Poetic Imagination in Japanese Art: Selections from the Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

October 13, 2018 – January 13, 2019
Portland Art Museum

Gallery Labels
INTRODUCTION

The Portland Art Museum is honored to present *Poetic Imagination in Japanese Art: Selections from the Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles*. Formed over the past four decades, the Cowles Collection reveals thoughtful and discriminating taste, informed by a deep sympathy for tradition as well as an adventurous spirit open to departures from the canon. This is the first major exhibition devoted to the Collection, and the great majority of works are being shown to the public for the first time. From a host of possibilities, we have chosen to focus on one of the great strengths of the collection: visual art closely tied to poetic traditions.

Poetry, painting, and calligraphy have always been deeply intertwined in East Asia, but in Japan the nature and meaning of those relationships have transformed over time, responding to larger cultural changes. The more than one hundred paintings, calligraphies, and ceramics in the exhibition, spanning the eighth to 20th centuries, illuminate the central role of poetry in the painting and calligraphy across time and in diverse social contexts.

Exquisitely beautiful and richly diverse, the works in this exhibition invite contemplative looking and emotional response. We hope that you will be moved to compose your own verses about what you see and experience.

*Organized by the Portland Art Museum and curated by Maribeth Graybill, Ph.D., The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Asian Art, with Jeannie Kenmotsu, Ph.D., The Japan Foundation Assistant Curator of Japanese Art, and Sangah Kim, the Cowles Curatorial Fellow in Asian Art.*
I. WAKA AND THE COURTLY TRADITION

Waga yado wa
michi mo naki made
arenikeri
tsurenaki hito o
matsu to seshi ma ni

At my dwelling place
even the paths have vanished
swallowed by rank growth
while I have waited in vain
for someone whose love has cooled.

— Archbishop Henjō (816–890)

Waka, Japanese poetry, usually refers to verses of thirty-one syllables, in lines of 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables. With its early origins in folk songs, waka became an important art form at the Japanese imperial court as early as the mid-eighth century. During the Heian period (794–1185), which later ages looked back to as the golden age of courtly culture, waka poetry served as an essential means of communication among the men and women of the aristocracy.

Although the language was constrained by brevity and decorum, waka allowed poets express their most profound emotions, from love to mourning to the simple pleasure of gazing at cherry blossoms. So closely was poetry associated with imperial prestige that twenty-one imperial anthologies were compiled between 905 and the 1430s.

These texts, as well as records of poetry contests and other poetry collections, have been revered down through the centuries. High-ranking members of court society would copy out verses on elegantly decorated papers, transforming manuscripts into luxury objects. Aspiring poets—again, usually members of the aristocracy—commissioned imaginary portraits of great poets of the past, relishing virtual communion with their literary idols.

Once the exclusive privilege of a small circle of the elite, the language and imagery of waka dispersed, over time, as literacy itself spread to the military, merchant, and artisan classes. Today, waka is the shared heritage of all Japanese, and increasingly of poets across the globe.
1. 太田垣蓮月 奴図に「ふり立てし」の歌

Ōtagaki Rengetsu (1791–1875)

Samurai Footman with Poem

1867

Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper

Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Rengetsu lived through one of the most turbulent eras in Japan, when the country opened to trade with the West, the Tokugawa shoguns were overthrown, and the imperial house was restored to rule. Even against such a background, she stands out as a memorable character. After suffering the loss of two husbands and early death of three of her children, Ōtagaki Nobu found refuge in taking vows as a Buddhist nun, taking the name Rengetsu. She refused to seclude herself in a convent, however, and from her cottage on the western outskirts of Kyoto, she supported herself by selling her pottery and calligraphy. A celebrity in her own time, she is fondly remembered to this day.

Here, she juxtaposes a humorous sketch and verse. The fellow jogging toward us is a low-ranking samurai tasked with clearing the road ahead of his lord’s procession.

furi-tateshi
mameshi kokoro no
hitosuji ni
koyuru ka imo ni
ausaka no seki

As if raising and lowering
his true heart like a standard
in one line
will he pass through to meet his love
beyond the Barrier of Meeting Hill?

