by Korean literati of the Joseon era and adopted as their ruling ideology.

The academies were built as scholastic retreats, beside streams and imposing mountains, where one could steep the mind and body in the study and practice of Confucianism, and pay respect to the wisdom of early sages by rites of worship at their shrines. The layout and appearance of the complex was orderly, modest and open to the beautiful landscape which surrounded it. The student dormitories formed a courtyard, both contemplative and active in character, while set well behind the lecture hall, the walled shrine remained secluded and quiet. The long pavilion – open
and expressly designed to bring people close to nature and encourage ardent debate or discussion of poetry - was set close to the entrance. All those seated in the lecture hall or the pavilion could see the facing mountain.

Over generations, the academies housed and conserved clan documents, scholarly books and artistic works. In Yangdong village, Yi Eon-jeok’s *Collection of Manuscripts* is held in the Oksanseowon Academy, together with the earliest complete set of Korean history books compiled by government. Adjacent to Hahoe village, the Byeongsan-seowon Academy houses some 1,000 documents and 300 highly valued books.

Byeongsan-seowon Confucian Academy (Historic Site No.260) is located some five kilometres east of Hahoe village on the banks of the Nakdong River and is separated from the village by Mt Hwasan. The Academy faces across the river to the cliffs of Byeongsan, or screen mountain. Its shrine is a memorial to Ryu Seong-ryong who retired to his birth-place Hahoe and wrote the *Jiubhink*, mentioned above, as a warning against future calamities.

Although Ryu Seong-ryong relocated the Academy to this site in 1572, most buildings in the complex were constructed by his students after his death. Byeongsan-seowon remains as one of only 47 academies not destroyed in the government’s anti-seowon purges of 1868. It encompasses a main gate, pond, large two-storeyed pavilion, eastern and western dormitories, lecture hall, storehouse for printing blocks, spirit gate and stone lantern, a raised and walled shrine surrounded by crepe myrtle trees, a building for preparing spring and autumn offerings and a house for stewards.

The Living Traditions of Ritual and Folklore

Joseon era folklore was performed by family, clan or village as a whole. Family and clan rituals relate to coming-of-age, marriage, funeral and ancestral worship, with the latter being the most essential. There is also the annual Hahoe festival when yangban, sailing on boats in moonlight, drink and recite poems under fireworks lit by villagers. These various rituals continue today.

Traditionally, villages worshipped a guardian spirit. Folklore included ritual prayers for good fortune to that spirit but also collective games to bond the community. The *dongje ceremony* of Hahoe is still conducted in the traditional way, twice a year at night, offering food and drink at upper and middle tutelary shrines and the next morning at the sacred *samsindang* tree. Yangdong village worships ancient trees and performs community tug-of-war ceremonies between the upper and lower sections of the village to lift morale at times of misfortune.

The wooden masks of Hahoe, worn in the Hahoe masked dance-drama (*Important Intangible Cultural Property No.69*), are the only ones designated as Korean national treasures. Their unique facial features are analysed through one of the *Four Books and Three Classics* fundamental to Korean traditional education. They depict social position, occupation and economic status. In performance, they vividly express scowls, laughter or calm, through their tilting and hinged jaw movement. The masks seemed mysterious, almost spiritual, to villagers during their hundreds of years of use. They were treated with such respect that actors would offer a sacrifice whenever they were moved to or from storage.

The *T'al-nori*, the masked dance-drama, is the third step of a village ritual *Byeolsingut* held whenever the village is suffering misfortune. The first two steps welcome the spirit *gangsin* and entertain the spirit *osin*. It is the oldest traditional masked dance-drama in Korea and its essence is to satirise tensions between the *yangban* (ruling class) and the *saengmin* (ruled class). It parodies the flaws of the privileged, including decadent noblemen and apostate Buddhist monks and so acts as an outlet for the frustrations of commoners. In a society where status and order were strictly observed, the *T'al-nori* allowed criticism of the ruling classes, with their tacit consent and financial support. The performance presented issues to the *yangban*, enabling them to resolve complaints and re-establish unity in the village community.

As for our final glimpse of these two World Heritage villages:

*Evening dims the river village.*
*Here and there I see the torches of fishermen.*
*An infinity of stars shine clearly in the sky.*
*A red fire blazes like a cluster of flowers.*

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CONSIDERING BOJAGI: TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY KOREAN WRAPPING CLOTHS

Christina Sumner

Bojagi, the patchwork and embroidered wrapping cloths of Korea, rank among the most influential of the world’s myriad array of glorious textiles for contemporary practitioners. A traditional form of rare delicacy and considerable antiquity, bojagi are deeply imbued with Korean aesthetic, cultural and social values. Their current visibility on the contemporary art scene seems characterised by a metamorphosis of traditional forms coupled with a strong adherence to their quintessential traditional aesthetic.

Colourful and highly decorative, traditional Korean bojagi are square or rectangular cloths made by women of all classes in the stratified Korean society. They range in size from one pok (about 35cm square) to ten pok and were designed to be used to wrap, cover, carry and store both ordinary and precious household items such as clothing, bedding, food, jewellery and gifts.

Bojagi were also used for ceremonial purposes and the observation of social rituals: special occasions and religious ceremonies were marked by covering the table or altar with a fine cloth, while gifts wrapped in a painstakingly stitched bojagi showed love or respect for the recipient. It was understood that the maker’s wishes for the recipient’s happiness and good fortune were enfolded in the packaging. In addition to their function as practical wrappers and coverings for people and their belongings, these lovely textiles thus also served their makers as personal expressions of care and creativity. When not in use, bojagi could themselves be easily folded and stored.

All the known surviving early bojagi date from the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), when they were at the height of their popularity. The earliest surviving example, now in the collection of the Museum of Korean Embroidery in Seoul, was used at the wedding of the Princess Myongan in 1681. The earliest reference however is to a red bojagi in a legend of the first century, which is indicative of their great antiquity. Typologically, bojagi were divided first into two socially defined groups (court users or ordinary users) and subsequently according to their design and construction (lined, unlined, patchwork, embroidered, quilted, painted or printed) and/or their purpose. The number of recorded bojagi types, as indicated by the many terms used to distinguish one from another, reflects their significantly varied forms, social meanings and functional roles. The terminology is complex and overlapping and, for the uninitiated, somewhat confusing as a single bojagi may have two or three names depending on its design, structure or function.

Gung bo, for court use
Wrapping cloths for use by royalty and the nobility at the Korean court were collectively known as gung bo. Typically, they were very colourful, made from red, purple, blue, green, black or cream silk, cotton or ramie, exquisitely printed or painted with flowers, animals or meaningful symbols; occasionally they were embroidered.

