

MEDIA RELEASE



Korea - the Land of Morning Calm

Celebrating the Library Korean Jeunseung carved pole – artifacts & ceramics from a Whangarei private collection

@ The **ArtLounge** Whangarei Library
Curated by Whangarei Art Museum
Monday 8th March – May 2010



Announcing the launch of the new ArtLounge at the Library with a small but splendid display of Korean artifacts from the 5th century AD *Three Kingdoms Period* to the demise of the *Chosun Dynasty* a century ago in 1910. A cyclical - 2 monthly display celebrating each of the community *pou* at the Library entrance curated by the art museum. Enjoy your coffee - free museum publications and exhibitions in the quietude of the ArtLounge in the front area of the Whangarei Library facing the carved *pou ihi*.

Korean cultural history can be traced back to 37 BC when King Chumong founded the Koguryo nation in what is now known as North Korea. Dating from this ancient period, the resplendent history of North and South Korea – and even its very name derives from this ancient Kingdom and its King. After the death of the Founder King Chumong life size wooden sculptures were made of the King and Queen Mother. These two pioneer monarchs were immortalised by their countrymen and annually celebrated as deities. An ongoing history of carving wooden figures and annual spiritual festivities in Korea can be traced to this cultural and artistic lineage.

One of 10 carved pou ihi or totems at the entrance to the new Whangarei Library the jeunseung is remarkable for being the largest known in the world. This Korean pole with two figures, (along with 4 other community based pou and five pou –ihi) was commissioned by the Library Arts Committee at

the development stage of the library project in collaboration Jasmax Architects and the design brief. This committee was a particularly forward thinking initiative of the art museum Chair at the time Councillor Crichton Christie - to have commissioned artwork as part of an inclusive process at the developmental 'front end' of the new library project rather than as merely added décor at the end. This was prescient as the sculptures were shortly after to win both a New Zealand Human Rights Commission citation and a Creative New Zealand Creative Places Award for excellence and have been much photographed and commented on since.

These folk art figures or jeunseung are traditionally carved as life size or smaller, are always twin figures and have shamanistic associations which date well back to the founding days of Korea as a nation. This massive double jeunseung is highly innovative in that it incorporates the two figures in the single totara pole as the 10 massive wooden logs donated for the project required. It also incorporates New Zealand, Korean and Christian symbolism in the imagery rather than the traditional shaman associations. Koreans are always amazed to see such a large and impressive sculptural pole carved by visiting craftsman Paul Kim whose daughter was studying English in Whangarei at the time.

Back home in the villages of an increasingly rare rural Korea, these totems carved in wood or stone are still sometimes seen. They represent objects of worship and protection for the village and act as markers or boundaries from one province to the next. The past decade has seen a resurgence of interest in traditional crafts in a rapidly industrialised South Korea.

The art museum has enjoyed a longstanding relationship with the Korea Foundation and the Asia NZ Foundation since 1999, and subsequently with the Asian and Korean communities in Northland, which in turn fulfilled the desire to signify this relationship with a carved jeunseung. In 2002 the art museum hosted Korean artist Shin Young-ok as artist-in-residence in Whangarei for 6 months and toured the exhibition 'Marginal Space' to Auckland and Wellington. One of her works created here in Whangarei is also on display in the Whangarei Library.

The exhibition includes ceramics, funerary vessels and rare carved funeral bier figurines, domestic and ritual objects from 5th century to the present day and ceramics from the 15th century – 19th century, metalware and furniture items. A reference collection of some 100 publications, books, periodicals and catalogues on Korean culture has also been donated to the Library by the art museum.

Next up is the Tangaroa – Pacific Island pou. June/July



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www.whangareiartmuseum.co.nz