— Translation by Joshua Mostow
This elegant poem card brings together three famous names: the monk Shōkadō, considered one of the greatest calligraphers of his time; the artist Sōtatsu, who invented a new style of decorative painting; and the poet Hitomaro (active late 7th/early 8th century), revered as the saint of poetry.

The early seventeenth century witnessed a revival of classical court culture, of which waka poetry was an essential part. The new fashion of the day was for bold calligraphy brushed on elegant papers decorated with pictorial and abstract designs. Here, Sōtatsu’s bellflowers appear matte black and partly obscure the calligraphy, but they were originally a luminous silver.

Kakinomoto no Hitomaro

*hono-bono to*  
Faintly, faintly

*akashi no ura no*  
through the morning mist

*asa-giri ni*  
in the bay of Akashi.

*shima-gakure yuku*  
my thoughts follow the boat

*fune wo shi zo omou*  
that becomes island-hidden.

— Translation by Joshua Mostow
3–5. 土佐派 歌仙三幅対
中央：土佐光起 人麻呂像
右：土佐光成 伊勢像
左：土佐光高 小町像

Triptych of Poet Portraits
Center: Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691), Hitomaro
Right: Tosa Mitsunari (1647–1710), Ise
Left: Tosa Mitsutaka (1675–1710), Komachi
1691
Three hanging scrolls; ink, color, and gold or silver on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

In this triptych, Tosa Mitsuoki proclaims his place, and that of his son Mitsunari and grandson Mitsutaka, as the rightful heirs of a distinguished tradition of poet portraiture. At the center is the seventh-century poet Hitomaro, who was worshipped as the sage of poetry. He is flanked by the two finest women poets of the ninth century, Ise on the right and Ono no Komachi on the left.

Hitomaro sits on the ground, leaning on an armrest. With a brush in his right hand and paper in his left, he appears to be contemplating his next verse. He wears robes of soft silk, with billowing trousers. This imagery can be traced back directly to a twelfth-century original that was used in Hitomaro Veneration Ceremonies, where a portrait of the poet was hung before a table of offerings of flowers and fruit, while gathered poets recited their verses. What Mitsuoki has added to the traditional iconography is the landscape in the upper part of the painting. In pale ink, he depicts a pine-covered island and two boats, a reference to Hitomaro’s “Faintly, faintly” verse seen in Shōkadō Shōjō’s calligraphy, at right.
6. 木村武山 明石浦図
Kimura Buzan (1876–1942)
Akashi Bay
1901
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Rather than emulate the traditional portrait of Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, seen in Tosa Mitsuoki’s painting at right, Buzan recreates the scene of Hitomaro’s famous verse, when the poet watches a boat disappear beyond islands in Akashi Bay.

Buzan’s minimalist approach is an example of an experimental technique known as mōrōtai (vague style) that was briefly popular among painters at the Japan Art Institute in Tokyo. With his classical subject and his radically new approach, Buzan brilliantly brings poetic imagination into the twentieth century.
7. 作者不詳 (伝藤原定頼) 大江切本古今和歌集
Calligrapher unknown; traditionally attributed to Fujiwara no
Sadayori (995–1045)
Ōegire Section of the Kokin waka shū
Early 12th century
Manuscript fragment mounted as a hanging scroll; ink on mica-flecked paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

A unique aspect of Japanese culture, and perhaps the most objective measure of the
importance of poetry down through the centuries, is the fact that there are twenty-one
imperial anthologies of waka, Japanese poems of thirty-one syllables. This work is a leaf from
one of the earliest extant manuscripts of the Kokin waka shū, compiled in 905 as the first
imperial anthology. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it became popular for groups of
courtiers to copy poetry texts on beautifully decorated papers for special occasions, such as an
imperial wedding.
This page has two poems as well as some prefatory text. The first verse, a love poem, reads,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{natsubiki no} & \quad \text{Though rumors flourish—} \\
\text{tebiki no ito wo} & \quad \text{recurring time after time,} \\
\text{kurikaeshi} & \quad \text{spinning out like thread,} \\
\text{koto shigeku tomo} & \quad \text{like summer-spun, hand-spun} \\
\text{taemu to omou na} & \quad \text{do not think of ending it}
\end{align*}
\]