Gung bo survive in comparatively large numbers as, in addition to cloths to wrap or cover everything in the household from chopsticks to chests, new wrapping cloths were required every year to package the new clothing, headwear and footwear made for royal personages. Gung bo could be lined (gyooup bo), unlined (hot bo), padded (som bo) or quilted (nabi bo); oiled paper wrapping cloths known as sikji bo were used at court for covering food. Gung bo were also classified by their function, for example to cover a food table (sang bo), or to wrap bedding (ibul bo), clothing (ot bo) or jewellery (norigae bo), as well as by their materials and decoration such as silk (bidan bo) or embroidery (su bo).

Min bo, for ordinary people
The bojagi made for use by ordinary citizens were known collectively as min bo and were at one time an indispensable part of everyday life in Korea. Most min bo were either embroidered (su bo) or made by means of a characteristic patchwork construction called jogak bo. They were generally simpler in design and ornament than gung bo, often with abstract rather than figurative designs, and were made from more robust fabrics. However, the terminology for the different structural and functional types of gung bo and min bo are the same, since the decorative techniques used and the purposes to which they were put were more or less identical whether for use in the palace or an ordinary household. A single

SANG BO, SELF-PATTERNED SILK (SA) WRAPPING CLOTH FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE (MIN BO), KOREA, 1800S.
COLLECTION MUSEUM OF KOREAN EMBROIDERY, SEOUL, KOREA.
Embroidery for betrothals and weddings

Su bo, embroidered wrapping cloths, were most common but not exclusive to the nin bo group of wrapping cloths and were popular for celebrations connected with betrothal and marriage. A range of bojagi was used in association with a couple’s betrothal. To mark this event, the bridegroom’s family sent a special gift of fabrics wrapped in a yemul bo. In return, the bride’s family sent gifts to the bridegroom’s family wrapped in a red or blue silk jedan bo. During the wedding ceremony, a special type of cloth, the giragi bo, was wrapped around a wooden goose and given to the bride by the bridegroom’s family. Kirogi bo were often red and blue with a bunch of gold or rainbow-coloured threads in the centre to symbolise rice stalks and bring prosperity to the couple.

The motifs used to embroider su bo were usually flowers and trees with a scattering of butterflies and birds. Chosen for their positive import, flowers were a signifier of prosperity and honour while the tree is a universal symbol of life; fruit encouraged fertility and birds and butterflies were thought to bring happiness. There was considerable latitude for personal expression in su bo, with the result that the makers’ imagination and creativity could be unbounded, bringing colour, vitality and individuality to their work.

Additionally, artists such as Dr Sung-Soon Lee, Won Ju Seo and Yeon-Soon Chang have generated a body of work inspired by bojagi that abandons traditional form to embrace fashion, interior design and sculptural installations. These new interpretations are far removed from the essential functional properties of the traditional wrapping cloth but, at the same time, the deep respect Korean makers have for their materials and skills, as well as their traditional forms, is clearly enshrined in these contemporary works, in particular through the reinterpretation of jang-in.

Bojagi today

The recognition of bojagi as an art form by Korean curators and collectors has served as a stimulus for many contemporary Korean textile artists. In response, the artist Kim Hyeon-hui for example has dedicated herself, in the true spirit of jang-in, which is the essence of Korean craftsmanship, to producing the very finest traditional bojagi whose forms are further enhanced by her contemporary artistic vision.

It is mainly this very beautiful patchwork form of bojagi, the jang-in, which has captured the attention of contemporary textile lovers, collectors and artists. Its unique appeal seems to lie in the special synergy that occurs when patchwork’s infinite variables of form, fabric and colour encounter the serene austerity of the Korean aesthetic.

Patchwork wrapping cloths

jogak bo, patchwork wrapping cloths, seem to have been exclusive to the nin bo. It is likely that wrapping cloths made from fabric scraps were not considered seemly for the palace. Jogak bo were traditionally made from coloured silk and sometimes ramie, hemp or cotton fabric scraps left over from family dressmaking. Frugality was considered a virtue, and even the tiniest fragments of cloth were saved. Similarly, economy was a characteristic of patchwork traditions in the West.

In both East and West, fabric scraps were collected and sorted according to weight and colour, then cut to shape and arranged and stitched together as determined by the maker’s sensibilities and skill in formulating the design. The selection of shapes and the choice of colours were essentially a creative endeavour; with jogak bo however the fine stitching of the many seams was more akin to prayer, an act of dedication and devotion through which each stitch contributed to the accumulation of blessings in the finished work. Wrapping cloths were usually intended for use by the maker’s own family and, as a consequence, they were precious and at least half of the surviving jogak bo were apparently never used. Instead they were stored away safely and handed down through the family, clearly indicating the high value assigned to them and to their makers’ creativity and talent.
Regardless of our origins, bojagi embody profound cultural and human values to which we respond, conveying through their materials, form and living presence the combined inherited experiences of their makers. For me, twenty years ago in London, it was love at first sight with these beautiful and evocative cloths, with their colour and vibrancy, skilled execution and, in some cases, a translucency reminiscent of stained glass windows. My experience was typical, and the opening of Western minds to the charms of bojagi, in particular the patchwork form jokak bo, has been rapid. Perhaps the strength of the European patchwork tradition, its long recognition as an art form and the vibrancy of its contemporary interpretation has ensured an immediate rapport with Korean jokak bo. For textile artists, this rapport is enhanced by an awed fascination with the inherent design possibilities. Strikingly contemporary in their abstract expressionism, the visual power of jokak bo as both resource and inspiration is contagious, stimulating as they do the prospect of creating with fragments of cloth a work that is new and entirely, reliably original.

In 2010, at the annual European Patchwork Meeting in France, South Korea was invited as the Guest of Honour country. A major program of Korean textile arts was presented in *Hands of Korea*, which incorporated the work of some 130 Korean artists in four exhibitions and a fashion show. One of these exhibitions, *Bojagi and Beyond* featured both traditional Korean jokak bo and contemporary interpretations by Korean and non-Korean artists, including four from Australia: Lyn Nixon, Catherine O’Leary, Marianne Penberthy and Robi Szalay.

The exhibition was curated by Chunghie Lee, who has taught Korean patchwork internationally over the last 10 years. *Wrapping Traditions: Korean Textiles Now*, also curated by Chunghie Lee, is on display at the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco until 22 October 2011. This exhibition features bojagi-inspired contemporary works by Korean and non-Korean textile artists. Contemporary interpretations are not bound by folkloric conventions but vary at will ‘to create new meanings that transcend borders’ (quote from Museum promotion). Their traditional origins nevertheless shine through.

An appreciation of the value of culture and authentic cultural products to the overall quality of human life has grown significantly over recent decades, as their survival has been increasingly threatened. This awareness has prompted efforts worldwide to ensure the survival of traditional craft forms under threat from changing aspirational values and the increasing availability of cheaper alternative products. Quite as important as the collection of these authentic products and their consignment to safe museum storage areas, has been the documentation and preservation of the skills required for their production in the living culture.

