

## Zen Landscapes

The term Zen (禪; pronounced Chan in Chinese) derives from the Sanskrit word *dhyana*. *Dhyana* originally referred to a specific meditative state, but by the time Buddhism entered China it had also come to indicate meditation in general. As its name suggests, Zen Buddhism places a special emphasis on the practice of meditation, rather than focusing on complex rituals or the scholarly investigation of sacred literature.

The introduction of Zen into East Asia is attributed to the Indian monk Bodhidharma, who according to Buddhist historical records came to southern China during the Liu-Song (420–479) or Liang (502–587) dynasties. However, Zen did not emerge as a fully organized movement until the Song dynasty (960–1279), at which time it gained court support and became the largest sect in the country.

This period also saw a renewed interest in continental culture in Japan, which experienced a renaissance after the devastation of the Genpei War in the late 12th century. When the monk Eisai (1141–1215) returned from China to Japan shortly after the war in 1191, he brought both Zen and other continental practices such as powdered tea (*matcha*) with him. His experience inspired many other Japanese monks to travel to China to receive direct

transmission of Zen enlightenment, and new monasteries began to be established.

Over the course of the Kamakura (1185–1333) and especially the Muromachi (1392–1573) periods, Zen flourished, revolutionizing Japanese society. Zen was influential not only in changing Buddhism, but also in introducing other aspects of continental culture. Zen monasteries, particularly in the ancient capital of Kyoto, became cultural centers that defined new aesthetics for the tea ceremony, architecture, garden design, poetry, calligraphy and painting. In addition, because Zen monasteries had strong ties with China, the Japanese government entrusted these monasteries to oversee trade with the continent, giving them considerable sway over the economy.

Zen also spread to other parts of East Asia, including Vietnam, where it is known as Thiền. In modern times, Zen has emerged onto the international stage, and much as when it first entered Japan, it has become a vehicle for the spread of not only Buddhism, but a wide variety of influences from Asia that have come to redefine culture around the world.

## **Anonymous**

### ***Landscape with Chinese Figures***

Japan, Edo period, 17th century

Set of four *fusuma* panels; ink on paper

Gift of Nomura Yōzō, 1947

(557.1a–d)

*Fusuma* (or sliding door) panels were an important element of traditional Japanese architecture. They could be installed as dividers to create smaller rooms, or removed when a larger space was necessary. They were found in a wide variety of contexts, including Zen temples, where they were common in the sub-temple buildings in which monks lived, studied, and held meetings (main halls were generally too large to be suitable for the intimate spaces created by *fusuma* panels).

Since its introduction from China to Japan in the 12th century, Zen was closely associated with Chinese culture, and the paintings that decorated Zen temples often depicted Chinese subjects, from the more generalized imaginary Chinese-style landscapes seen here to specific Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist themes from Chinese history and legend, examples of which can be found in other paintings in this exhibition.

Zen played a key role in the introduction of Chinese painting styles, which were grouped under the category of *kara-e*, as opposed to *Yamato-e*, or Japanese-style painting. By the time these *fusuma* panels were made, *kara-e* was most closely associated with the Kanō School, which dominated not only paintings made for temples but also official government

commissions (which also favored Chinese subjects for the air of cultural authority they provided).

## Sesson Shūkei (1504–1589)

### *Egret, Moon and Wave*

Japan, Muromachi period, 16th century

Hanging scroll; ink and white *gofun* on paper

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1929

(2847)

The idiosyncratic, and probably largely self-taught monk-painter Sesson Shūkei has been heralded by later critics as one of the leading artists of the Muromachi period. Removed from the sophisticated artistic environment of the capital city of Kyoto (represented by Tenshō Shūbun's work on display elsewhere in this gallery), Sesson represents a separate, parallel transformation of painting techniques being introduced from the continent that largely derived from Chinese court paintings of the Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasty. At the same time, Sesson's work also takes its inspiration from Southern Song monk painters such as Yujian (fl. c.1250) and Muqi (c.1210–after 1269).

