

Tomioka Tessai (1836-1924), Tanaka Hakuin (1865-1934), Tajika Chikuson (1864-1922), and

Hashimoto Kansetsu (1883-1945)

***Stone in the Shape of Mount Fuji, Storage Bag,
Album of Three Paintings of Mount Fuji,
and Miniature Table Screen***

Japan, Meiji period, 1911

Stone with quartz markings, ink and color on paper (album), ink on satin with bamboo frame (screen), and ink and color on silk (bag)

Gift of Drs. Edmund and Julie Lewis in Honor of Stephen Little, 2002
(12289.1-4)

Unusually shaped stones, termed “strange stones” (Chinese *guaishi*, Japanese *kaiseki*) have been collected in East Asia for centuries. This remarkable stone, closely resembling Mount Fuji, belonged to the great early 20th-century master of literati painting in Kyoto, Tomioka Tessai. In a superb example of the artistic collaboration for which literati painters are traditionally known, Tessai invited Tanaka Hakuin, a senior student of his recently deceased colleague, the famous Kyoto teacher Tanomura Chokunyū (1814-1907), to design a silk storage bag for the stone with two inscriptions and charming landscape paintings.

In addition, he invited Hakuin and another of Chokunyū’s well-known students, Tajika Chikuson, to complete paintings of Mount Fuji in a small album intended to accompany the stone, together with the controversial young scholar-artist Hashimoto Kansetsu, whose painting is on display here. Finally, Tessai himself inscribed a miniature screen that would have been placed behind the stone when it was displayed.

Interestingly, Tessai uses the term “True Form” (Chinese *zhenxingtu*, Japanese *shinkeizu*) to describe this stone’s relationship to Mount Fuji. The concept of a mountain’s “true form” derives from ancient Daoist beliefs from China centuries earlier, in which talismanic designs revealing the essential, energetic form of important sacred peaks, rather than their outer material form, were treasured for their great spiritual power. By using this term, Tessai places both Mount Fuji and this small stone of which it is a microcosm within a context of great spiritual antiquity and authority.

Masuda Gyokujō (1881-1955)

Osen of Kasamori Shrine

Japan, Taishō to early Shōwa period, ca. 1925-1935

Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk

Purchase, Marjorie Lewis Griffing and Beatrice Watson Parrent Funds, 1994
(7554.1)

A characteristic of Taishō *nihonga* is a fascination with Edo-period beauty (*bijin*) themes. In this evocative scroll by Gyokujō, the aesthetic link between old and new hints at the timelessness of specific feelings and values. The subject and composition of this painting derive from Suzuki Harunobu (1724-1770), one of the greatest ukiyo-e masters.

In several prints of the 1760s, Harunobu depicted the famous beauty Osen at her tea-stall in front of Kasamori Shrine, accompanied by other people. In Gyokujō's depiction, he eliminates all figures but Osen, and radically simplifies the setting. The prominent focus on Osen creates the feeling that she has somehow slipped through the bounds of time.

Itō Shōha (1877-1968)

Genroku Beauty

Japan, Taishō period, ca. 1920

Hanging scroll; ink, color and gold on silk

Gift of Felix Juda, 1962

(6161.1)

Although homogeneous at first glance, at closer inspection the depiction of women in Taishō *nihonga* was comprised of a variety of styles. This diversity stems in part from the range of stylistic traditions in Edo and Meiji painting, the desire to fuse them with aspects of Western art, and the necessity of finding formulas that would garner the favor of critics, judges at exhibitions, and patrons.

Though her talent has been largely overlooked in postwar years, Shōha was one of the most skillful and versatile *bijinga* painters of her time. In stark contrast to the large, formal paintings that define most of her works (and the *bijinga* canon), this painting is refreshingly casual. The loose brushwork and muted tone make it appear as if it were done in an instant, capturing a single moment in time. At the same time, in only a few strokes, the woman's face exudes the haughty confidence of a high-ranking courtesan.

Yamakawa Shūhō (1898-1944)

Heron Maiden

Japan, Taishō period, ca.1925

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Purchased with Marjorie Lewis Griffing and Beatrice Watson Parr Funds, 1994

(7551.1)

The Heron Maiden was a popular subject during the Taishō and early Shōwa periods. Deriving from Kabuki plays dating back to the 18th century, the Heron Maiden tells the story of an injured heron rescued by a woodcutter. In return, the spirit of the heron appears to the woodcutter in human form and marries him. She makes beautiful capes of her feathers for him to sell, but he eventually discovers her true nature and the pain it causes her to make the capes, and releases her back into the wild.