—Translation by Helen Craig McCullough
8a. 絵：作者不詳 書：伝良純入道親王
源氏物語：末摘花
Artist unknown
Calligraphy attributed to Ryōjun, the Imperial Prince Novice (1604–1669)
The Safflower, from The Tale of Genji
Mid-17th century
Album leaf mounted as a hanging scroll; ink, color, gold, and silver on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Written in the early eleventh century, The Tale of Genji is the world’s oldest novel. Its fifty-four chapters span the lives of two generations of courtiers. Although a work of prose, the novel frequently includes waka verse as dialogue at moments of emotional poignancy. In the early thirteenth century, an influential critic declared that no one should attempt to compose poetry without knowing Genji, and countless generations have treasured this tale ever since.

From the fifteenth century onward, accordion-fold albums became popular, with one poem and one painting for each chapter. As in this example, these were often collaborations between professional painters and aristocratic calligraphers.

This text and image are from Chapter 6, “Suetsumuhana” (The Safflower). The title is the uncomplimentary nickname for one of Genji’s lovers, a woman with a long, red nose. Here, Genji visits her at night. In a convention unique to Japanese painting, we look down at the scene from an elevated viewpoint and the roof has been removed, allowing us to see not only Genji on the veranda, but also the lady and her maid inside.

This is the first of three works from the same Genji album in the Cowles Collection and will be shown from October 13 through November 11, 2018. The other two will be shown in rotation during this exhibition.
8b.  絵：作者不詳  書：伝良純入道親王
源氏物語：絵合（絵）と関屋（文）

Artist unknown
Calligraphy attributed to Ryōjun, the Imperial Prince Novice (1604–1669)
The Picture Contest (painting) and The Gatehouse (text), from The Tale of Genji
Mid-17th century
Album leaf mounted as a hanging scroll; ink, color, and gold on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Written in the early eleventh century, The Tale of Genji is the world’s oldest novel. Although a work of prose, the novel frequently includes waka verse as dialogue at moments of emotional poignancy. In the early thirteenth century, an influential critic declared that no one should attempt to compose poetry without knowing Genji, and countless generations have treasured this tale ever since.

From the fifteenth century onward, accordion-fold albums became popular, with one poem and one painting for each chapter. As in this example, these were often collaborations between professional painters and aristocratic calligraphers.

In this scroll, the text from Chapter 16, “Sekiya” (The Gatehouse) has been combined with the painting from Chapter 17, “E-awase” (The Picture Contest).

In a convention unique to Japanese painting, we look down at the scene from an elevated viewpoint and the roof has been removed, allowing us privileged access to activities taking place indoors. Through green blinds, we glimpse several ladies-in-waiting, some of whom are looking at paintings, while at the upper right, we see three women of high rank, each surrounded by privacy curtains.

This is the second of three works from the same Genji album in the Cowles collection and will be shown from November 13 through December 16, 2018. The other two will be shown in rotation during this exhibition.
8c. 絵：作者不詳 書：伝良純入道親王
源氏物語：薄雲
Artist unknown
Calligraphy attributed to Ryōjun, the Imperial Prince Novice (1604–1669)
Wisps of Cloud, from The Tale of Genji
Mid-17th century
Album leaf mounted as a hanging scroll; ink, color, and gold on paper

Written in the early eleventh century, The Tale of Genji is the world’s oldest novel. Its fifty-four chapters span the lives of two generations of courtiers. Although a work of prose, the novel frequently includes waka verse as dialogue at moments of emotional poignancy. In the early thirteenth century, an influential critic declared that no one should attempt to compose poetry without knowing Genji, and countless generations have treasured this tale ever since.