This mature work by the artist is a superb example of Zen aesthetics. The subject has been reduced to only a few essential elements, with all extraneous distractions eliminated. Typical of Sesson, a great deal of emphasis is placed on lighting accomplished through contrasting tonalities, with white highlights against the pale ink wash of the sky effectively conveying a vision of the egret and waves in the light of the full moon. The brushwork is equally subtle, and the artist has chosen to utilize delicate washes, rather than the bolder ink flourishes that were becoming popular at the time through Sesshū (1420–1506) and his followers, who introduced new influences into Zen painting after his return from China in 1469.

## **Sesson Shūkei (1504–1589)**

### ***Mynah Birds and Pigeon***

Japan, Muromachi period, c.1555–1560

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Purchase, Marjorie Lewis Griffing Fund, 1985

(5326.1–2)

The loss of centralized political power during the late Muromachi period (1392–1573) had a profound impact on the development of Zen painting. The influence of the powerful Zen temples in Kyoto waned, and regional centers emerged. In the west, Sesshū (1420–1506) brought new Chinese styles from the continent, which eventually would form the basis for the dominant trends from the 17th century onwards, particularly through the Kanō School. However, several important Zen temples also had been established in eastern Japan during the 13th–14th centuries, and this provided a foundation for the growth of a new distinctively individual style by Sesson.

This pair of hanging scrolls is thought to date to Sesson's formative period during the sixth decade of the 1500s, which he spent in Kamakura and nearby Odawara, the political center for the powerful Hōjō family. Under the influence of the Hōjō and the Zen temples in Kamakura, Sesson was exposed to both originals and Japanese copies of Southern Song paintings. This work is notable for its juxtaposition of soft ink washes and rounded contours for both the pigeons and the oak tree on which they perch in the right scroll, with boldly contrasting ink tonalities and sharp edges for the mynah birds and chestnut tree in the left scroll. This reveals the experimental approach to ink which would develop into Sesson's unique, mature style in the following decades.

## **Kanō Motonobu (1476–1559)**

### ***The Daoist Immortal Huang Chuping***

Japan, Muromachi period, 16th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1929

(2844)

Developing in China, Zen took on an eclectic character that drew equally from Buddhist doctrine (ultimately coming from India) and traditional Chinese culture as embodied by Confucianism and Daoism. Consequently, Zen painting was not limited to Buddhist subjects, and became a vehicle for the introduction into Japan of a wide variety of Chinese cultural influences. This painting depicts the Chinese Daoist immortal Huang Chuping, who lived in the early Six Dynasties period (4th century). Huang was once asked to tend a flock of sheep, but rather than be troubled by the animals he instead transformed them into rocks. Here, he waves his stick at a rock that suspiciously resembles a sheep.

Working under the tumultuous circumstances of the late Muromachi period, Motonobu maintained the patronage of the weakened shogunate and imperial court while also expanding the school's market to include Buddhist temples and wealthy merchants, eventually becoming the most successful artist of his generation in Kyoto. Motonobu fused a wide variety of artistic sources to develop the distinctive Kanō School repertoire, and the influence of Zen brushwork and subject matter is especially evident here. At the same time, it should be noted that, like many surviving paintings attributed to Motonobu, the present work was likely done by a follower rather than the master himself, who supervised a large workshop that produced paintings in his style.

## **Traditionally Attributed to Sesshū Tōyō (1420–1506)**

### ***Landscape***

Japan, Muromachi period, 15th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke; conserved with a grant from the Robert F. Lange Foundation, 1929

(2846)

The monk-painter Sesshū is one of the towering figures in the history of Japanese painting. He studied under Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463), soon becoming recognized as one of his most talented followers. However, after Shūbun's death he left Kyoto, which had already descended into chaos leading to the devastating Ōnin War (1467–1477), and moved to western Japan.

There, the patronage of the powerful Ōuchi family enabled him to travel to China in 1467–1469. While on the continent, he was exposed to the revival of court painting happening at the time. The new style he brought back was enthusiastically received in Japan, forever changing the direction of both Zen art and ink painting in general. Most later schools of Japanese painting trace themselves back to Sesshū, including the Kanō School, which by the 17th century dominated the art world through its near-monopoly on official commissions.

