



18th century

Ink and color on paper;  
mounted as a hanging scroll

53 x 18 inches (134.6 x 45.7 cm)

Mount: 82 1/4 x 24 1/4 inches  
(208.9 x 61.6 cm)

**CHO TAI EOK**

Korean

Gift of Mrs. W. James Anderson, Mrs. Samuel Bell, Jr., Mrs. Richard Drayton, and Charles T. Ludington, Jr., in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Townsend Ludington, 1970, 1970-259-1a

## LET'S LOOK

What do you see in this picture?

What words could describe the rabbits, or hares? What do you see that makes you choose these words?

When do you think this scene is taking place? Day or night? A certain season? Why?

Look for some calligraphy (beautiful writing). Where else in the painting can you find graceful black lines that are not calligraphy?

What colors are the strongest?

Find several different kinds of brushstrokes in this painting. What textures do they create? Which looks the softest? Why?

This painting was probably made for a special occasion. What do you think it could be? Why?

## TWO HARES IN MOONLIGHT

What is the first thing you notice about this painting? Two brown hares, or rabbits, with bright, round eyes crouch under a flowering tree and beside a rock covered with bright green lichen and moss. The full moon, hanging low in the sky, bathes the hares in light. Its round shape creates a backdrop behind one of the tree branches and a few white blossoms. It even looks like a small, round painting within the larger one. Are these hares nervous, poised to run away from danger? Or are they simply alert, taking in the moonlight with wide-open eyes and the scents of the spring flowers and plants all around?

The eighteenth-century Korean artist Cho Tai Eok (cho-tay-OHK) used a variety of brushstrokes in his painting. Look at the lively texture of the fur and the detailed paws of the two hares. The artist painted the moss and lichen on the rocks and branches using dozens of small, watery-looking dots of color that dance along the surface of the painting. He used different brush-strokes, this time blending them, to create the illusion of the soft, delicate petals of the magnolia blossoms, the bright green plants, and the subtle brown branches. This way of painting is similar to a style of Chinese painting called fur and feather, which involves the precise, realistic depiction of animals or birds and the branches of flowering trees.

*Two Hares in Moonlight* was painted in the eighteenth century, during the Joseon dynasty, a period of peace and prosperity in Korea that lasted over 500 years, from 1392 to 1910. Joseon, which means "the land of the morning calm," was the country's name before it was divided into North and South Korea in 1948. The calligraphy in the upper-right section of the painting, which states the title and artist's name, was added later. During the Joseon dynasty many Korean artists absorbed symbols and styles of painting from

Chinese art, selecting the aspects they liked to create their own unique works of art. In both China and Korea, hares are symbols of long life, a happy home, and many children. The magnolia tree in the painting, which flowers in early spring, represents feminine sweetness and beauty. These particular symbols were favored by Korean artists throughout the long Joseon period, when there were relatively few wars. The teachings of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher, also influenced Korean art. He encouraged people to do good, help others, focus on family relationships, and respect their elders.

Paintings like *Two Hares in Moonlight* were believed to bring good fortune and were made as gifts for special occasions such as weddings. They were often mounted on screens as decorations and to provide protection from cold drafts. When this tall, narrow painting—close to five feet tall and two feet wide—was given to the Museum, it was the center section of a large, folding, three-part screen. After careful study, museum curators decided that the three parts of the screen may not have been made by the same artist and did not belong together. Conservators then repaired some cracks and creases on the center section and mounted it separately on silk as a hanging scroll.

## ABOUT MOON AND HARE FOLKTALES

Both the moon and rabbits (or hares) are frequently used as symbols—not just in Asian art, but in folktales and fables (stories) around the world. You may have heard of Aesop’s famous fable *The Hare and the Tortoise* or the stories about Brer Rabbit created by enslaved African Americans. The rabbit also plays a central role as a trickster and a hero in the traditional legends of native peoples of North America, and in some stories he lives on the moon!

There are many stories in Asia about the rabbit and the moon. According to Daoist mythology, a divine hare lives on the moon, grinding the ingredients for a special drink, the elixir (potion) of immortality, which allows people to live forever. A Buddhist tale explains how the rabbit came to live on the moon. Long ago, the Buddha came to a faraway forest, tired and hungry after many days of traveling. All the animals brought him the foods that they usually gathered for themselves. The rabbit thought of bringing fresh green grass and leaves, but when he found them, he ate them all up himself! Ashamed of his greediness, he went to the Buddha and said, “O Buddha, I am a foolish creature and have nothing to give you except myself. Please eat me if you are hungry.” The Buddha was so touched by this that he gave the rabbit the gift of eternal life on the moon.

Korean and Chinese astrology teaches that a person’s destiny is based on when he or she was born

on the lunar (moon-based) calendar, which follows a twelve-year cycle. Each year is represented by one of five different elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, or water) and one of twelve different creatures (dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, pig, rat, ox, tiger, or rabbit). Together these form a 60-year cycle (5 elements x 12 animals) in which the world moves, making someone's 60th birthday an extra special occasion. According to this tradition, rabbit years—which follow the unsettled tiger years—are times of diplomacy, gentleness, compassion, healing, and good deeds. People born in rabbit years are thought to be clear-sighted and full of life and to have a close circle of friends.

## MOON FESTIVAL IN KOREA

In Korea the moon festival lasts for three days and is called *Chusok* (CHOO-sawk), which means “fall evening.” During *Chusok* families prepare and eat special foods, including moon-shaped rice cakes called *songpyon* (song-PEE-yun), wear traditional, brightly colored clothes, and visit graves to pay respect and give thanks to their ancestors. Other ancient *Chusok* customs include holding wrestling competitions and *kang-gangsu-wallae* (kahn-gahng-soo-wah-lay), a circle dance performed by women. The festival falls on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, when the moon is at its brightest. Find out how the lunar calendar compares to the calendar used in the West (Europe and North and South America). In some years *Chusok* falls on a day in September, but in other years in October. What day will *Chusok* fall this year?

## CONNECT AND COMPARE

- Asian languages, like Korean and Chinese, do not distinguish between hares and rabbits, but in English-speaking countries the two are viewed as slightly different creatures. Find out the differences between them. Which term fits this painting better?
- Compare Korean screens with European medieval tapestries. What are the subjects in both? How are the two used?
- Look on a lunar calendar to find out what animal and element represent the year that you were born. Learn more about what your animal stands for in Asian cultures. What does it say about you?

## RELATED ART PROJECT

Create a scroll or screen painting on a long, narrow piece of paper using colors and creatures that make you think of a particular season. For fall you could use brown squirrels gathering acorns under trees with brilliant leaves. For winter you might show a red cardinal sitting on bare tree branches on a snowy day. What do your animals symbolize? What different kinds of brushstrokes could show fur, feathers, and plants? Glue your painting onto patterned fabric or wallpaper and hang as a scroll or mount as a screen. Which seasons have your classmates painted?

*This painting is included in **The Arts of Asia**, a set of teaching posters and resource book produced by the Division of Education and made possible by a generous grant the from Delphi Financial Group and Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company.*