

Shūgetsu Tōkan (c. 1440-1529)

Landscape

Japan, Muromachi period (1392-1573), 15th-16th century

Handscroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. Robert Allerton, 1957

(2390.1)

Shūgetsu took vows as a Buddhist monk in 1462, and in 1467 traveled to China for two years with his teacher Sesshū (1420-1506). As a young painter, Sesshū studied at Shōkokuji in Kyoto, where he would have had access to the painting collection of the shoguns, including a number of high quality Chinese paintings, particularly from the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). When Shūgetsu and his teacher traveled to China, they found an active revival of the Southern Song style underway, which drew upon traditional compositional elements, brushwork, and use of ink, but sometimes with dramatically different results.

Sesshū and Shūgetsu brought this early Ming manner of painting back to Japan, where it quickly became the dominant style. Shūgetsu eventually was called back to his home prefecture of Satsuma in 1492, but he continued to promote the new style of painting introduced to Japan by Sesshū throughout his life, and of all Sesshū's students and imitators, Shūgetsu is generally considered to be the most faithful to the master's original style. This remarkable handscroll, monumental in its conception, uses a number of elements derived from early Ming painting, such as the dramatic "axe-cut" brushwork and the emphasis on foreground elements. The painting is particularly distinguished by the clarity of its brushwork, a feature that was to be highly influential in the continuation of this style for centuries afterwards.

Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743)

Set of Five Dishes in the Shape of Shikishi (Poetry Cards)

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1699-1712

Stoneware with iron underglaze decoration

Purchase, 1984

(5249.1a-e)

Kenzan was a key figure in the revival of Kyoto stoneware during the mid-Edo period (a time when the ceramics industry had largely shifted to Kyūshū), and today is recognized as one of the greatest potters in the history of Japanese ceramics. He came from an eminent family of artists, including his great uncle Honami Kōetsu and his brother Kōrin, that shaped the Rimpa School, one of the most important traditions of painting and decorative arts in early modern Japan.

Kenzan first trained as a Confucian scholar, which provided him with a rich knowledge of classical poetry, calligraphy and painting from both Japan and China. These superb dishes, examples of his early work before he established a successful commercial kiln, innovatively translate the traditional Confucian arts of the brush into the medium of ceramics. Not only do the dishes take the shape of paper cards used for composing poetry (*shikishi*), but each bears a painting in the style of an earlier scholar-artist from China or Japan on its interior, and a four-character phrase written in elegant calligraphy on the reverse.

Anonymous
Buddha Head

Thailand, Mon Dvaravati style, 8th-10th century

Limestone

Gift of John Kostiner, 2010

(14239.1)

The various early polities established in Thailand by the Mon ethnic group during the 7th to the 13th centuries, the most prominent of which was Dvaravati, marked an important period in the development of international styles of Buddhist art.

Although early Mon sculpture retained the significant influence of Indian precedents, by the time the statue (from which this head came) was made, Mon artists had begun to diverge from Indian models to develop one of the earliest distinctive sculptural traditions in Southeast Asia. The broad face, arching eyebrows over elongated eyes, thick lips, and large curls of hair evident in this head were all characteristics of the newly emerging Mon Dvaravati style. Although only this small fragment of the original sculpture now survives, the large size and particularly fine carving of the head mark it as an exceptional example of sculpture from the period when Buddhist art was first beginning to develop in Southeast Asia.