From the fifteenth century onward, accordion-fold albums became popular, with one poem and one painting for each chapter. As in this example, these were often collaborations between professional painters and aristocratic calligraphers.

This text and image are from Chapter 19, “Usugumo” (Wisps of Cloud). In a convention unique to Japanese painting, we look down at the scene from an elevated viewpoint and the roof has been removed, granting us privileged access to activities taking place indoors. Genji has been visiting his principal wife, Murasaki, seen at right in an elevated chamber. As he turns to depart, their daughter clings to his trousers.

This is the third of three works from the same Genji album in the Cowles collection and will be shown from December 18, 2018 through January 13, 2019. The other two will be shown in rotation during this exhibition.
Poetic Imagination in Japanese Art: Selections from the Mary and Cheney Cowles Collection
Not for publication

9. 作者不詳 時代不同歌合絵巻断簡：
    清慎公・崇徳院

Artist unknown
Illustrated Competition between Poets of Different Eras:
Lord Seishin and Retired Emperor Sutoku
Mid-13th/early 14th century
Handsroll fragment mounted as a hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Poetry competitions have been popular in Japan since at least the ninth century. Many famous contests were recorded in literature, and in time some authors began using them as a way to organize literary anthologies. Among the most famous of these was a text compiled by Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239), in which he pitted one hundred historical poets against one another in an imaginary contest.

Not long after Gotoba completed his text, illustrated versions began to appear. This painting, a fragment of a handsroll, is one of the earliest extant examples. It depicts, at right, poet and statesman Fujiwara no Saneyori (900–970), identified by his posthumous name, Lord Seishin; and at left, Retired Emperor Sutoku (1119–1164). The text above the figures records their poems in three matches.

The painter’s exceptional skill is evident in the poses of the figures, which suggest two very different personalities: the emperor, at left, is confident and relaxed, fully occupying his allotted space, while Saneyori, at right, hunches his shoulders and seems to squirm uncomfortably. Their faces are rendered with restraint and sensibility, conveying an inner intelligence.
Iwasa Matabei is known as a master of caricature, and his favorite subject was figures from classical literature. These two imaginary portraits are sections of a handscroll depicting poets from a famous eleventh-century anthology, *Selection of Thirty-Six Poets*. Archbishop Henjō (816–890) is shown as a wrinkled old man—a humorous contrast to his poem, a love song from his youth. The courtier Ki no Tomonori (845?–907) seems to be dozing off while reciting his verse, another love poem.
12. 後陽成院・他十一名 和歌色紙帖
Retired Emperor Goyōzei (1571–1617) and Eleven Others
Waka Album
Early 17th century
Album of twelve double leaves; ink on gold- and silver-decorated paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Emperor Goyōzei (1571–1617, reigned 1586–1611) lived through a perilous era when the political and economic status of the imperial house was dependent on the whims of powerful warlords. Their cultural prestige remained undiminished, however. In this exquisite album, Goyōzei and eleven other courtiers flaunt their authority by displaying their knowledge of classical waka poetry and calligraphy styles. Each contributor selected two poems from traditional anthologies and wrote them out in bold calligraphy on elegantly decorated papers.

Looking Inside the Waka Album [text for video showing all pages of the album]
The extravagantly decorated album of calligraphy on display in the adjacent case is a collaborative project between the Emperor Goyōzei and eleven other aristocrats, including his younger brother and two of his sons. Each of them wrote two poems, savoring the opportunity to display their calligraphic skills.

Each double page of the album features a different design. Delicate clusters of bamboo or pine trees, or seasonal flowers such as plum blossoms, bellflowers, and chrysanthemums appear nestled among gently rolling hills, all painted in ink, gold, or silver. Sprinkled pieces of metallic foil, in sizes ranging from a fine powder to large, irregular shapes, complement these natural forms and gives the whole a strikingly modern appearance.