Although this landscape entered the museum as a work by Sesshū, it is unlikely to be by his hand. Given Sesshū's prominence, it was common for later collectors to attribute anonymous works from the Muromachi period (and later) to him. However, the painting bears close similarity to another work

attributed to Sesshū's contemporary Bokkei Saiyo (c.1450–c.1470), who was also a direct student of Shūbun, and can be confidently dated to the 15th century.

## **Anonymous**

### ***Bamboo and Sparrows***

Japan, Edo period, 17th century

Set of seven *fusuma* panels; ink on paper

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cook, 1933

(3873-3878)

When these *fusuma* panels first came to the museum through the eminent Japanese art dealer Nomura Yōzō (1870–1965), they were associated with the monk-painter Sesson (1504–1589), who developed his own unique style in eastern Japan during the tumultuous 16th century and became known as one of the leading Zen artists of his generation (see the paintings by Sesson elsewhere in this exhibition).

However, stylistically, the paintings lack Sesson's idiosyncratic spontaneity, and are closer in style to the official Kanō School a century later. As the Kanō School expanded in the 17th century, it became necessary to meet the demands of a broad range of clients, from the shogunate and temples to newly influential wealthy merchants. Consequently, the school's leaders, especially Kanō Tan'yū (1602–1674), elaborated upon the Zen ink painting of the Muromachi period (in particular, Sesshū, but also to a lesser extent Sesson), together with a wide variety of other sources, to synthesize Japanese painting into a standard repertoire that could be practiced consistently throughout the extensive network of the Kanō School's many workshops.

The skillful painting of these impressive *fusuma* panels, which would have been produced by multiple artists in a workshop environment, is a testament to Tan'yū's success in organizing the school, while their size suggests that they were for a large and important commission.

## **Anonymous**

### ***Landscape***

Japan, Edo period, 17th–18th century

Six-fold screen

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1933

(3879)

This screen came to the museum through Nomura Yōzō (1870–1965) together with the *fusuma* panels depicting bamboo and sparrows on display nearby. It was similarly associated with Sesson (1504–1589), due to the clear influence of Zen ink painting from the late Muromachi period on its brushwork and composition. However, the use of silver leaf for the background was unusual during the Muromachi period, and makes it more likely that the screen dates to the second half of the 17th or first half of the 18th centuries.

The political stability and economic prosperity of the time, after the long upheaval of the preceding 16th century, resulted in a new flourishing of the arts. While official commissions continued to be dominated by the Kanō School, a number of talented artists trained within the school emerged to form their own distinctive movements, and the idiosyncratic style of this screen differs from the standardization common in Kanō School works (such as *Bamboo and Sparrows*). Rather, the screen was probably produced by an independent studio that took Muromachi influences in a new direction.

Paintings of this scale rarely survive, and would have been reserved for the most prominent of official or imperial halls. Despite numerous later repairs (undoubtedly resulting from its massive size), the screen is, nevertheless, breathtaking for its unprecedented sense of monumentality.



## **Liu Yun (active late 11th century)**

### ***Abbot***

China, Song dynasty, dated 1099

Dry lacquer

Purchase, 1939

(4818)

The idea that the inner truths of Buddhism could not be conveyed by language (especially the written word), but only directly from the mind of the master to the mind of the disciple, was fundamental to Zen. For this reason, lineages of teachers who maintained this transmission took on a special importance, and images of these teachers are one of Zen's most important contributions to the arts.

Dry lacquer with a hollow core was a popular medium for Buddhist sculptures in both China and Japan, but due to its fragility they rarely survive intact, making the exceptionally good condition of this figure all the more remarkable. Chinese Buddhist sculptures were made largely by artists who did not sign their work and whose identities have been lost to history. This example is exceptional in that it bears an inscription on the bottom identifying both the donor, Jiangsheng, and the artist, a certain Liu Yun, about whom no other biographical information has survived. The inscription also dates the work to 1099, making it the earliest-known dated dry lacquer Buddhist sculpture from China to survive.