At the same time, as can be seen clearly in the widespread interest in Korean bojagi, this broader appreciation of traditional cultures has stimulated the production of cultural products that reproduce, rediscover, reinvent or are simply inspired by traditional forms. In many cases, preservation and reinvention overlap as skilled entrepreneur designers work with the holders of traditional skills to develop high quality products which are grounded in and dependent upon traditional arts but which nevertheless have strong market appeal in a world flooded with singularly disposable merchandise.

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On a spiritual level, it is an ancient belief that material is a form of energy. The makers transfer the energy of the material into the jewellery they create, transforming the wearer into a powerful being. Once you understand the visual language of jewellery, you begin to appreciate the full spectrum of the prominent role that jewellery plays in recording a nation’s cultural heritage.” (Yoon-Jung (Elaine) Kim at the WCC symposium, 2011)

The concept of the transfer of energy through the making process is an interesting way to understand Joungmee Do’s work. Joungmee transforms metal using traditional metalworking techniques to make vessels and jewellery which valorise her Korean heritage and exemplify skilled craft practice. Her work is clearly contemporary and at the forefront of jewellery and metal object making. In her work, Joungmee challenges accepted craft traditions and incorporates significant symbols and imagery from Korean folk paintings.

The dialogue between traditional crafts and contemporary practice is currently receiving scrutiny, particularly in Asia and the Pacific regions where traditional crafts are still widely practiced, for example at events such as Abhushan, a jewellery symposium organised by the World Crafts Council in New Delhi, February 2011. As Yoon-Jung (Elaine) Kim, Deputy Director of the World Jewellery Museum in Seoul stated at this symposium, the Korean government is now trying to find ways to re-enliven traditional craft practice, pairing young makers with master craftspeople so that the crafted object made by traditional methods does not become a pale ‘souvenir’ of itself.

The Republic of South Korea has a government initiative to preserve traditional techniques and intangible cultural heritage which include dance, theatre and crafts. This is achieved in a variety of ways including recognition for master craftspeople and assisting in the passing on of knowledge.

One way of linking traditional craft practice with contemporary is through the staging of large international craft biennale such as the Cheongju Craft Biennale. At the 2005 Cheongju Craft Biennale symposium, Hyun-mi Yang from the Korea Culture and Tourism Policy Institute stated: “Two types of resources exist for craft as a cultural industry; traditional crafts and contemporary crafts”. She feared that there was little discourse between the two, and as a consequence: “This explains the separate paths along which these two areas of craft evolve, and how contemporary craft fails to lead, as it should, the modernisation of its counterpart and help the latter grow into an industry.” (Yang 2005).

Spirit of jang-in: treasures of Korean metal craft, an exhibition being held at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney in October this year, attempts to bridge this gap by including contemporary metalwork alongside historic examples. Korea has a very long metal working tradition and the Silla (one of the kingdoms of the Three Kingdoms period (c300 – 668 CE) and ruler of most of the Korean peninsula from 668 – 935) created very beautiful and unique objects in gold such as the rare Silla gold crown from the 6th century, on loan to this exhibition from the National Museum of Korea. This will not only be one of the first opportunities for such a culturally significant exhibition of Korean metalwork to be seen in Australia: it offers an opportunity to explore the cross-over between the contemporary and traditional and for a wider debate with craftspeople and the public about the significance of such crafted objects.

Joungmee Do’s work in particular combines contemporary materials with traditional techniques. Joungmee received her undergraduate degree from Kookmin University, Seoul and a Master of Arts from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University, Melbourne. She came to Australia in 1997, where she now lives with her silversmith husband Daehoon Kang. Even though she lives at a distance from her homeland, her desire is to find new ways of incorporating Korean culture into her work. Craft practices evolve and shift with the development of technologies and influences, a healthy culture benefits by questioning and challenging accepted traditions. I believe Joungmee challenges traditions and thus extends contemporary craft practice.
In her covered bowls, Joungmee Do crosses traditional boundaries by constructing lidded vessels in metal with chiselled and inlayed surfaces that display intricate patterns and texture usually associated with textile processes such as embroidery and wrapping clothes (bojagi) or Wancho basketry. Textile craft in Korea includes embroidery, patchwork and quilting, and is predominantly practiced by women. Korean patchwork is quite unique, made either with open weave ramie, which lends itself to geometric patterning or small pieces of silk with intricate embroidery which would have been a detail on a special piece of clothing, each piece carefully hand stitched together. Bojagi cloth is a square fabric used to wrap food and precious objects to make them easier to carry, but increasingly in today’s society an important covering used as a mark of respect. Another traditional craft is the creation of lidded baskets and other objects using a reed often found in rice paddies called Wancho. The particular inlay method utilised by her would originally have been executed by craftsmen to decorate weapons and armour.

Joungmee Do’s lidded bowls, which will be exhibited at the Powerhouse Museum, show incredible patience and dexterity. They have a rich surface that is reminiscent of small patches of fabric with a ‘running stitch’ between them. She has hand chiselled the entire surface, coloured by heat treatment and inlayed with various metals to trick the viewer and create a sensation of soft fabric on the seemingly tough metal. The interior is covered with a natural lacquer. The bowl’s surface pattern is very reminiscent of a ramie bojagi wrapping cloth.

The use of etched stainless steel is an innovation in this area of inlay work which would normally be made of black steel. Joungmee has perfected and continues to utilise this technique in her jewellery as seen in her recent exhibition, Longevity at et.al Gallery in Melbourne. In this exhibition, as the title suggests, Joungmee has drawn on a tradition of using symbols that represent a healthy and long life. These symbols were often included in objects and scrolls presented as gifts, especially for the birthdays of older people who are well respected in Korea. The 10 longevity symbols are the sun, clouds, mountains, rocks, water, cranes, deer, turtles, pine trees, and sacred fungus. The intention is to encourage contemplation and enjoyment of nature.

Joungmee Do has significantly simplified the longevity symbols in her jewellery such as her turtle necklace and brooch which have an oval pendant form with a stylised pattern representing the segments on a turtle shell executed in contrasting metals. In pine tree necklace the needles of the Korean pine tree become a repetitive motif. The use of a variety of metals including steel and fine silver, 925 silver, pure gold and 18 carat gold add contrast and contribute to the graphic quality of these works. I was particularly enchanted by the simplicity of her segmented necklace where several formed units have leaf like ‘windows’ in a celebration of decorative motifs and fine craftsmanship.

