

The Guardian Lions

Guardian Lion Statues

These massive lionesque statues at the entrances of buildings are referred to by many names: foo dogs, fu dogs, lion dogs, stone lions, imperial guardian lions, and/or Chinese guardian lions. Although foo dogs is a common name for the guardian lions in English, they are not, in fact, dogs at all. They are believed to resemble, now extinct, asiatic lions. The statues are most commonly in pairs, next to the entrance of buildings or pathways, facing those entering. They are meant to be symbols of protection, to guard the entrance way.

Why are they in pairs?

The two statues have a subtle difference between them, one lion with his paw resting on an ornate, patterned ball (meant to represent male energy) and the other with their paw on top of a playful cub (meant to represent female energy). They are positioned purposefully at entryways, one on the right (male) and one on the left (female) if you are facing the entry or a pathway, which is in accordance with the principles of feng shui.

About Feng Shui

Feng Shui originated in ancient traditional practice, loosely the concept describes that energy and forces in the environment can harmonize depending on a number of factors, including placement, movement, the four cardinal directions, time, astrology etc. The goal is to situate human built environments with good qi. Feng Shui, additionally, relates to yin and yang and the five elements, or forces, which are metal, earth, fire, water, and wood.

Feng Shui additionally relates to the word 'auspicious', which hold connotations such as luck, success, and showing or suggesting future success. Following the

concepts involved in Feng Shui would create situations for people to hold auspicious gatherings or place objects in auspicious placements, which would create good luck, harmony, or create an environment that allows for success or future success.

About Qi

Qi, literally meaning “vapour”, “air”, or “breath”, but also additionally carrying the meanings of “vital energy”, “vital force”, “material energy”, or simply “energy” is a central underlying principle that influenced many different areas, but most notably traditional medicine and martial arts. Qi could be described as an energy, or life force, that flows, permeates and links everything in existence.

About yin and yang

The pairs additionally represent yin and yang energy. The female is yin and the male is yang. The yin and yang are a philosophical concept of opposing, or complementary, and/or contrary forces. It’s important to note that the yin and yang are not reserved to concepts or forces that are opposite, but also, complementary and how they are related to each other.

About the Embroidered Ball

The ball held under the foot of the ‘male’ lion is an embroidered ball. Embroidery balls are made of silk or embroidered cloth, typically in three colours: red, yellow, and green, with twelve connected petals. Each petal represents a month and has an image of flowers, plants, or birds on it. The ball is a token of love, traditionally given from a girl to a boy to represent gifting a heart.

Materials Used

Guardian lions are typically carved from expensive, decorative stones, such as marble and granite or they are cast in bronze or iron. Thus, historically, for a family to have guardian lions in front of their private home would be a sign of wealth and

elite social status. Today, there are more accessible materials available to create guardian lions, such as concrete or resin.

Notable Features

Some lion dogs have a female with their mouth open and the male with their mouth closed, representing the two saying the sacred word ‘om’

Artist Statement: About Rawry & Pohly’s Rendition

Titled “The Guardians of the Dynasty”, Rawry & Pohly collaborated to design and screen print, by hand, a first edition pair of guardian lions for accessioning into the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre Museum.

These stone guardian lions are sitting on pedestals with geometric square patterns. The two lions have subtle differences, the triangle placement on their face and the cub (left) or the ball (right) beneath their foot and the character on each of the pedestals. The lion with the cub has the ancient oracle bone script for mother and the lion with the embroidered ball has the ancient oracle bone script for father.

The ancient oracle bone script is the earliest known form of Chinese writing and was typically engraved on animal bone or turtle shell. The oracle bone script was used for divination.

The lions are facing $\frac{3}{4}$ in the opposite direction to show that they ‘have each other’s backs’. This positioning allows for them to perfectly guard the entranceway as a pair. Stylistically, they are represented in Rawry & Pohly’s iconic line work with asymmetrical eyes. The seal/signature at the bottom right is a traditional red seal with the letters for R&P, Rawry & Pohly.

Materials

Stonehenge Fine Art Paper

Speedball Acrylic Ink (black)

Speedball Fabric Ink (red)

Rawry & Pohly Biography

Jamie Mason and Kevin Chow founded Rawry & Pohly in 2015. The husband and wife duo excel at creating artwork as a team. The motto for their practice, "celebrate your inner child," is explored through the use of mixed mediums: sculptures, canvas, prints, or drawings, all alluding to the dynamic elements of whimsy, humour, and joy. As artists, they create stylistic interpretations of modern pop art with themes of minimalism through iconic lineweight and bright, vibrant colours. A key element of their approach to visual art is encouraging play.

As artists, Rawry & Pohly strive to bring back the element of play for adults who feel overburdened, stressed, or unable to engage in one of the most important outlets one has. Adults are often discouraged from play for fear of embarrassment, negative perceptions of their work ethic, and simply forgetting how. Play is incredibly important to not only one's ability to be creative, but also to one's health, especially mental health. Their approach to art is reconnecting viewers with their inner child and facilitating fun, awe, and playfulness in all aspects of their artwork. Play, empathy, and stewardship of land are deeply connected, and by encouraging play, we are also encouraging care.