

**Exhibition:** *Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing*

**On View:** June 16–September 29, 2019

**Location:** Resnick Pavilion

**Press Preview:** June 12, 2019 | 10 am–noon



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(Los Angeles—May 14, 2019) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing*, the first major U.S. survey to examine the history of Korean calligraphy. *Beyond Line* explores the role of calligraphy in Korean society by looking at the lives and legacies of writers from prehistory until the present day, a narrative spanning nearly 2,000 years. Featuring nearly 90 works, the exhibition focuses on the people—royalty, scholars, diplomats, monks, and artists—who produced calligraphic works in a variety of mediums including paper, stone, ceramic, wood, metal, lacquer, and textile. The exhibition demonstrates the important historic and social role of writing and calligraphy in Korean society and how calligraphy has developed as an art form throughout Korean history.

*Beyond Line* is curated by Dr. Stephen Little, Florence & Harry Sloan Curator of Chinese Art and Head of the Chinese, Korean, and South and Southeast Asian Art Departments, and Dr. Virginia Moon, Assistant Curator of Korean Art. Accompanying the exhibition is a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by curators and academics, making this the first published overview of the history of Korean calligraphy in any Western language. *Beyond Line* is the first in a series of exhibitions as part of The Hyundai Project: Korean Art Scholarship Initiative, a key element of LACMA's ongoing 10-year partnership with Hyundai Motor Company. The Korean Art Scholarship Initiative is a global exploration of traditional and contemporary Korean art through research, publications, and exhibitions.

“*Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing* is the first comprehensive exhibition to present critical new scholarship about Korean history, culture, and identity through

the lens of calligraphy. This art form is both a conveyer of content and an abstract art of the highest degree of intellectual and artistic refinement,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “Thanks to our ongoing partnership with Hyundai Motor Company, LACMA is empowered to study and share new areas of Korean scholarship, from historical to contemporary, with a global audience. To have this groundbreaking exhibition presented in Los Angeles is incredibly special since the city is home to the largest Korean population outside of Korea.”

Executive Vice Chairman Euisun Chung at Hyundai Motor Group said, “*Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing* marks a key milestone in the history of LACMA and Hyundai’s partnership. We hope that the second phase of our 10-year commitment—set forth with a sophisticated and unique approach to Korean calligraphy—will elicit sincere interest and the expansion of Korean art and culture. We at Hyundai feel deeply responsible for connecting with people around the globe through Korean culture, sharing the foundations for what has and will continue to shape us. Providing distinct experiences and nourishing intuitive thought is the core of our ongoing commitment to the arts, and we are delighted to be able to collaborate with LACMA on this journey.”

### **Exhibition Background**

Due to Korea’s geographical proximity to China, Korean calligraphy has evolved alongside Chinese calligraphy, yet at the same time witnessed transformations that are uniquely Korean. Calligraphy in Korea can be divided into two broad categories: writings that use the Chinese ideographic or pictographic characters known as *hanja*, and those composed with the unique Korean phonetic script *hangeul*, created by King Sejong in the mid-15th century. The invention of *hangeul* in 1446 eventually democratized literacy in the country and became a rallying point for nationalism while the country was under Japanese control. For centuries prior to the invention of *hangeul*, written communication in Korea was carried out in classical Chinese (*hanja*). Today *hangeul* is the most widely used script in Korea.

“*Beyond Line* brings together the classic *hanja* and the native *hangeul* alphabet in one exhibition spanning from the ancient to the contemporary. LACMA’s exhibition is unique in that its chronology goes past the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) and into a contemporary context. The historical significance of Korean calligraphy can only be realized by taking the subject all the way to the present to show its development, the historical factors that affected it, the political issues that propelled it, and the current issues that sustain it,” said Virginia Moon.

“For centuries, calligraphy has been considered the highest art form in Korea, and an essential means of communication. This exhibition looks at the way calligraphy developed and advanced over the course of Korean history. Through strong examples of calligraphic works, the exhibition uncovers the role of writing in different social strata and traces the histories of many individual writers,” said Stephen Little. “*Beyond Line* is the first exhibition of its kind outside of Korea and we hope that the scholarship from this exhibition will illuminate the humanity of a country through its writing.”

