

A Room of Quiet Contemplation

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Time to lose yourself deep in wandering thought

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The Journey of Experience



A Room of Quiet Contemplation

Time to lose yourself deep in wandering thought

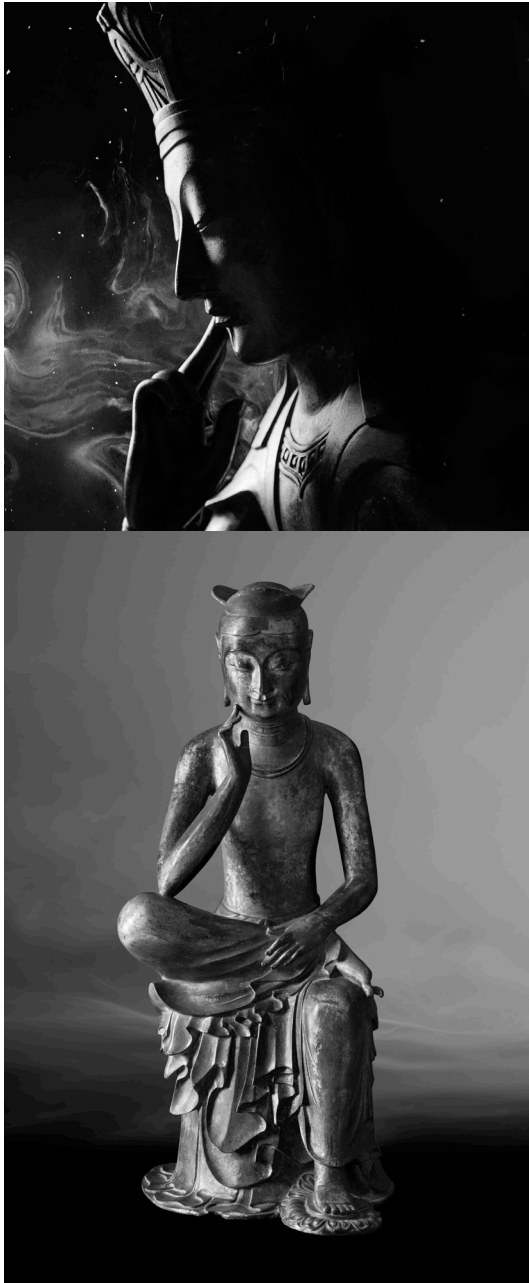
Two pensive bodhisattva statutes, both national treasures of Korea, stand side by side in this room. As you walk into this quiet, dark room, the image of endlessly circulating water and infinitely expanding space arouses a sense of surreality. As you step slowly following the glimmer of the image, you encounter these two pensive bodhisattvas lost in thought, crossing 1,400 years of time, religions, and ideologies.

With their mystical smiles, the two pensive beings seem to be gazing into a different world, expressing compassion for our suffering, or maybe they have discovered the secrets of the universe. They seem to emanate ripples of emotional healing and mental peace.

Time to lose yourself deep in wandering thought—this serene encounter with pensive beings in the room of contemplation is a privilege to those who experience it. Why don't you visit this room of contemplation and join the two bodhisattvas on their journey of contemplation? You might make it your own experience, your own story.

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Two Pensive Bodhisattvas



Gilt-bronze Pensive Bodhisattva
Late sixth century, Three Kingdoms period,
Height: 81.5 cm, Weight: 37.6 kg,
National Treasure, National Museum of Korea
bon 2789

Gilt-bronze Pensive Bodhisattva
Early seventh century, Three Kingdoms period,
Height: 90.8 cm, Weight: 112.2 kg,
National Treasure, National Museum of Korea
duk 3312

The Meaning of a Pensive Bodhisattva, a Being of Contemplation

A pensive bodhisattva lost deep in thought gazes downward with slightly opened eyes while giving a mystical smile. With his right foot lightly resting on his left knee, he bends his right arm to touch his fingers to his cheek.