In an interview with the artist she expressed her desire to: “explore the ‘hidden culture’ from my own background that joins the past to the present within the context of my contemporary jewellery practice. It reveals traditional symbols of longevity and the interpretation of the symbols are intended to engage the curiosity of viewers. In this way the work demonstrates how contemporary expression can be linked with the traditional context of the Korean spiritual and symbolic world.” (Interview with the author with Joungmee Do, June 2011, Kew Australia)

It is my hope that Joungmee will hold an exhibition of her work in Seoul in the near future. Her work truly responds to the challenge to “maintain the delicate balance between the ‘preservationist’ view of craft as intangible heritage and its true status as living tradition including the contemporary practices.” (Kim 2011)

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T E L L  M E  T E L L  M E :  A U S T R A L I A N  A N D  K O R E A N  A R T  1 9 7 6  –  2 0 1 1

Song Mi Sim

2011 is the Australian – Korean Year of Friendship, marking the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. A number of events are being held in celebration, including a major new exhibition of Korean and Australian contemporary art.

The core of the exhibition comprises a significant collection of historical works by important artists from both countries, including Paik Nam June, Marr Grounds, Stelarc, Ken Unsworth, Shim Moon-Seup, Lee Kang-So, Quac Insik and Lee U-Fan. It also features contemporary artists such as Brook Andrew, Louise Weaver, Nyapanyapa, Charlie Sofo, Brown Council, Kim Beom, Yang Haegue, Yeesookyung, Chung Seoyoung and Jung Marie.

A first-time collaboration between the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney and the National Museum of Contemporary Art (NMOCA) in Seoul, it is inspired by the visit of Paik Nam June and Charlotte Moorman to Sydney in 1976 and the Biennale of Sydney in the same year, Recent International Forms of Art, that included a group of important artists.

Whilst Paik and Moorman held their exhibitions and performances, Korean artists Lee U-Fan, Quac Insik, Shim Moon-Seup and Lee Kang-So showed their works at the Biennale. Tom McCullough, curator of the Biennale, had met Stelarc in Japan. Stelarc in turn met Lee U-Fan who had met Quac, Shim and Lee Kang-So.

Jointly curated by MCA Curator Glenn Barkley and NMOCA Curator Kim Inhye, the project highlights the historical and ongoing connections between Australian and Korean art and showcases works from the collections of both museums.

The exhibition explores Korean and Australian conceptual, fluxus and technological art and regional variation in both countries over the last 35 years. Whereas the 1976 Biennale consisted ‘of anything other than painting’, Tell Me Tell Me includes everything: painting, sculpture, installation, video and performance art.

The current exhibition juxtaposes works from the original Biennale against later works, enabling the viewer to see relationships between the past and present, real or imagined, directly or indirectly influenced. Similarly, whilst many of the Australian artists would have been unfamiliar with the work of the Korean artists and vice versa, there are aesthetic and conceptual linkages.

For example, rocks or stones feature heavily in Australian Ken Unsworth’s sculpture Stone House 2011 but are also central to Lee Seung-

Another Quac work, which, like those above, appears in the 1976 and present exhibition, is Thing and Thing 1975. Quac used water to inscribe a circle on stretched Hanji paper (Korean mulberry paper) and then pushed the circle slightly out of the paper. From a distance, it appears as though there is a circle of ink on a sheet of paper but the effect is created by the separated circle hanging by tiny fibers from the main piece of paper.

Lee Seung Teak’s Godret Stone, in which rocks are hung from a loom, creates a similar illusion: the concept of hard stone being carved central groove in each rock giving the illusion: the concept of hard stone being carved central groove in each rock giving the impression of malleability.

Lee U-Fan is the leading theoretical proponent of Mono-ha (school of things). His Situation II 1975 is exhibited for the first time since being acquired by the Mildura Arts Centre after the 1976 Biennale, when it was shown with Situation I 1975. Both works incorporate stones, charcoal, canvas and lamps but the concept lies in the encounter between the objects, as much as the objects themselves. Situation II can be configured in two ways – either as a light bulb sitting on a large boulder illuminating a charcoal circle on a wall or, as it is in Tell Me Tell Me, suspended from the ceiling over a large rectangular canvas, with a stone in each corner, lighting another charcoal circle. Its simplicity rewards those who linger as the focus shifts from the ordinariness of the objects themselves to the impact they have on the space around them. Art is not what is ‘created’ by artists as something totally new, rather it is an activity through which that which exists originally is revealed, letting its existence be perceived.

It is possible to divine the ancestry of many of the more contemporary Korean pieces in the exhibition in forebears of the 1970s. Natural objects or everyday items are transformed into art through the intervention of the artist. Talking about Tell Me Tell Me, Kim Inhye provided a rationale for this approach. She expressed the view that the Western world tends to think of time as linear, a straight line, and is therefore constantly looking forward for new ideas and innovations. In the East, however, time is thought of as a circle. There is no concept of past or future, only present which is perhaps also a combination of both the past and the future.

In Chung Seoyoung’s Light from a Bicycle 2007, a lamp is attached to a bicycle and the light from the lamp shines through a hole in the wall. Kim Beom plays with our perceptions by transposing the appearance and function of household appliances in An Iron in the Form of a Radio, a Kettle in the Form of an Iron, and a Radio in the Form of a Kettle 2002. Merely by endowing a new function between the visual image and the cognitive image of the objects, Kim addresses the perceptual limitation underlying an image. He creates something unusual from something ordinary.

In another example of creating art from something which pre-exists, Yesookyong designs a stage for Jung Marie, a Jeogga singer, to showcase her talent in While Our Tryst Has Been Delayed 2010. Jeogga is a form of Korean music consisting of the reciting of traditional three-verse odes. Whilst a video of the recital forms a permanent part of the exhibition, Jung Marie physically performed on Yesookyong’s stage three times during the exhibition (see front cover image). To create The Breathtaking (2009), Kil Chosil climbed Mount Gyerong, well known for its strong energy, and trapped the breath of female shamans in a glass vessel.

These artists are not playing a role as creator but rather documenting interactions of an existing order, acting as a mediator to an ‘outer world’.

Tell Me Tell Me is a story about encounters: the series of encounters between the artists featuring in the exhibition (see front cover image), dating back to the 1976 Biennale, the encounter between the years 1976 and 2011 and between Korea and Australia. Day after day, encounters occur suggesting various patterns and dimensions – unavoidable interactions between beings and objects across the world.

In another type of encounter, some of the works by Australian artists appear to have been chosen for their similarity to Korean counterparts – or perhaps it is the other way around. Gamu Mambu (Blood Song) 2010 by Christian Thompson, a video work featuring a Dutch opera singer performing in an Aboriginal language shares a commonality with Yesookyong’s Jeogga singer and, appropriately the two works appear on the front and back covers of the exhibition catalogue.

For an interesting counterpoint to Kim Beom’s work mentioned above, In No Small Wonder 2005, Louise Weaver covers rocks, branches and even a foam animal in knitted fabric, but rather than disguising the underlying object, its shape is emphasized. Grey Forest 2005 applies the same technique to a foam kangaroo. Her work challenges the space between the natural world and the artificial world, between art and craft.