Here, Shūhō brings the Heron Maiden into the conservative Tokyo *bijin* tradition as fashioned largely by his teacher Kiyokata. The stoop-shouldered, columnar figure is gracefully vaporous, yet she is rooted to the ground by her impossibly long cloak, which trails on the ground before and behind her.

Nakamura Daizaburō (1898-1947)

Woman

Japan, Shōwa period, 1930

Two-panel screen; ink and color on silk

Purchased with Marjorie Lewis Griffing and Beatrice Watson Parrent Funds, and the Estate of Selden Washington, 1994

(7547.1)

This screen epitomizes the style that made Daizaburō one of Kyoto's top *bijinga* specialists. The subject, popular film star Takako Irie, may be wearing a traditional kimono, but her graceful position on a chaise longue, with left ankle over right, is reminiscent of Manet's famed *Olympia*, the scandalous hit of the 1865 Paris Salon. Where Manet flouted Renaissance ideals by showing an unidealized, contemporary woman as a naked courtesan who gazes back at the viewer, Daizaburō re-classicizes his model as a modern Japanese Venus, fully clothed and gaze averted, but exerting subtle femininity.

The dramatic centrality of the subject is set off by the emptiness of the surrounding space and by the intricate details on the couch and clothing. Arrayed in the latest in Japanese couture and coiffure, yet at ease on European furniture, Takako coolly synthesizes native and foreign aesthetics.

Uragami Shunkin (1779-1846)

Laughter on Spring Wind

Japan, Edo period, 1827

Handscroll; ink and color on silk

Gift of Terry Welch in honor of William Jay Rathbun, 2005

(13154.1)

This handscroll was inspired by the title calligraphy by Yi Fujiu (1698-1746), a Chinese trader and scholar who came to Nagasaki. The three characters for "Laughter on Spring Wind" derived from a famous Tang-dynasty poem, well known among Japanese literati. The viewer of the painting was expected to recall the verse while reading the title, at once understanding that the theme would be peach blossoms with an undertone of the transience of life.

Shunkin's painting takes the viewer on a journey through the quiet countryside, from a narrow path to the open vista over water against a background of magnificent mountains. The sophisticated brushwork is typical of Shunkin's approach but the extensive use of bright color is rare among his landscapes.

Nukina Kaioku (1778-1863), a scholar-poet in Kyoto, added an inscription to the painting, and Shinozaki Shōchiku (1781-1851), a noted Osaka calligrapher, provided the postscript.

Gotō Shūgai (1886-1976)

Idle Pleasures

Japan, late Taishō or early Shōwa period, 1920s

Album of twelve leaves; ink and color on silk

Purchase, 2005

(13158.1)

Idle Pleasures depicts popular literati retreats and activities. Twelve scenes in diverse compositions are introduced in a seasonal sequence, opening with white plum blossoms and ending with a scene of travelers in snow. Shūgai did not adopt the flamboyant brushwork favored by many artists during the Taishō period. The restrained brush style and well-structured composition revealed by this album confirm Shūgai's allegiance to the orthodox stylistic lineage.

Trained under a noted Kyoto literati painter, Tajika Chikuson

(1864-1922), whose work is on display elsewhere in this gallery, Shūgai shunned competitive exhibitions and made a living fulfilling private commissions for wealthy collectors and connoisseurs. This superbly executed, exquisite album amply demonstrates the talent of this little-known artist.

Fujimoto Tesseki (1817-1863)

Pleasures of the Literati Life

Japan, Edo period, 1856

Album of twelve leaves; ink and color on paper

Purchase, 2005

(13157.1)

Pleasures of the Literati Life employs the popular theme of enjoyable literati activities. The twelve scenes portray various delights associated with nature, friendship, books, traveling, drinking wine, and *sencha* tea in the artist's typically playful brushwork.

Originally a samurai from Okayama, Tesseki resigned his position and developed his skills and reputation as an artist. During the turbulent last years of the Edo period, Tesseki sacrificed his life for the aspiration to restore imperial rule. The power of Tesseki's idealized vision as seen in this album may have derived from his desire to change the grim reality of Japanese politics, even at the cost of his life.

Kawahigashi Hekigotō (1873-1937)

Potted Plum Haiku

Japan, Shōwa period, 1930s

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Purchase, 2005

(13208.1)

A prolific haiku poet, Hekigotō advocated a new direction that emphasized immediacy and directness over the traditional structure of haiku. At the same time, he achieved a radical new sense of calligraphy, adopting the Chinese-based style to write haiku. Since the origins of haiku in the 17th century, numerous styles of cursive calligraphy had been used for its mixture of hiragana syllables and characters, yet all had featured elegant, flowing compositions.