The Korean term for a pensive bodhisattva, "banga sayusang," describes the posture of the bodhisattva, not its name. "Banga" describes a half-lotus position, sitting with one leg crossed and the other hanging down. "Sayu" refers to contemplation, and "sang" means a statute. Together, the term "banga sayu sang" indicates a statue of someone seated in contemplation with their legs half-crossed and one hand slightly touching the face. A statue of a pensive bodhisattva represents the posture taken by Gautama Siddhartha who, before renouncing the mundane world for enlightenment, pondered the birth, aging, sickness, and death experienced by human beings and anguished over his decisions at a cross-roads in his life. This statue also represents a bodhisattva who deferred attainment of Buddhahood and chose to nurture all sentient beings.

Seated in the banga, or half-lotus position, this bodhisattva is at a middle point in the path to the Buddhahood, sometimes advancing but other times halting his progress toward enlightenment. This position represents a moment of decision about whether to release the bent leg and leave the lotus position or to bend the other and complete it. It is a moment of alternating meditative practice and decision. The bodhisattva's gentle smile with slightly tensed lips represents the moment of attaining enlightenment after profound thought. This fleeting smile is the product of countless thoughts and long anguished contemplation of human suffering.



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Harmony and Balance: The Aesthetics of Pensive Bodhisattva Statues

A pensive bodhisattva was an important figure in Buddhist worship, and statues of them have been produced in large quantities as objects of worship. As if embodying the realm of faith in the form of masterly art, the beauty of a pensive bodhisattva statue helps it transcend the sensory limits of the mundane world.

At first glance these two national treasure pensive bodhisattva statues look alike, but they differ in their facial expressions, dress, size, weight, and the date of production. The pensive bodhisattva on the left side in the gallery dates to the late sixth century. It is characterized by a sharp nose, well-defined eyes, lavish adornments, and restrained drapery lines. The celestial robe flapping at both shoulders creates a vivid impression, and the necklace and armlet slightly showing under the robe add a certain splendor. The pensive bodhisattva on the right side wears a crown and necklace with a simple and restrained beauty, whereas rhythmic waves are created in the drapery of its robe below the knees. The crown consisting of three half circles and the necklace of two circular lines add a simple beauty to the otherwise naked upper body of the bodhisattva. Its fingers are delicate but the resolutely bent toes give a feeling of tension. The drapery flowing three-dimensionally below the knees adds to the dynamic atmosphere.