Tell Me Tell Me was held in the National Art School Gallery, Darlinghurst, Sydney from 17 June to 24 August 2011. It will travel to the NMOCA in Seoul, Korea where it will be exhibited from 8 November 2011 to 19 February 2012.

Song Mi Sim is a practicing artist and graduate of the National Art School. She is a Korean national living in Australia with a particular interest in Korean art.

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Korean Cinema Today: Korea Goes to Hollywood

Kieran Tully

Since the emergence of the ‘Korean wave’ in the late 90’s, which refers to the spread of Korean popular culture throughout Asia, Korean film has had its ups and downs. Rising to a high in the mid 2000’s, when Korean cinema dominated the box-office with more than 50% of the local market, and Korean directors picked up awards and adulation worldwide, there has since been a slight fall in the growth of the industry. This was largely expected as the industry’s rapid growth finally caught up with itself. As we enter the new decade there has been a further resurgence, seemingly linked to new trends in the market place.

Hollywood previously turned to Korea, producing remake after remake of classic Korean films, such as “My Sassy Girl” (remade as “My Sassy Girl”), “Il Mare” (remade as “The Lake House”) and “A Tale of Two Sisters” (remade as “The Uninvited”). While demonstrating the depth of quality of the Korean film market, foreign remakes didn’t really benefit Korea due to lack of exposure to the original and the poorer quality of the remake. This seems to have kick-started Korean industry initiatives to turn to Hollywood first and thus keep the revenues to themselves.

Examples of this are CJ Entertainment, a powerhouse in the Korean media industry, commissioning an English language remake of “Castaway on the Moon” (Closing film of KOFFIA 2010). Set to be directed by Mark Waters (“Mean Girls”), rather than waiting for the rights to be bought by an American distributor and sloppily remade, CJ is proactively taking advantage of the film’s superb content by maintaining creative control of the new product. The end result is yet to be seen, and while it could be argued that it’s even more pointless to remake your own content, it could be an intelligent move by the media giant to protect its interests.

The major change happening in the Korean market is that its key figures are finally choosing to move on to Hollywood - a common step for Australia directors. The likes of Philip Noyce, Alex Proyas and Peter Weir have all operated regularly in Hollywood for decades. Most recently Gregor Jordan and David Michod have also made this jump. Now despite the successes of “Joint Security Area” and “Old Boy”, considered two of the best Korean films ever made and highly popular worldwide, Park Chan-wook chose to stay in Korea and continue his trade. Bong Joon-ho, who directed the No. 1 Korean Box-office film of all time, “The Host”, which was also received very positively worldwide, also chose to continue to make films in the Republic. The list goes on and on. Either due to lack of interest or a strong passion for their local industry, top Korean directors never seemed to even consider making this step. This is now changing.

Bong Joon-ho (“The Host”, “Mother”, “Memories of Murder”) is currently prepping a new film that is rumoured to be produced by JJ Abrams (“Super 8”, Star Trek”) and be in English. Park Chan-wook’s (“Sympathy for Lady Vengeance”, “Thirst”) English language debut “Stoker” is set to star Australia’s Nicole Kidman and Mia Wasikowska and is penned by Wentworth Miller (of TV’s “Prison Break”). There is no doubt that relations between Hollywood and the Hollywood of Asia, are becoming even closer. In fact “Kung Fu Panda 2” was the first Hollywood production ever to be directed by an Asian woman - Korean-American Jennifer Yuh.

With the likes of “Wonder Girls” touring the United States, it is a clear sign that the American market is a key goal of Korean media companies. Comedies, the long dismissed genre of the globalised film market, are finally starting to be released in America. “The Last Godfather”, “Detective K” and “Hello Ghost” will all be released in North America this year, and so the reaction will be interesting to see. Slightly more than 50 Korean films have been released on DVD in Australia to date, only one of which is a comedy. So hopefully this trend extends to more than just the US, but also for...us.

While there have been Korean film showcases, touring events and small scale screenings in Australia before 2010, an annual Korean Film Festival did not exist. Realising there was a strong demand for Korean media and a hungry Sydney audience ready to embrace new forms of cinema, the first Korean Film Festival in Australia was formed. KOFFIA (the Korean Film Festival in Australia) was organised by the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea.
KOFFIA first took place in October 2010 at Dendy Opera Quays, Sydney. A small scale event that ran for 5 days over the long weekend, it managed to connect with the local Australian audience immediately. Around 1,220 people attended the 8 screenings, with 99% stating they wanted more!

The festival used the slogan Hungry for Drama, identifying the two things most Australians seem to connect with Korea: dramas (Korean Television Shows) and Korean food. A lack of access to Korean cinema exists: barring illegal downloads or the odd library collection, it is very hard to find a wide range of Korean films in Australia. For that reason the KOFFIA 2010 line-up was specifically chosen to offer a diverse selection of cinema and something people had never seen before.

It included a range of film genres: Thriller ("Mother"), Comedy ("Castaway on the Moon"), Sport ("Like a Virgin"), Documentary ("Old Partner"), Action ("Rough Cut"), Pop ("200 Pounds Beauty") and Dramas ("Secret Sunshine", "The Housemaid"). All selections proved to be popular, with the audience award vote going to the classic K-pop spoof "200 Pounds Beauty". Other audience highlights were Bong Joon-ho’s intense mystery “Mother” which opened the festival, and the beautifully nuanced “Castaway on the Moon” from festival guest Lee Hae-jun.

In a unique approach, KOFFIA also included aspects other than film. This encompassed cultural performances (Taekwondo, Samulnori and Korean Traditional Dance) and musical performances (Matt Purcell, Hany Lee) to keep the atmosphere going. In just a short period of time KOFFIA managed to create a special festival mood, delivering a professional event with a strong personal feel to it.

KOFFIA 2011 is almost upon us again and will be greatly expanded to 25 screenings over 6 days in Sydney and 4 days in Melbourne. The KOFFIA staff now work out of the newly opened Korean Cultural Office. We will continue with our popular additional events, including our education and industry forums, our cultural and musical performances, and our YKFA Young Korean Filmmakers in Australia competition.

Returning to the Dendy Opera Quays from 24-29 August, this year’s line-up will showcase a range of the latest and greatest in contemporary Korean cinema as well as a selection of classic retrospective films never before screened in Australia. So far we have announced just a sampling of our exciting line-up, which includes Park Chan-wook’s award winning worldwide phenomenon “Night Fishing” which was shot entirely on an iPhone 4.

