

Chinese Guardian Lion

Today, I am going to introduce you to a type of sculptured art know as the Chinese Guardian Lion.

Guardian Lions are usually made out of stone or bronze and can be seen all over China. The picture of this Guardian Lion that we are studying today was sculpted during the Tang Dynasty between the years of 616-906, or about one thousand 200 years ago. It is actually one of the most preserved works from this period and is treasured for its wonderful sense of motion and energy.

#1 What gives this lion a sense of motion and energy?
(wide open mouth showing teeth, curled tongue, claws spread as if he is about to attack)

Chinese lions are often shown looking away from each other. Their mouths may be closed as thought to keep in good spirits, or their mouths opened to scare off demons as in the picture of our lion.

In Chinese art, animals are used as symbols to convey important meanings. Chinese Lions are also known as “Fo dogs” or “Fu Lions”. Fu is a Chinese word meaning luck or prosperity. The typical Chinese lion is not a typical presentation of a lion you might see in a zoo. Instead, these lions are thought to have “doggish” features. The lions are often created to look more friendly than fierce. This may be why they’re also referred to as Fo dogs or “luck” dogs symbolizing good luck.

#2 What part of this sculpture might be considered as a “dog like “ feature?
(shape of the nose and eyes)

In addition to symbolizing “luck”, Guardian Lions are thought to be powerful protectors of truth and defenders against evil. They have traditionally stood in front of Chinese Imperial palaces, emperors’ tombs, and government offices. They have also been placed at the entrances to important official buildings and gates and can still be seen in many popular areas around here.

#3 Where might any of you seen these lions?

(In front of the art institute, libraries, insurance companies, Harris Bank, MGM movies, restaurants).

Chinese lions usually appear as male and female pairs. To the intruder’s right will be the male lion, with his right paw on a ball or globe, representing his feeling the “pulse of the earth”. To the intruder’s left will be the female, closely resembling the appearance to the male, but playing with her single cub with her left paw. The male of the pair is said to guard the structure, while the female fu dog protects those dwelling inside.

Whether you prefer to think of the statues as the kings of the jungle or man’s best friend the dog, Chinese lions are one of the most popular and permanent examples of Chinese art.

For our craft today, I am going to hand out to each of a block of clay and some etching sticks and am going to ask you to create your own lion. You can start by flattening your clay with your palm and using the stick to etch out a replica of a lions face as I did in this example. I will have pictures of lions on each table for you to recreate.

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