The high status of the calligraphers and the luxurious materials suggest that this album may have been made for a wealthy and powerful patron.
13. 絵: 作者不詳　書: 伝万里小路藤房　藤房本三十六歌仙絵巻断簡：斎宮女御
Artist unknown
Calligrapher unknown; traditionally attributed to
Madenokōji Fujifusa (1295/6–?)
Fujifusa Version of the Thirty-Six Poetic Immortals:
Saigū no Nyōgo
First half of the 15th century
Handscroll fragment mounted as a hanging scroll; ink and color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The Thirty-Six Poetic Immortals are those named by Fujiwara no Kintō (966–1041) in a famous anthology, Selection of Thirty-Six Poets, in which he celebrates writers active from the eighth century through his own time. Pictorial versions of Kintō’s poets have been popular in Japanese painting for centuries. This section from a dispersed handscroll presents an imaginary portrait of Saigū no Nyōgo (929–985), an imperial princess, in a flirtatious pose.

The lengthy text provides a capsule biography and one of the lady’s poems:

Junior Fourth Rank, Upper [Grade]

[Active during the reigns of] Suzaku, Murakami, Reizei, En’yū, and Kazan.

Koto no ne ni
mine no matsukaze
kayou rashı
izureno wo yori
shirabesomekemu

In the sound of the koto, it seems the wind passes through the pines on the peak. Where are those taut strings that give rise to this sweet melody?

—Translation adapted from Laurel Rasplica Rodd
The Suō Handmaid (Suō no Naishi) is the title of Taira no Chūshi (1037–1109/1111), a woman who served at court during the reigns of four emperors. She often participated in poetry contests, and her verses appear in multiple imperial waka anthologies. Here, she is portrayed in formal court dress posed against the triple peaks of Mount Mikasa, a sacred site in the ancient capital of Nara. The artist, Mitsuoki, was head of the court painting bureau, and the calligrapher an imperial prince.

伊か者か梨神裳
う禮し登ミか左山
万津乃
千世農
二葉能
ごろし
越

イカバカリ
kami mo ureshi to
Mikasayama
futura no matsu no
chiyo no keshiki wo

How very glad
the gods must be
at Mikasayama
to see the pine seedling —
The scenery of a thousand years!
15. 絵：作者不詳 書：伝藻塩
遊女藻塩読書図

Artist unknown
Calligraphy attributed to Moshio (active ca. 1655–1660)
Courtesan Moshio Reading a Book
About 1655/60
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

While the other poets portrayed in this gallery were members of the aristocracy, Moshio was a courtesan of Kyoto’s famed Shimabara brothel district. This work is a rare example of a portrait of a living poet; more remarkably, the subject is also the calligrapher.

An unknown artist portrays Moshio reading by lamplight, a clue to her character and education. Her inscription, in confident, sweeping curves, emphasizes all the more that she was a woman of erudition, taste, and refinement.

*Nushi ya tare
minu yo no iro wo
utsushite mo
fude no susabi ni
kayou omokage*

Who are you, my lady?
Sketched with playful brush
your visage resembles
someone I once knew
in an age long past
Moshio

— Translation by John Carpenter
16. 作者不詳 菅原道真大宰府行き
Artist unknown
Sugawara no Michizane Traveling to Dazaifu
17th century
Six-panel screen; ink and color on gold-leafed paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Scholar, statesman, and poet, Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) is one of those characters in Japanese history who is most revered for having been wronged. Framed by his political rivals, he was forced into exile, where he died protesting his innocence. His posthumous career was far more successful: after his vengeful spirit was blamed for floods, lightning, and a plague, the court restored his rank and office and built a memorial shrine, Kitano Tenjin, where he is still worshipped as the god of learning. In this screen, we see Michizane bidding farewell to the emperor at upper right, and his journey by ox-drawn carriage into exile. A boat awaits him in the offing.