We have recently launched a popular blog, which covers all things Korean cinema. KOFFIA contributors took part in the recent worldwide Korean blogathon, with KOFFIA staff submitting more than 15 entries in 1 week alone. It now has garnered more than 4,000 views and continues to grow, with entries from industry experts Richard Gray (DVD Bits), Sarah Ward (The Reel Bits) and Samson Kwok (Heroic Cinema). We accept submissions from anyone with an interesting comment on Korean cinema.

KOFFIA graces Melbourne for the first time ever this September, in what will be 4 days of drama, comedy, action and more. Taking place at ACMI Cinemas, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Federation Square, Melbourne from 10–13 September, the festival will encompass the Korean Thanksgiving Holiday of Chuseok.

Presenting a showcase of the latest hits, as well as a few classics, the Korean Film Festival offers a direct chance for people to satisfy their hunger for Korean drama. Don’t miss it!

Kieran Tully is Marketing and Festivals Manager at the Korean Cultural Office Australia. He has previously worked at more than 20 different film festivals across Sydney and is currently completing a Master of Arts in Asian Film at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS).
INTRODUCING THE KOREAN CULTURAL OFFICE, SYDNEY

Young-soo Kim

The Korean Cultural Office (KCO) opened on 4 April in the heart of Sydney opposite Hyde Park. Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relationship between Australia and Korea, its opening is a first, celebrating the Year of Friendship between the two countries. The KCO performs the role of cultural ambassador in Australia. It hopes to enlighten and entertain the public by presenting Korean contemporary and traditional culture in order to strengthen the bond between our two countries. It further aims to improve cross-cultural exchange between the diverse cultures found in Australia.

For this 50th anniversary celebration, our program of cultural exchange in the arts is particularly active. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney has been collaborating with the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea for the exhibition *Tell Me, Tell Me* at the National School of Art, Sydney. Sydney College of the Arts and Sookmyung Women’s University, Seoul are working together on an exhibition exchange project. In addition, the Powerhouse Museum is working closely with the National Museum of Korea on a major Korean metal crafts exhibition opening in October.

The KCO is itself currently holding a Korean contemporary art exhibition, *Korean Art Today*. Given the trail blazing legacy of Korean video artist Nam June Paik, video works will particularly attract visitors, but the various forms of artworks from the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, including paintings, photographs and sculptures in this exhibition enable visitors to review Korean contemporary art at a glance.

The KCO also organises musical and other performance events. The opening ceremony of the Year of Friendship on 4 April, *Celebrating Mateship* was a showcase for a variety of Korean traditional and contemporary performers, musicians and dancers, and included an extraordinary musical performance by a crossover chamber orchestra of Korea’s leading young traditional and classical musicians. It attracted an audience of more than 1,000 at the Sydney Town Hall.

*Korean Film Festival in Australia (KOFFIA)* will come back again this year on 24 August for 6 days at Dendy Opera Quays cinema in Sydney and in Melbourne at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) from 10 – 13 September. Furthermore, *Cinema on the Park*, a free Korean film night, is held every Thursday at the KCO.

The KCO runs several cultural classes and its library possesses about 2,000 Korean related materials. The KCO library provides access to the digital database of both the Korea National Assembly Library and National Library, the only access point of its kind in Australia. Of all our activities, *The Korean Cuisine* (Korean cooking class) is in most demand: the KCO holds two cooking classes per week and every class is full of people willing to learn the diversity of Korean food such as *Bibimbap*, *Bulgogi* and *Kimchi*.

*Hangeul* (Korean Language) is also being introduced to about 80 Australians through three language classes, divided into beginner and intermediate levels. Due to the high popularity of Korean drama in many Asian countries, a large number of Australians with Asian backgrounds attend these classes, which aim to provide a stress-free, relaxed environment for learning Korean.

School excursion and School Holiday programs aim to allow young Australians to experience Korean culture at the KCO. Targeting public school students who are learning Korean as their second language, the KCO presents them with a deeper understanding of Korean culture through a guided tour and other cultural activities. In addition, the excursion program is a great opportunity for second or third generation Korean-Australians to experience the culture and investigate their roots.

In the near future, the KCO will hold a K-POP class to satisfy young Australians’ high demand for Korean popular music. *Fiddler on the Park* is also in planning stage to provide free violin lessons by a voluntary Korean violinist for young students unable to have a chance to learn to play a musical instrument due to economic or social reasons.

Since we assume that sharing art and culture is the best way to promote better understanding between countries, the KCO will continue to offer more Korean cultural classes and art events in Australia. This does not mean that the KCO will only aim to increase the exposure of Korean culture in Australia. To achieve active two way cultural exchange, we are also focusing on enhancing the level of understanding of Australia in Korea by acting as a bridge between the two countries. Recognising the diversity of culture in Australia, the KCO will spare no effort to achieve mutual understanding and respect for each other’s cultures in the context of a multicultural Australia.

Young-soo Kim is the Director of the Korean Cultural Office. He has worked at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Korea for 16 years. He graduated from the Seoul National University (SNU), majoring in Aesthetics. He studied at the graduate school of SNU as well as Syracuse University, majoring in Public Administration.
The Asian art and design collection of the Powerhouse Museum (PHM) is fortunate to hold many fine examples of metal craft, including a significant collection of decorated Japanese tsuka (sword guards), which use an alloy of copper and gold named shakudo.

While this same alloy is listed in the description of a necklace by Won Ho Chong, which could give the impression of it being Japanese in origin, it is in fact the first Korean-Australian object in the PHM collection. Japanese terms may have been used in the description rather than Korean as they are better known in the West and as the artist himself studied Japanese metal craft techniques.

The necklace consists of copper, shakudo, shibuichi (a copper-silver alloy) and sterling silver, and was made by Chong in Adelaide, South Australia in 1981. It consists of an organically shaped neck ring with a ‘marbled’ appearance and a sterling silver push-clasp. Joined to the neck ring by two small hinges are two curved wires in a contrasting stripe pattern. Hanging from these wires by a cylindrical hinge is an asymmetrical pendant, which is slightly curved along one side, and has an indentation running on a diagonal across the front. The pendant is composed of copper, shakudo and shibuichi in organic, wave-like lines, with sterling silver along one edge.

Won Ho Chong was born on 28 October 1934 in Busan, South Korea. Chong studied literature at university, although interest led him to traditional metal craft and design in Seoul during the early 1960s. In 1964 Chong started his own jewellery design studio, and in the following years he received awards at international craft and design competitions, such as in Japan and the USA. In 1967 he undertook an artist’s residency at the Yamada Reiko studio in Tokyo. Chong migrated to Australia in 1970, setting up a workshop in The Rocks, Sydney, and from 1972-76 tutored at the Tin Sheds Gallery at the University of Sydney.

In 1976 Chong studied Japanese metal craft under Master Satsuo Ando, among others, after receiving an Australia Council grant. From 1978-1981 Chong lectured at the South Australian College of Advanced Education, and it was in 1981 that he made this necklace.