The era when this sculpture was made was a pivotal time when Zen became increasingly systematized and organized in China, allowing it to rise to national prominence, and to spread to Japan a century later.

## Hosetsu Tōzen (dates unknown)

### *Landscape*

Japan, Muromachi period, 16th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Gift of Mr. A. E. Steadman, 1962

(3099.1)

This landscape is painted in the *haboku*, or "broken-ink," technique, in which the brush moves in a spontaneous manner with strong contrasts of ink tonality. Tōzen was a student of one of the Muromachi period's most influential Zen painters, Sesshū Tōyō (1420–1506; see the painting attributed to Sesshū elsewhere in this exhibition), and may have been a Buddhist monk. The style of the painting is derived from "broken-ink" landscapes of the Song and Yuan dynasties in China, which Sesshū popularized in Japan.

The poem at the top of the scroll was inscribed by the Zen monk Sakugen Shūryō (1501–1579) in a combination of regular and cursive scripts, and reads:

“Where the duckweed ends, one sees  
the mountains' reflection,  
When boats from Chu return home, one  
dreams of the sound of the grass.”

The literary allusion to Chu, an ancient state in southern China renowned for its distinctive poetry, suggests that the painting was not intended to depict an actual scene from Tōzen's home country of Japan, but rather an imaginary Chinese landscape, as was typical for Zen paintings at the time (see also the set of four

*fusuma* panels showing an imaginary Chinese landscape displayed at the entrance to this gallery).

## **Anonymous**

### ***Avalokiteshvara***

China, Yuan dynasty, late 13th century

Hanging scroll; ink and light colors on silk

Purchase, Richard Lane Collection, 2003

(2005.28)

After the introduction of Zen in the late 12th century by Eisai (1141–1215), a number of Japanese monks traveled to China during the 13th century to receive direct transmission of Zen teachings. Not only did they bring back new doctrines, but also artworks, which were often given as part of their ordination. The present painting was made in China, but at some point in the past it traveled to Japan. While the circumstances of its history are unclear, it is typical of the paintings brought from China by Japanese monks, and dates to precisely the period when this exchange was most active.

The painting shows the deity Avalokiteshvara, dressed in a white robe, in his abode on Mount Potalaka. Early references to Mount Potalaka in Buddhist scriptures from India are likely to refer to a mountain in Tamil Nadu, but as Buddhism spread to East Asia the abodes of several Buddhist deities were associated with specific geographical areas in China, so that Mount Potalaka came to be identified with an island off the coast of Zhejiang Province in China (southeast of modern Shanghai). As a result, this island was renamed Putuo, a Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit term Potalaka. When Japanese monks were traveling to China to study Zen in the 13th century, Mount Putuo was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in southern China (the region most frequented by Japanese monks). Consequently, images such as this became widespread in Japan, and have been among the most iconic examples of East Asian Buddhist art ever since.

## **Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463)**

### ***River Landscape***

Japan, Muromachi period, 15th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Purchased with funds from the Robert F. Lange Foundation, 1992  
(7021.1)

Shūbun was one of the leading cultural figures of the 15th century. He served as head abbot of Shōkokuji, a powerful Zen temple in Kyoto intimately connected with the shogunate. Shūbun's position placed him in charge of not only the spiritual well-being of the shoguns, but also important aspects of the government's administration, including trade with China. Shūbun also managed the shoguns' art collection, most significantly Chinese paintings, at a time when official patronage fostered a remarkable cultural and artistic efflorescence in which Zen played a leading role.

The Ashikaga rulers were especially interested in Chinese court paintings from the Southern Song period (1127–1279). Shūbun would have had access to rare original Chinese works then already centuries old, and he modeled his own paintings after them, adopting such features as an emphasis on atmosphere, meticulously detailed brushwork, and “one-corner” landscape compositions. Shūbun’s transformation of the Chinese court style would be elaborated by his most famous student, Sesshū (1420–1506; see the painting attributed to Sesshū elsewhere in this exhibition), who studied contemporaneous landscape painting while in China.