### **Exhibition Organization and Highlights:**

*Beyond Line* is organized thematically and in loose chronological order by the following sections:

**Prehistory:** Nearly every human culture is known to have produced petroglyphs, which flourished in the Neolithic period (c. 10200–2000 BCE). These mysterious images are early manifestations of human beings’ impulse to give visual form to their experiences of the world. This section shows the Neolithic petroglyphs on the Bangudae cliff, situated near Korea’s southeast coast, which date from about 5500 to 4700 BCE. These carvings include small images of humans dominated by representations of animals, including gigantic whales.

**Tools and Materials:** This section presents examples of the tools and materials used to create calligraphy in Korea, including brushes, inkstones, and paper. Brushes are made of animal hair assembled with glue and set inside bamboo or wood handles, while inkstones are made of stone, ceramic, or earthenware. Ink sticks are generally made from soot and animal glue; to make ink they are ground by hand with water on the surface of an inkstone. Korean handmade paper has long been a crucial material used for various purposes in daily life, and some scholars claim that Koreans used paper before the fourth century. In Korea, calligraphy appears not only on paper, silk, wood, and bamboo, but also on ceramics, metals, and lacquer.

**Buddhist Calligraphy:** The Buddhist religion, which first emerged in India, reached China in the first century and Korea in the fourth century. Most Buddhist texts (sutras) were originally written in Sanskrit and later translated into Chinese. Buddhist monks were among the most literate members of Korean society because of their mastery of *hanja* (written Chinese characters). Two categories of Buddhist calligraphy are shown in this section. The first comprises sacred Buddhist texts, among which are illuminated sutras written and painted in gold on indigo-dyed paper. The second

includes written texts honoring deceased monks and records of new and renovated temple buildings carved into the surfaces of stone steles.

**Royal Calligraphy:** This section presents calligraphies and writings created by and for members of Korea's royal families starting in the Three Kingdoms period, ranging from stele inscriptions composed as statements of political power to calligraphic exercise books. Also included in this section is a contemporary rendering of the king's writing style by artist Jung Do-jun.

**Yangban Calligraphy:** The vast majority of calligraphic works in Korean history were created by and for members of the elite scholar-official (*yangban*) class. These works include poetry and prose inscribed on both two- and three-dimensional surfaces. Included in this section is a rare example of calligraphy by Sin Saimdang, the most famous Korean woman calligrapher and painter. During the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties, utilitarian objects were often inscribed with elegant calligraphy. Calligraphy was found on a wide range of surfaces, including brush stands, padlocks, incense burners, porcelain, lacquer, and branding irons. This section ends with an exploration of the close traditional relationship between calligraphy, painting, and poetry.

**The Advent of *Hangeul*:** Korean *hangeul* script was created at the court of King Sejong in the mid-15th century. *Hangeul* is a uniquely Korean script that comprises phonetic symbols far fewer in number than *hanja*, or Chinese characters. *Hangeul* was designed to encourage literacy across the country, where it was first embraced among women and the middle and lower social classes. In the early 20th centuries, the use of *hangeul* spread to the upper classes, increasing in popularity as it came to symbolize a unique Korean intellectual and ethnic heritage, distinct from those of China and Japan. This section features the *Hunminjeongeum* (1446), the first official record announcing the invention of the scientifically created *hangeul* alphabet.

Gim Jeonghui, a Calligraphic Master: Scholar, painter, and epigrapher Gim Jeonghui (1786–1856) is considered the greatest calligrapher of the Joseon dynasty. In his youth Gim studied the history and stylistic lineages of classical Chinese calligraphy and traveled to Beijing as part of a diplomatic mission to the Qing dynasty court. Gim excelled at many calligraphic forms: for example, his *Mount Gonryun Rides on an Elephant* (19th century) demonstrates how he both mastered ancient seal script and playfully altered it. Gim is most famous for Chusache, the bold, freeform style named after his artist name, Chusa (autumn scribe), which he perfected while in exile on Jeju Island. In addition to illustrating the wide range of Gim's calligraphic work, this

section includes examples of Gim's letters written in *hangeul* script, and evidence of his activities as an archaeologist and epigrapher.

**The Early Modern Period:** The Korean Empire was established in 1897, marking the end of a more than 500-year dynasty. Although the empire lasted only four years, it jumpstarted rapid modernization guided by Western ideals, which continued while the country was colonized by Japan for more than three decades. During this time, *hangeul* became a beacon of nationalism, and was the script used in leading newspapers. Artists such as O Sechang and An Jungsik continued to explore archaic styles in new ways, making them relevant for the present. Despite the political instabilities of these decades, the period witnessed the beginnings of modernity as unique to Korea—an as-yet undivided peninsula.