17. 佐賀県有田柿右衛門窯 菊紋八角花瓶
Kakiemon kiln, Arita, Saga Prefecture, Japan
Octagonal Bottle with Chrysanthemum, Plum, and Bamboo Design
1670s/1690s
Porcelain with painted overglaze enamel and gilded decoration
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The Kakiemon kiln in Arita was the first in Japan to master the difficult use of overglaze enamels to produce colors other than cobalt blue—especially a clear, strawberry red. Here, that red is judiciously combined with a clear green and underglaze blue. The delicate brushwork and large areas of negative space are typical of early Kakiemon designs.
Kawahigashi Hekigotō (1873–1937)
“Arranging a Flowering Cherry” and Five Other Poems
1929
Pair of two-panel screens; ink on gold-leafed paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Kawahigashi Hekigotō began his writing career as a poet of haiku, but he freed himself from composing traditional stanzas in favor of the new freestyle poetry that came into vogue in the early twentieth century. The same sense of play that animates his verse is found in his calligraphy, where he lines up deconstructed characters in crooked columns, defying expectations. He detested technical finesse and professionalism in calligraphy, creating his own style and standards instead. Here, he has transcribed six poems—five of his own composition, in Japanese, and a Chinese verse by Su Shi (1037–1101).

The first poem, brushed along the right edge of the right screen, reads:

Sakura iketa
hana kuzu no naka kara
hito eda hirou

I arranged a branch of blossoming cherry picked up from fallen ones.

— Translation by Sadako Ohki

Hekigotō is one of many avant-garde calligraphers in the Cowles Collection.
II. INK PAINTING AND THE ZEN MILIEU

Buddhism first arrived in Japan in the sixth century as part of continental culture. By the mid-eighteenth century, the time of the exquisite sutra fragment in the exhibition, the Japanese court had modeled itself on the example of Tang dynasty (618–907) China, with an emperor at the head of a centralized state. Since then, down to the late nineteenth century, Chinese or a hybrid form of Sino-Japanese has been the language of government and religion, the elite male spheres of power.

Zen, a sect of Buddhism that originated in China, places emphasis on personal discipline, the practice of meditation, and an intuitive transmission from master to disciple. Early Zen texts recount the lives of sages who lived in remote retreats, defying convention and logic as they sought a spiritual breakthrough. By the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), however, Chinese Zen had become part of a sophisticated, cosmopolitan culture, with monks and courtiers mingling in congenial circles. It was this version of Zen—deeply engaged in philosophy, poetry, and painting—that was transmitted to Japan.

During the Kamakura (1185–1333) and Muromachi (1333–1573) periods, the great Zen monasteries in Japan became centers of Chinese learning under the patronage of the military class. Monks and their lay patrons alike studied not only religious texts but also a broad curriculum of Chinese history and literature, all while savoring whipped green tea and connoisseurship of imported calligraphy, painting, and luxury objects.

Calligraphy became increasingly important in the Zen context, as high-ranking monks often wrote out pithy aphorisms as part of their daily practice. These calligraphies were greatly prized as tangible embodiments of the monk’s exalted spiritual status. The works on view in this gallery include calligraphies by some of Japan’s most famous Zen masters: Ikkyū, Ryōkan, and Hakuin.

Monochrome ink painting, inspired by imported Southern Song models, was initially taken up by monks, as seen here in the works of Motsurin Jōtō and Sesson. Later, it was adopted by professional painters, especially members of the hereditary Kano school and others in the employ of the military aristocracy. Ink painting, like calligraphy, is an art of gesture. We can sense the movement of the brush and the artist’s hand, prompting our bodies to subconsciously, kinesthetically recreate the painting process. Our minds are drawn to respond as well, given that the monochrome medium, by its very nature, hovers at a coy distance of suggestion: it is up to us to complete the image with color and detail.
19. 東大寺写経団 華厳経断
簡：二月堂焼経
Tōdaiji Scriptorium
Fragment of the
Flower Garland Sutra:
The Nigatsudō Burnt Sutra
744
Handscroll fragment mounted as a hanging scroll; silver ink on indigo-dyed paper
Mounting by Sugimoto Hiroshi 杉本博司 (born 1948)
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

This fragment was created as part of a set of sixty scrolls of the Flower Garland Sutra (J. Kegon-kyō). With its eloquent descriptions of a radiant, mystical universe presided over by the cosmic Buddha Vairocana, this influential text inspired massive architectural and sculptural monuments throughout Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries. Among them was Tōdaiji in Nara, Japan, established in the 740s as the headquarters for a countrywide system of Buddhist monasteries and convents.