No confirmed signatures or seals exist for Shūbun, and it is likely that the paintings attributed to him were done by a number of different artists active in the elite cultural circle surrounding the shogunate during the 15th century.

## Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558–1637)

### *Teabowl*

Japan, Edo period, 17th century  
Earthenware with glaze and lacquer  
Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1933  
(3821)

Zen and tea are intimately connected in Japanese history. The practice of drinking *matcha* (powdered green tea) was introduced from China by the monk Eisai (1141–1215), who also brought the first Zen teachings from the continent in the late 12th century. The modern tea ceremony took shape during the late 16th century, under the influence of Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591). Rikyū rose from a merchant family to gain the patronage of the most powerful warlords of the time, especially Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536/7–1598). Hideyoshi also came from humble origins, and the two introduced a novel aesthetic to the tea ceremony that revolutionized the elitism previously surrounding tea. Notably, Rikyū promoted simple, locally made earthenware tea bowls over the expensive, sometimes elaborately decorated porcelain then favored as symbols of status and taste.

The maker of this bowl, Hon'ami Kōetsu, was one of the leading designers of the early 17th century, and is equally renowned for his genius in calligraphy, lacquerware, garden arrangement and ceramics. Kōetsu advanced Rikyū's aesthetic by making his own tea bowls, which can be identified by their distinctive clay from the neighborhood in Kyoto where he lived. Kōetsu's bowls are unique in their celebration of the spontaneous beauty that resulted from the firing process, including not only the rich red color (which he preserved by coating the bowl with a clear glaze), but also such

“flaws” as the long crack on one side of this bowl, which has been covered with simple black lacquer.

**Ernesto Pujol (born 1957)**

***Desert Walk, from Inheriting Salt***

Cuba, 2008

Sculpture; salt, iron

Gift of Ernesto Pujol in honor of TCM staff who worked with the artist on the exhibition and performance project, 2011

(14387.1)

Ernesto Pujol draws from a wide variety of spiritual traditions in his artwork, and in addition to studying for four years in a Trappist monastery, he is a practicing Zen Buddhist. Here the artist makes reference to the importance of the historical Buddha’s footprints (which were believed to bear signs revealing his spiritual accomplishment) as icons of worship and meditation.

This iron box was constructed according to the dimensions of the artist’s body and stride. Within it are fifty pounds of pink salt from Utah and fifty pounds of white salt from the Dead Sea, dried into a solid block of fossilized footprints growing crystals. As the crystals form and the salt interacts with the iron, the work is constantly evolving in a literal example of the Buddhist principle of impermanence.

The traces of the artist’s movement convey an implicit multilayered significance that suggests not only the role of footprints in Buddhism generally and the specific practice of walking meditation in Zen, but also the prevalence of the body in art since pre-history, dating back to the very beginnings of human expression. Simultaneously familiar and mysterious, they provoke an innate response on the part of the viewer. They signify both

presence and absence and convey an immediate sense of physical contact and connection.

## **Meridel Rubenstein (born 1948)**

### ***Monks in a Canoe***

America, 2000-2001

Sculpture; dye transfer on glass, found dug-out canoe

Gift of Cherye R. and James F. Pierce, 2014

(2014-57-01ab)

This sculptural work by Meridel Rubenstein consists of a small found wood dugout canoe holding a group portrait of Zen Buddhist monks from Vietnam. Sandra Matthews has written eloquently about it: “[This work] pictures the abbot, abbess, novice and nuns of Từ Hiếu [monastery] and Diệu Nghiêm [nunnery] in Vietnam, representing them as firmly rooted individuals together constituting a human forest. Yet this translucent group portrait is laminated between two pieces of glass, and the glass then stands upright in a small wooden dugout canoe—a boat made from the trunk of a tree (‘a tree at sea’). So the forest is both rooted and mobile, potentially or actually journeying. And in fact these monks are part of the monastery from which the influential monk, Thích Nhất Hạnh, journeyed out to plant the seeds of Buddhist thought abroad. Sandblasted onto the fragile but luminous glass is a delicate additional image of the veins of the leaves of a Bodhi tree, the kind of tree under which the Buddha was sitting when he first attained enlightenment.”