Fall 2026 Arts of Asia Lecture Series

Unknown Makers, Lasting Beauty: Rethinking Fine Art Across Asia
Sponsored by the Society for Asian Art

In the Grain: Wood in Korean Art, Past and Present

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I. A Brief Timeline of Korean History

Three Kingdoms Period (삼국시대) | 57 BCE–668 CE
An era of three major kingdoms: Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla.

Goryeo Dynasty (고려시대) | 918–1392
An era known for Buddhist art, refined celadon ware, and lacquerware.

Joseon Dynasty (조선시대) | 1392–1910
An era shaped by Confucian ideals, when wooden furniture and everyday household objects became important expressions of craftsmanship.

Japanese Colonial Period (일제강점기) | 1910–1945
Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, a period of profound political, social, and cultural change.

Post-Liberation Korea (광복 이후) | 1945–Present
Following liberation in 1945 and the Korean War (1950–1953), Korean artists and craftspeople continued to reinterpret traditional materials and techniques.

II. Key Terms: Traditional Korean Woodcraft

1. Medicine Cabinet (Yakjang, 약장, 藥欌)

2. Rice Cake Stamp (Tteoksal, 떡살)

3. Divination Coin Container (Jeomtong, 점통)

4. Gourd Dipper (Pyojubak, 표주박)

5. Open-Sided Display Stand (Sabang Takja, 사방탁자, 四方卓子)

6. Scholar's Desk, Gyeongsang (경상, 經床)

7. Scholar's Desk, Seoan (서안, 書案)

8. Village Guardian Pole (Jangseung, 장승)

Additional Korean Terms

- *Cheonha Daejanggun* (천하대장군, 天下大將軍) | "Great General Under Heaven," a title inscribed on some village guardian posts
- *Jiha Daejanggun* (지하대장군, 地下大將軍) | "Great General Under the Earth," another guardian title
- *Jangseok* (장석, 裝錫) | Decorative and functional metal fittings used on traditional Korean furniture

III. Archaeological Sites Mentioned in the Lecture

Sinchang-dong Archaeological Site (광주 신창동 유적)
Gwangju, South Korea
An archaeological site known for the discovery of ancient wooden objects, lacquerware, and evidence of everyday life.

Daho-ri Archaeological Site (창원 다호리 유적)
Changwon, South Gyeongsang Province, South Korea
An archaeological site where remarkable early wooden objects, including writing brushes, were discovered.

IV. Museums and Collections Mentioned in the Lecture

Museums in South Korea

- Onyang Folk Museum (온양민속박물관) | Asan, South Chungcheong Province
- National Museum of Korea (국립중앙박물관) | Seoul
- National Folk Museum of Korea (국립민속박물관) | Seoul

Museums and Archives in the United States

- Asian Art Museum | San Francisco, California
- Brooklyn Museum | Brooklyn, New York
- Philadelphia Museum of Art | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Peabody Essex Museum | Salem, Massachusetts
- Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives | Suitland, Maryland