Chong’s work is influenced both by traditional Korean and Japanese materials, techniques and craftsmanship, particularly the patination of different alloys to create a range of colours. The dark brown to black metal seen in the necklace is an alloy of copper and gold, named shakudo in Japanese or odong in Korean. It is also referred to by many other names, including ‘red copper’, ‘black gold’, and ‘crow’s gold’, the latter term due to the similarity of the classic blue-black colour to crow’s feathers. However, with different ratios of gold to copper, a range of colours can be achieved through patination. The blue-black colour is a result of 3-5% gold, brown to black colours are a product of 0.25-3% gold, and ‘purple gold’ has a gold content of over 10% (Oguchi 1983: 125 and O’Dubhghail & Jones 2009: 290).

The silver-grey colour seen on the necklace is an alloy of copper and silver called shibuichi in Japanese, and is also known as misty or hazy silver. Shibuichi, or ‘a quarter’, is so named as the silver conventionally amounts to 25% of the alloy’s composition. Just as with shakudo/ odong, there are colour variations in shibuichi, such as a light variant that contains a high amount of silver, and a dark variant that contains copper, silver and gold (Oguchi 1983: 125 and O’Dubhghail & Jones 2009: 291).

In brief, the traditional process of creating these alloys involves melting the copper in a carbon crucible, and adding the desired quantity of gold and/or silver. The alloy is then poured into a mould in a hot water bath, thus slowing down the cooling process and increasing the workability of the ingot. It is then hammered or pressed into a sheet or plate and annealed.

The surface finishing of the final work created from these alloys is vital in creating the desired colours. To achieve a good result, the piece is polished using stone and charcoal, cleaned with sodium bicarbonate, dipped in a colouring solution made of the juice of white radish, and finally immersed into a boiling colour solution, where the colouration of the alloys take place (Oguchi 1983: 125-129 and O’Dubhghail & Jones 2009: 291-293).

This necklace was displayed from 2005-2010 in the Inspired! Design across time exhibition, the PHM’s former decorative arts and design gallery, and will be shown again in the exciting upcoming exhibition, Spirit of jang-in: treasures of Korean metal craft. This exhibition will showcase historical and contemporary masterpieces of Korean metal craft, and look at processes and the spirit of the maker, that is, the essence of jang-in.

Alysha Buss is Assistant Curator, Asian Arts and Design, at the Powerhouse Museum.

REFERENCES

COLLECTOR’S CHOICE: A KOREAN MAEBYONG VASE

Josefa Green

Most collectors have encountered a situation where an object becomes available on the market with such appeal that it can’t be resisted – even if it means straying somewhat from their core collection.

This was the case when this charming Korean maebyong vase was offered at auction a few years ago. It is a celadon glazed vase with iron brown underglaze decoration of freely drawn chrysanthemum scrolls and three large flower heads on the body. Iron brown radiating bands representing stylised chrysanthemum petals are painted on the shoulder and base and there are regular markings on the lip. The glaze is of a thin, greenish grey, with green pooling on the base and inside the boat shaped lip. The fully glazed base is fired on kiln grit.

The name and shape of the maebyong is derived from the Chinese meiping, generally translated as prunus vase. Despite its name, it was actually a storage vessel for wine or perhaps other liquids, and examples have been found with bell shaped lids.

My husband and I generally collect Chinese ceramics from the Song period (960-1279) – but the link between our collecting interests and this vase is not hard to see.

The production of celadons in Korea began around the 9th or early 10th centuries. In terms of both quality and quantity, celadons held a prominent position during the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) and were clearly preferred by the court and aristocracy. They were also made in large numbers for use in Buddhist rituals, often adopting special shapes influenced by silver and bronze prototypes, such as the kundika.

The relatively rapid development of celadons in the 11th century owed much to the transfer of Chinese ceramic technology, particularly from the Yue ware kilns in Zhejiang Province. Research has confirmed that the technology of Korean celadon manufacture is most closely related to Southern rather than Northern centres of celadon production, in terms of firing temperatures, glaze composition, microstructure and kiln design.

By the late 11th century, the Koreans had fully mastered the techniques of celadon, their technical sophistication rivalling the Chinese. At this point, Korean potters began looking for inspiration from a range of Chinese wares, especially from Northern kilns. This seems to have led to a greater diversification and refinement of techniques, shapes and designs, such as the use of underglaze iron oxide and white slip decoration recalling Cizhou ware, and incised and carved decorations similar to Yaozhou green ware.

In general, Goryeo celadons tend to be greyer than Chinese examples as their glaze is more thinly applied, allowing the grey clay body to show through. The glaze is also more transparent. The wide use of iron oxide decoration under a celadon glaze is distinct to Korea. The chrysanthemum design on the body of this maebyong vase is somewhat unusual, peony flowers being more common. One such example is held by the British Museum.

The shape of earlier Korean maebyong vases followed Chinese prototypes, for example Cizhou wares of the 11th and 12th centuries, with gently rounded shoulder, almost straight but subtly curved sides and flat base. The maebyong become more distinctly Korean during the second half of the 12th century and into the 13th, with narrow mouth, broad shoulder, narrowing body and slightly flared foot, resulting in a decided S shape which became more accentuated over time. On this basis, our maebyong vase is an early example, dating to the 12th century. No wonder then that it caught our eye as Song collectors!

REFERENCES

Dr George Soutter AM died peacefully on 13 July 2011. Having grown up on his family farm in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, he graduated in medicine in 1959 from the University of Cape Town. He continued his paediatric training in England and in 1964 was appointed Professional Registrar at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children in Camperdown after emigrating to Australia.

George was the catalyst behind the Oriental Rug Society of NSW (ORS) and became its first president. He gave generously of everything – time, knowledge and rugs. He donated much of his personal collection to the PHM, forming what is now the basis of the museum’s collection, and in 2008 he was appointed a Life Fellow of the Powerhouse.

Another of George Soutter’s great passions was African and Southeast Asian art and sculpture, which he saw as complementary to rugs and which greatly influenced his own work as a printmaker and sculptor. In recognition of his generosity and active support for the Asian collection of the Art Gallery of NSW, he was made a Benefactor of that institution in 2006. Many donations to the Gallery were ceramics and textiles, of which both George and John Yu, his long term partner, have been avid collectors.

He and John travelled widely in China and Southeast Asia. In particular, he loved Bali, its culture and its people. He and John introduced many friends to a beauty in Bali they would otherwise never have found. He loved the processes of making and acquiring art and was always happy to encourage young artists and counsel the budding collector.

In recognition of his services to paediatric medicine and the decorative arts, George was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2005. He was a teacher who touched everyone in his professional and personal life and a dear friend who we shall miss hugely but whose ongoing presence we will always feel.
that you are a TAASA member.

