

HAI BO

Chinese, born Changchun, Jilin Province, China, 1962

Four Seasons: Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn, 2000–2002

Four inkjet prints, 24 x 24 inches each

Gift of Melih and Zeynep Keyman, 2015.1

Memories can imprint in our minds like photographs: everything stays the same in that moment, even as time marches on. Returning to the site of a memory, then, can be a jarring experience. Hai Bo's *Four Seasons* lingers on that unsettling sensation. In four photographs, the artist captures himself sitting in front of the same tree in each season, and in doing so, references his own past. A young Hai Bo played by this tree when it was part of an old field, the site of his brother's drowning. As his hometown Changchun expanded, the tree became enclosed in a city park. While this history is not visible in the images, the signs of transition from spring to summer, fall, and winter provide a meditation on change over time.

The cycle of life and death—from snow to green grass, barren branches to foliage—ever-present in the natural world imbues *Four Seasons* with the melancholic atmosphere typical in Hai Bo's work, which reflects a sense of loss both personal and national. The timeline of the artist's childhood mirrors that of China's growth. In 1966 a four-year-old Hai Bo toddled as China plunged into the Cultural Revolution. In his teenage years, he navigated a post-Mao era. When the artist returned home as an adult from his new life in Beijing, he found his hometown transformed: his community had aged and changed, the natural landscape now a cityscape. While he had grown from child to man, the geography shifted from agrarian to urban. *Four Seasons* is both a record and a reminder. Hai Bo preserves the tree and himself in this moment. The photos also serve as a *memento mori*—a symbolic reminder of death. Time continues its unceasing movement forward. This core tension resides at the heart of Hai Bo's work: his photographs may be fixed in time, but they are reflections of unrelenting change.

—Kelsey Allen-Niesen '19, Asian Languages and Cultures