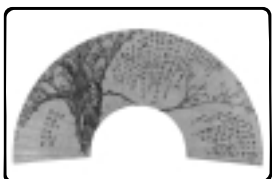




PLUM BLOSSOM FAN

Korea • Ink on paper

Chong Tae-gyu, 19th century • 2000.89



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INK ON PAPER

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The flowering plum symbolizes renewal; it blossoms before all other flowers just as spring arrives. The gnarled and battered trunk of the plum tree contrasted against fresh blossoms is a favorite decorative motif in Asian art. Korean scholars brushed the flower in ink washes without color, as on this fan, because the purity of the image represented the height of cultured taste. Scholars would have waved the fan for coolness or used it to accentuate their conversation and to quietly impress their audience with its special meaning. Painted fans were also exchanged as tokens of friendship. The painting was often meant to refresh the mind through elegant verse and tranquil scenes of nature.

The plum blossom, triumphing over the cold, was also known as one of the “Three Friends of Winter,” which symbolize model scholars or “superior men.” (The other two “friends” are the flexible bamboo and sturdy pine.) Korean scholars would have admired

this fan painting for its symbolism and its classical combination of calligraphy, poetry, and painting—known as the “Three Perfections.” This fan was later mounted as a hanging scroll for further admiration and preservation.

Many traditional Korean painters were Confucian-trained scholars who strove to imitate the Chinese-style of lofty self-expression and honorable conduct. Confucius (551–479 BCE), a Chinese official and teacher, believed good government depended on people respecting their roles in the natural order of things. He emphasized education and self-perfection through the arts for scholars and officials. Confucian teachings have influenced Korean culture since their introduction during the Three Kingdoms era (about 57 BCE–668 CE).