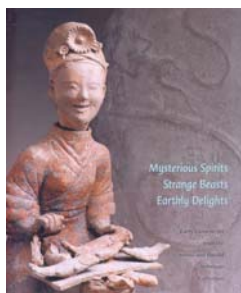


Mysterious Spirits, Strange Beasts, Earthly Delights: Early Chinese Art from the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Collection / Donald Jenkins and Jay Xu.--Portland, OR: Portland Art Museum, dist. by University of Washington Press, Sept. 2005.--112 p.: ill.--ISBN 1-883124-18-2: \$39.95.



Mysterious Spirits, Strange Beasts, Earthly Delights features selected pieces from the ongoing exhibit at the Portland Art Museum. The artifacts, donated to the museum by philanthropists Arlene and Harold Schnitzer, are a fine representation of funerary art made during the Warring States and Qin-Han periods (481 BCE- 220 CE).

The introductory essay, written by Jay Xu, Pritzker Curator of Asian Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, places the artifacts in context of what happened during this time period and provides examples on how such pieces were used. Through the essay, we can gain an understanding of how significant death was for the people of ancient China, and how the spirits of the afterworld governed everyday life. The featured objects give a glimpse of how the people of the Warring States and Qin-Han periods lived, because the items in the tombs were based on the actual possessions of the living. In some cases, the tomb was a recreation of the dwelling. To support the items one was expected to have in the afterlife, a large production of *mingqi*, items made to accompany the deceased in burial, flourished between 206 BCE and 220 CE. Possession of bronze items was a sign of power, and a green-and-brown lead glaze was developed and used on *mingqi* to imitate the period's bronze items.

The catalog showcases a wide range of *mingqi*, including people, animals and dwellings with their contents. These offerings, like the earthenware horse (p. 68) and dog (p. 79), are beautiful and full of personality. In addition to showing us what people used and wore at the time, these artifacts teach us about the behavior of the living. For example, both the *Court Lady* (p. 120) and the *Female Banquet Chef* (p.131) are servants, but of different status. We know this from their different attires and postures, the first modestly looking down and the second one looking straight at the viewer and smiling.

The catalog is divided into three sections, each referring to a part of the book title. In the first section, "Mysterious Spirits," we can see a variety of vessels, jars, mirrors, and unusual objects, like the *Money Tree*,(p. 37), which protected the tomb and its occupants from evil spirits. The second part, "Strange Beasts," illustrates the artifacts representing imaginary animals, such as a beautiful *bixie* (p. 72), which served as a tomb guardian. Common animals are also included in this section. Some of the animals symbolize a connection with the spiritual world, like the tortoise (p. 74), which was associated with long life. The last section, "Earthly Delights," highlights objects representing possessions during one's lifetime. These various items, expected in the afterlife, include a variety of objects, such as a pigpen, dishes, horses and carriages, and a watchtower, as well as people, such as servants, musicians and soldiers.

All of the catalog's images include a description of the object and relevant information such as provenance and symbolism. The checklist of the collection provides a quick review of the catalog's content. The comfortably-sized publication (10 x 12 inches) includes beautiful color images. The catalog is a real gem and will greatly complement the collection of an academic library.

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