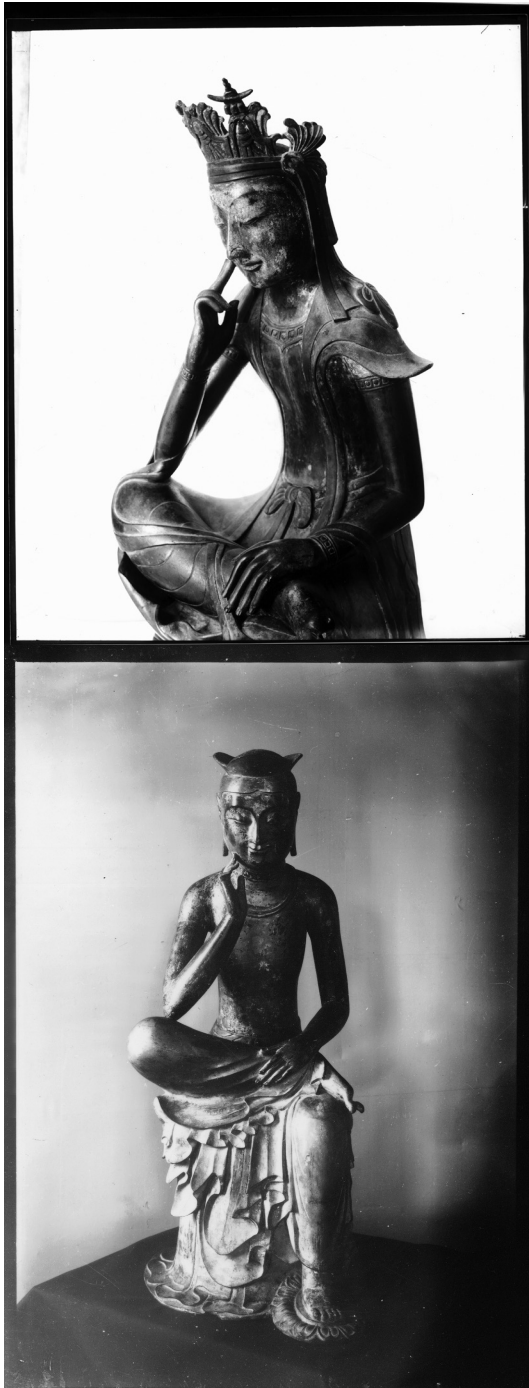


Production of the Pensive Bodhisattva Statues

Both of these two national treasure pensive bodhisattva statues feature a casting technique that was cutting edge during the Three Kingdoms period. Metal bars were joined together horizontally and vertically to create an armature for the statue from the head to the pedestal. They were then covered with clay to provide the inner mold. This inner mold was coated with beeswax and further carved to form the bodhisattva. It was then coated again with clay to provide the outer mold. Heat was applied to the outer mold to melt the beeswax and leave a hollow channel in the desired shape of the pensive bodhisattva. Liquid bronze was poured into the channel and then cooled. Such molds are prone to breaking during the casting process, but the artisans behind these two pensive bodhisattva statues succeeded at casting bronze statues nearly one meter high with an even thickness ranging from 0.2 to 1.0 centimeters. The anchors and nails used to secure the molds were removed after the completion of the casting and any traces are only barely apparent to the naked eye. This indicates how advanced metalworking techniques had become by the time. Both of the two pensive bodhisattva statues show some traces of repair or reinforcement conducted either at the time of production or in a later period, but these traces are also only barely visible.

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Gilt-bronze Pensive Bodhisattva, photographed in 1927,
25.2×30.3cm, Gelatine dry plates, National Museum of Korea

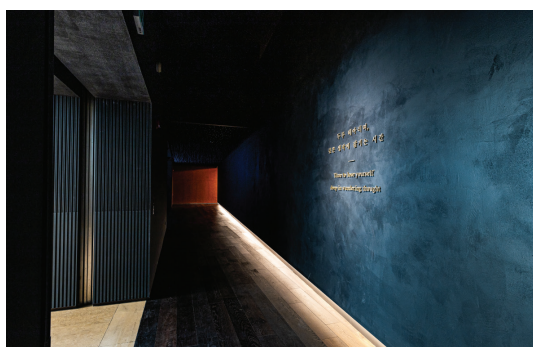
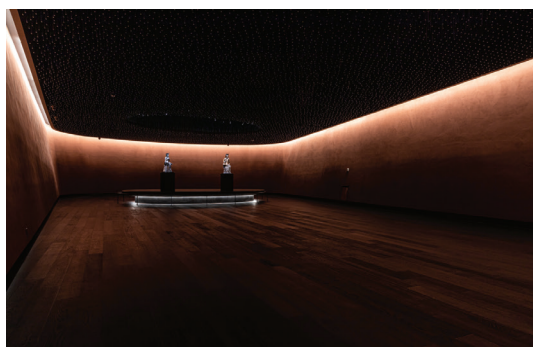
Gilt-bronze Pensive Bodhisattva, photographed during the Japanese Occupation (1910-45),
11.9×16.4cm, Gelatine dry plates, National Museum of Korea

History and Nationality of the Pensive Bodhisattva Statues

Little is known about when and where these two national treasure bodhisattva statues were produced and later discovered. The pensive bodhisattva on the right side was purchased by the Yi Royal Family Museum in 1912 from a Japanese antique dealer named Kajiya Yoshihide. The price of 2,600 won was considered a vast sum at the time. The other was acquired by the Japanese Government-General of Korea in the same year from a businessman and antique collector named Huchigami Sadasuke for 4,000 won. It was acquired by the Museum of the Japanese Government-General of Korea in 1916. Clues as to the temples where the statues might have once been enshrined or the places of their production have been passed down orally, but the exact sites of their excavation remain unknown. A comparison of the crowns, ornaments, and drapery of the two statues with those of contemporaneous rock-carved Buddha statues or other pensive bodhisattva statues with known excavation sites suggest that the pensive bodhisattva on the left side dates to the late sixth century whereas the other appears to date to the early seventh century and was probably cast in the Silla Kingdom.