Hekigotō defied the tradition by employing heavily inked, bold lines in irregular arrangements to create an expression that appeared rough and naive. His innovative style represented a unique synthesis, attained by seriously exploring ancient Chinese calligraphy and experimenting with various styles for many years.

*In front of the
potted plum
New Year's
ennui sits.*

Hirai Baisen (1889-1969)

White Lotus

Japan, Taishō period, 1915

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Purchase, 2005

(13209.1)

Large paintings of the lotus motif were popular among *nihonga* (literally Japanese-style painting) artists during the Taishō period. Baisen's version distinguishes itself from others in its radical style. In depicting the leaves, Baisen added pale ink meticulously, stroke by stroke, letting the edges of the strokes emerge to suggest the finely reticulated veins of the leaf. For the water, Baisen applied dense small dots reminiscent of both the "pointillist" technique of Post-Impressionism and the brush manner of Ike no Taiga (1723-1776). In Buddhism, the lotus signifies spiritual perfection and enlightenment, as the plant rises from the mud to bloom above the water. Baisen's dramatic yet exquisite image matches the plant's unworldly symbolism.

Kobayashi Shunshō (1888-1929?)

Plum Trees in Tsukigase

Japan, Taishō period, 1910s

Hanging scroll; color on silk

Purchase, 2005

(13216.1)

Famous for its plum blossoms, Tsukigase is located in a dramatic gorge in northeastern Nara prefecture. Because plum blossoms epitomized the virtues idealized by scholar-poets, Tsukigase valley in early spring became an important theme for literati artists. A Kyoto artist, Shunshō was primarily identified with *nihonga* (a modernized style of traditional Japanese painting). In this work, he transformed the celebrated subject into a vibrantly colored landscape of monumental scale. Surveyed from a high vantage point, the valley presents its topography in great detail.

Rather than the traditional literati emphasis on ink brushwork, Shunshō applied color more freely, as if working in Western-style oil painting. Though the details of his life still remain

elusive, this remarkable landscape indicates a painter of great artistic gift. The luminous gray ink contrasts most effectively with the vivid blue of the water and the pristine white of the flowers.

Hirai Baisen
(1889-1969)

Mountains in China

Japan, late Taishō or early Shōwa period, late 1920s

Pair of six-fold screens; ink on paper

Purchase, 2005

(13152.1-2)

A remarkably innovative and independent talent, Baisen achieved recognition in the first government-sponsored Bunten exhibition as a young artist, and enjoyed financial success throughout the Taishō period as one of Kyoto's leading painters. However, his reputation declined after the 1920s, and he was viewed as superficial, a criticism shown to be unfair by such powerful works as these screens.

Baisen was known primarily as a bold colorist. During the later half of the 1920s, however, he explored the expressive potential of ink with great concentration. Here, Baisen's dynamic composition joins two screens in a continuous panoramic view. The tiny Chinese-style pagoda in the left screen indicates the locale of this landscape, one of many Chinese scenes he did after visiting the continent in 1913.

In Baisen's distinct brush method, brittle outlines define the near mountain forms while a darker wet brushwork saturates the wooded areas. By alternating powerful rocky peaks with thick forests, Baisen created not only a light-and-dark visual rhythm but also the tactile contrast of hard and soft.

Yamakawa Shūhō (1898-1944)

Three Sisters

Japan, Shōwa period, 1936

Screen, ink and color on silk

Purchase, Beatrice Watson Parrent Fund, 2002

(11822.1)

The women in this painting share a striking resemblance, so much so that they might even be considered triplets. They also wear similar clothing: long-sleeved kimono and obi with the same arabesque *karakusa* (Chinese grass) pattern, although the colors vary. Though this is likely a portrait of three specific women, it is also a depiction of Japanese femininity. As such, the juxtaposition with the Western car is intriguing.

The title *Three Sisters* repeats the title of Chekov's famous play of 1901, which was not performed in Japan until 1932. These screens are mostly about consumption and privilege. The fancy automobile leaves no doubt about the economic status of these women. Their high

fashion and aloof expressions are in keeping with the "classical" elegance of the car, while the strong lines and sweeping curves of their kimono reprise the car's stylish silhouette.

Mochizuki Gyokusen (1834-1913)

Waterfall

Japan, Meiji-early Taishō period
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Gift of Griffith and Patricia Way, 2008
(13192.1)

Tajika Chikuson (1864-1922)

Chinese Landscape After Mi Fu

Japan, Taishō period, 1917
Leaf from an album of twenty-one paintings by various artists;
ink and color on silk

Gift of Griffith and Patricia Way, 2008
(13917.1)