The Tōdaiji Flower Garland Sutra scrolls were created for use in periodic rituals held in the temple’s Nigatsudō (Second Month Hall). In 1667, a fire badly damaged the set, leaving only twenty scrolls in fragmentary condition. Surviving portions, now known as the Nigatsudō Burned Sutras, are divided among Tōdaiji and museums and private collections in Japan; only a few fragments have found their way to North America.

The Nigatsudō Burned Sutras are the earliest Japanese religious texts to be executed in deluxe materials. The paper was dyed indigo blue and the text written in ink made from pure silver. The extravagance of the materials and the solemn, measured calligraphy fit the sacred nature of the text. The ragged, scorched lower edge of the scroll has turned a rusty red, eerily evoking the heat of the flames. Here, a mounting by contemporary artist Sugimoto Hiroshi further enhances the beauty of the burned paper.
20. 渡部秋彦 窯変米色香炉
Watanabe Akihiko (born 1959)
Celadon Censer
2014
Porcelaneous stoneware with crackled celadon glaze
Portland Art Museum, Gift of Mary and Cheney Cowles, 2014.178.3

Like many contemporary Japanese potters, Watanabe Akihiko is inspired by classical Chinese ceramics of the Song dynasty (10th–13th centuries). He is renowned for the type of glaze seen here, celadon with a beautiful “cracked ice” pattern in a rosy brown. The harmony between the angularity of the glaze pattern and the curvilinear shape of the vessel is especially beautiful.
21. 一休宗純 鳥窠白居易問答語
Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481)
Bai Juyi Questions Zen Master Bird Nest
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The Zen monk Ikkyū was known for his wild behavior: he drank too much, he criticized other monks, and he had a lover. Nevertheless, he rose to be head of a major monastery and had a major impact on Japanese Zen.

The ferocity of the brushstrokes in this calligraphy, with the extreme variation in the size of the characters, reveals the eccentricity of this truly exceptional man. The text is not an original verse by Ikkyū but a well-known dialogue between Bai Juyi (772–846), a Chinese poet, and Master Bird Nest (741–824), a hermit-monk whose nickname reveals his fondness for meditating while sitting high in the branches of a tree. Bai Juyi asked Master Bird Nest, “What is the essence of Buddhism?”

Bird Nest answered, “To refrain from all evil and practice all that is good.”
Bai said: “Even a three-year-old understands that much!” to which Bird Nest replied, “A three-year-old child is able to say it correctly, but even an old man of eighty cannot do it.”
Bai Juyi offered his thanks and withdrew.

— Translation by Jonathan Chaves
22. 費隠通容 參禪參到獨知時

Feiyin Tongrong (Chinese, 1593–1661)
Poem on Zen Meditation
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Chinese Zen master Feiyin Tongrong (1593–1661, known in Japanese as Hi'in Tsūyō) is especially revered in Japan: it was his disciple Yinyuan Longqi who came to Japan to found a new school of Buddhism, the Ōbaku Zen sect. Headquartered at Manpukuji in Uji, south of Kyoto, Ōbaku Zen introduced not only new religious practices, but also a wide range of cultural and artistic trends from Ming dynasty (1368–1644) China.

Several of Feiyin’s calligraphic works made their way to Japan in the mid-seventeenth century, where they quickly won fame among Sinophile intellectuals in the Kansai area. This vigorous writing in grass script from his hand is characteristic of late Ming trends in calligraphy.

I’ve practiced Zen up to the point
where in myself I get it;
Now understood in clarity,
to whom might I pass it on?
All I see is this autumn moon,
filling the whole of heaven,
A single wheel effulgent
illuminating the stream out front.