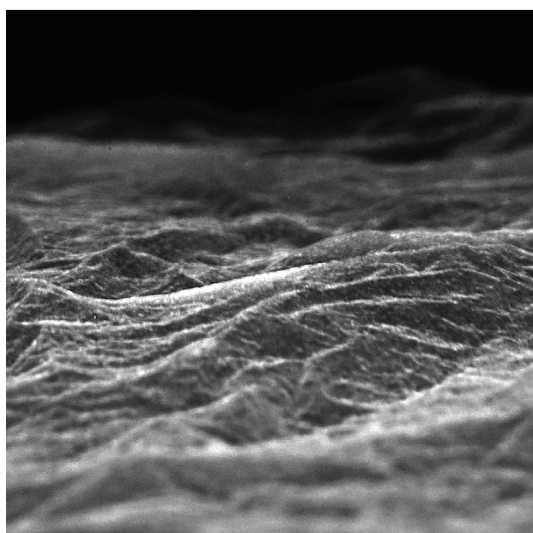
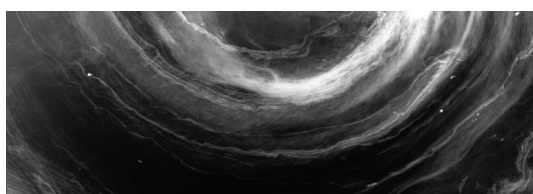
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A continuing story



Room of Contemplation

This gallery for the two national treasure pensive bodhisattva statues was designed by the architect Choi Wook (101 Architects). He chose the scale of a small theater for the exhibition room in consideration of the distance between the statues and the viewers to create an ambience where the energy emanating from the pensive bodhisattva statues integrates with the space. The darkened path leading to the exhibition room, the slightly inclined floor and walls, and the glittering ceiling all help the viewers concentrate on their appreciation of the bodhisattva statues in a quiet space with an immaterial atmosphere.



Media Art Projection

Cycle

Jean-Julien Pous, 2021

Digital video, 3430 x 1200 pixels, 5min, black & white with sound

The video suggests to see beyond the matter. It evokes its different solid, liquid and gaseous states, from the microscopic to the gigantic.

Director	Jean-Julien Pous
Art direction	Jean-Julien Pous, JJ Walker
Design	Emmanuel Wolfs
Sound samples	Guillaume Poncelet, Francisco Lopez

Lighthouse

Jean-Julien Pous, 2021

Animation, 9600 x 1920 pixels, 3min, black & white & color with sound

As a prequel to the *Cycle* film, it introduces statues as beacon of hope for wandering souls, before spreading and merging with a surrounding abstract nature.

Director	Jean-Julien Pous
3D Scans	Emmanuel Wolfs
Sound samples	Guillaume Poncelet, Francisco Lopez



Pensive Bodhisattvas at the Metaverse Museum, Peaceful Hill on the ZEPETO Platform (feat. Pensive Bodhisattvas, National Museum of Korea)

You can also meet the pensive bodhisattva statues on the World Map “Peaceful Hill” on ZEPETO. “Peaceful Hill” is a metaverse museum tailored to the tastes of the global Generation Z. It seeks to deliver the philosophical message of healing embodied in the smiles and contemplation of the pensive bodhisattva statues. Within this virtual world, the pensive bodhisattvas stand outdoors in a peaceful environment full of natural light rather than in the exhibition room at the museum. Visitors can freely interact with others within this world and communicate with them in real-time.



Pensive Bodhisattva Goods

You can buy items related to the pensive bodhisattva statues at the museum shop or at the online shop of the Cultural Foundation of National Museum of Korea: museumshop.or.kr.