**Beyond the Modern:** Contemporary Korean calligraphers have used both classical *hanja* (Chinese characters) and *hangeul* (Korean characters) in their work, demonstrating the influence of traditional Korean and international styles. Up until the 20th century, most artists adhered to centuries-old rules of how calligraphy should appear, but many contemporary artists, while trained in the traditional ways, have reinterpreted these rules. For example, Lee Kang-So's *Emptiness 14010* (2014) explores the performative act of writing, while Kim Sun Wuk uses color in his work *Emptiness* (1996) to broadly interpret a single character. Yoon Kwang-Cho's *The Heart Sutra* (2001) harkens back to earlier periods when inscriptions were regularly carved into stone and clay surfaces. Other artists in this section incorporate modern technologies, such as the camera and digital graphics. In *Light Calligraphy #1* (2004), Kyungwoo Chun combines photography with calligraphy, drawing attention to the feeling and physical expression of writing.

### **Exhibition Catalogue**

*Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing*

Co-published by LACMA and DelMonico Books•Prestel Munich, London, New York

Edited by Stephen Little and Virginia Moon

Essays by Insoo Cho, Lee Dongkook, Stephen Little, and Yi Wanwoo

Additional contributions by Christina Gina Lee, Stephen Little, Natalie Mik, Audrey

Min, Virginia Moon, Joon Hye Park, and Eunsoo Yi

Hardcover, 408 pp, 250 color illustrations, \$85 retail

### **Hyundai Project at LACMA: Korean Scholarship**

*Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing* is the first exhibition as part of The Hyundai Project: Korean Art Scholarship Initiative at LACMA. In 2015, LACMA and Hyundai

announced a significant partnership supporting the museum's Art + Technology and Korean scholarship initiatives, thus making this the longest and largest programmatic commitment from a corporation in LACMA's history. Through the Korean Art Scholarship Initiative, The Hyundai Project will support three exhibitions and museum publications ranging from historic, traditional art forms to contemporary Korean art. The Korean Art Scholarship Initiative creates a new platform and a model for research in these areas—key aspects of Korean art that have never before been explored on a global scale in either exhibitions, programs, or books published outside Korea. The partnership with Hyundai Motor Company also includes support of LACMA's Art + Technology program

### **Credit**

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Presented by:



This exhibition is part of The Hyundai Project: Korean Art Scholarship Initiative at LACMA, a global exploration of traditional and contemporary Korean art through research, publications, and exhibitions.

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Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

### **Image captions**

(left): *Hunminjeongeum (The Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People)*, 1446, woodblock-printed book: ink on paper, Kansong Museum, photo © Kansong Art and Culture Foundation

(left center): Kim Choong Hyun, *Poem on the Diamond Mountains, in Hangeul Script*, 1990, pair of hanging scrolls: ink on paper, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Susan Baik and Prem Manjooran, © Kim Choong Hyun, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA  
(center): Gim Jeonghui, *Mount Gonryun Rides on an Elephant*, 19th century, hanging scroll: ink on paper, Yi Sejong Collection  
(right center): Kim Sun Wuk, *Emptiness*, 1996, ink with dye on paper, collection of Gwang Min, © Kim Sun Wuk, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA, by Paul Salveson  
(right): Kyungwoo Chun, *Light Calligraphy #1*, 2004, chromogenic print, © Kyungwoo Chun, photo courtesy of the artist

### **About LACMA**

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 140,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

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### **About Hyundai Motor Company**

Established in 1967, Hyundai Motor Company is committed to becoming a lifetime partner in automobiles and beyond. The company leads the Hyundai Motor Group, an innovative business structure capable of circulating resources from molten iron to finished cars. Hyundai Motor has eight manufacturing bases and seven design & technical centers worldwide and in 2016 sold 4.86 million vehicles globally. With more than 110,000 employees worldwide, Hyundai Motor continues to enhance its product line-up with localized models and strives to strengthen its leadership in clean technology, starting with the world's first mass-produced hydrogen-powered vehicle, ix35 Fuel Cell and IONIQ, the world's first model with three electrified powertrains in a single body type. More information about Hyundai Motor and its products can be found at: <http://worldwide.hyundai.com> or <http://globalpr.hyundai.com>

Hyundai Motor has a strong commitment to supporting art communities and has initiated partnerships with organizations around the world to offer better access to experiencing art. Hyundai Motor explores the unique values of art with the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), Tate, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Further

information about Hyundai Motor's global art partnerships and its various activities is available at:  
<http://brand.hyundai.com>