September. Please indicate on your reply

to lecture@qag.qld.gov.au

Art, who will conduct a tour of the exhibition.

This seminar, jointly hosted by TAASA

and ACAPA (the Australian Centre of Asia

Pacific Art), will explore contemporary Asian
textiles in the exhibition Threads: Contemporary
textiles and the social fabric on display in

the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art

(GoMA). Speakers are: Mary Jose, Fabric of

Life, Liz Williamson, Woven in Asia, and Ruth

McDougall, Associate Curator, Asia and Pacific

Art, who will conduct a tour of the exhibition.

There is no charge but bookings are essential and should be sent to

rsvplecture@gag.qld.gov.au by Friday 23

September. Please indicate on your reply

that you are a TAASA member.


to use this space.

We are very grateful to Dr Gene Sherman,

Director of SCAF for so generously allowing

us to use this space.

The members and guests in attendance greatly

appreciated the opportunity to see these rare stencils.

Textile Study Group meeting – 10 August

2011

At our usual Powerhouse Museum venue,

Roger Grellman, an avid collector of Chinese
dress, brought in a number of spectacular
elements of women’s dress and textile

accessories dating from the mid-19th to the

early 20th century. A particular focus of his

collection is bound feet shoes. All displayed

superb workmanship in the decorative
techniques of embroidery and couching. He

also showed us a set of theatrical costume

worn by male actors in female roles, right
down to a set of bound feet shoes plus

leggings.

Following the AGM, TAASA’s Textile Study

Group held its meeting with a viewing of

Ayako Mitsu’s collection of Japanese textile

stencils and kimonos. Ayako gave us a brief

history of the Mitsu family and how her

ancestor had moved to Edo (now Tokyo)

opening Echigoya (fabric store) in 1673 –

the present day Mitsukoshi department store.

Ayako brought with her a selection of

beautiful kimonos that had belonged to

her mother and an extensive collection of

stencils featuring different motifs from nature

and geometric designs. She discussed how

artists use special tools to cut the intricate

patterns through washi (Japanese rice paper).

The stencils are then used for resist dying on

silk kimonos. The art of making paper stencils

for kimono printing, known as Katagami, is

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WHAT’S ON IN AUSTRALIA AND OVERSEAS: SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2011
A SELECTIVE ROUNDPUP OF EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

Compiled by Tina Barge

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Inaugural Screening of ‘The Murals of Ajanta’ & ‘Crossroads of the World’
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
11 September, 2.00pm

Two documentaries from the Indian series ‘Paintings of India’ by Indian photographer and art historian, Benoy K. Behl, bring to life the stunning 5th and 6th c. murals in the cave temples of Ajanta, and 11th and 12th c. monastery murals of Ladakh, Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur.

Asian textile treasures series: lecture 4
13 September, 12.45 pm
Melanie Eastburn, Curator, will discuss the form and symbolism of a Japanese Buddhist priest’s mantle of luxurious brocade patchwork.

FLYING ANGELS BY HERI DONO: AN ECCENTRIC LOW-TECH CHORUS
8 November, 12.45 pm
Melanie Eastburn, Curator, and Roy Marchant, Objects Technician—Conservation, speak about renowned Indonesian contemporary artist Heri Dono’s Flying angels 2006.

NEW SOUTH WALES

After Effect
Gallery 4A, Sydney
2 September – 15 October 2011

This new exhibition, curated by Olivier Krischer, includes eight artists from Japan, Europe, America and Australia who integrate technology into their practice and demonstrate this as neither simply nostalgic nor futuristic, but as an element of everyday experience.

For further information go to: www.4a.com.au

ARTS OF ASIA LECTURE SERIES - CONTEMPORARY MINIATURES: ART FROM SOUTH ASIA
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
6 September, 2011

Russell Storer, curatorial manager, Asian and Pacific Art, Queensland Art Gallery will end this year’s lecture series with a lecture on contemporary painting in South Asia.

For more information go to: www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/calendar/arts-asia-2011

ONE HUNDRED FLOWERS: RECENT ASIAN ACQUISITIONS
AGNSW Asian Gallery, Ground floor
1 September 2011 – 2 January 2012

A selection of Asian acquisitions over the past five years, grouped by region and representing

the high points of artistic expression in diverse Asian countries. Free entry.

EXHIBITION TALK WITH HEAD CURATOR OF ASIAN ART JACKIE MENZIES
Wednesday 19 and 28 October 5.30pm in the exhibition

TOKUJIN YOSHIKAZU: WATERFALL
Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF)
7 October – 17 December, 2011

In this major solo exhibition Tokujin experiments with a sophisticated play of materials and shapes using his art as a means of communicating something fascinating, surprising, joyful and unexpected.

VICTORIA

IKEBANA: BEAUTY OF LIVING FLOWERS
National Gallery of Victoria - International, Melbourne
2 & 3 September from 10am-5pm

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Ikenobo Melbourne chapter. There will be a display in the Great Hall of over 40 traditional and modern Ikebana arrangements; a demonstration of Ikenobo Ikebana on 3 September, 1.00-3.00pm; and workshops on 8 September, 1.30pm-3.30pm and 10 September, 10.30am-12.30pm & 1.30pm-3.30pm.

For more information go to: www.ngv.vic.gov.au

INTERNATIONAL

USA

MAHARAJA – THE SPLENDOR OF INDIA’S ROYAL COURT
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
21 October 2011 – 8 April 2012

Explores the extraordinary culture of princely India, showcasing rich and varied objects that reflect different aspects of royal life, including paintings, photography, textiles and dress, jewellery, jewelled objects, metalwork and furniture.

For further information go to: www.asianart.org/maharaja

THE ART OF DISSENT IN 17TH-CENTURY CHINA: MASTERPIECES OF MING LOYALIST ART FROM THE CHIH LO LOU COLLECTION
7 September, 2011 – 2 January, 2012

The traumatic events associated with the conquest of China by the semi-nomadic Manchu in 1644 spurred an enormous outpouring of creative energy as many Ming loyalists turned to the arts. Drawn from one of the finest private art collections of this period, the exhibition showcases more than 60 landscape paintings and calligraphies highlighting the intensely personal styles created by the leading artists of that time.

Wonder of the Age: Master Painters of India, 1100–1900
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
28 September, 2011 – 8 January, 2012

In over 220 works selected according to identifiable hands and named artists, the exhibition will dispel the notion of anonymity in Indian art. The high points of artistic innovation in the history of Indian painting will be demonstrated through works by 40 of the greatest Indian painters. Major collections in India, Europe, and the United States have lent works to the exhibition.

For further information go to: www.metmuseum.org
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM PRESENTS

Spirits of Jang-in

Treasures of Korean metal craft

28 OCTOBER 2011 – FEBRUARY 2012
POWERHOUSEMUSEUM.COM