Written by Old Monk Rong, the thirty-first abbot of the Linji [lineage] at Jingshan.

— Translation by Jonathan Chaves
Like Ikkyū (whose calligraphy is in this case, to the left), Ryōkan was also a Zen monk, but one with a very different temperament. While Ikkyū’s career was controversial, Ryōkan chose to live the quiet life of a hermit in a remote part of northern Japan. He supported himself by begging for food in the nearby town, winning the affection of the people by his unaffected and warm manner. Despite his lack of ambition, he became famous for his poetry in Chinese and Japanese and his distinctive calligraphy. These verses, written in cursive script with a dry brush, convey his self-effacing personality.

At right: *The Grass Hut*

Shouldeing wood, I descend the western ridge:
Along the western ridge, the path not smooth!
At times I rest beneath the towering pines,
In stillness, I hear the songs of mountain birds.

Written by Ryōkan

— Translation by Jonathan Chaves

At left: *The Wanderer’s Life*

Yesterday, I went out of the town
Begging food to the west and to the east.
My shoulders gaunt, I felt the bag’s weight;
My clothes unlined, sensed thickness of the frost.
Old friends? Where had they all gone?
New ones? Met so few of them!
And when I came to the place of “Joyous Ritual,”
Pines and cedars swayed in harsh, sad winds.

— Translation by Jonathan Chaves
24. 白隠慧鶴 孝
Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768)
Filial Piety
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Hakuin Ekaku, the most famous Zen master of Edo-period Japan, made use of calligraphy and ink painting as effective tools for teaching fundamentals of Buddhism to a wide audience. His message was often tinged with Confucian morality, as is the case here: the character for Filial Piety fills the upper half of the scroll, as though its very size could jolt the viewer into an elevated state of awareness. Hakuin chose to write in a readily legible script, with rounded brushwork and saturated ink that pools in variegated tones.

Filial Piety:
Nothing is more filial than helping your father and mother enter the coming life as they please.

— Translation by Sadako Ohki
25. 作者不詳 (伝可翁) 牧童図
Artist unknown; traditionally attributed to Kaō (died 1345)
Herdboys and Buffaloes
15th/16th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Kaō, to whom this work has been attributed, was one of the first Japanese painters to work in Chinese monochrome ink styles; both the style and the subject of this painting were inspired by Chinese models. The spare use of ink wash, so pale that it seems to disappear, is associated with Zen teachings about the elusive nature of reality: Is there ink there, on the surface of the paper, or not? Are the herdboys and buffaloes real, or simply figments of the imagination?

26. 作者不詳 (伝周文) 竹林閑居図
Artist unknown; traditionally attributed to Shūbun (15th century)
Quiet Residence in a Bamboo Grove
About 1450
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The composition of this work suggests that we are looking through a tall, narrow window at a vast landscape. In this imaginary evocation of a scene in southern China, with lush bamboo and towering peaks, it is evening, when the mist rises from the lake to almost obscure the mountains on the far shore. Inside the foreground cottage, a man sits, and we follow his gaze across the water. He is surely a poet, contemplating his next verse. Put yourself in the picture: what poem would you write?
27. 沒倫紹等 葡萄図
Motsurin Jōtō (died ca. 1492)
Grapes
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Motsurin Jōtō, who also used the name Bokusai, was among the closest disciples of Ikkyū, a Zen master whose calligraphy is on view nearby. He did ink painting as a pastime. Grapes, his subject here, were a favorite subject of ink painters because their forms are so well suited to the medium. For each component, the handling of the ink and the gesture of the brush lets the painter show his particular skills.

Motsurin himself inscribed the Chinese quatrain on the painting. The verse is based on the myth of a black pearl guarded by a dragon under the sea. The poet awakes from a dream to find that the dragon’s pearls have become a cluster of grapes.

Intoxicated, I fall into the eastern sea
And grab a handful of old dragon’s whiskers!
Sobering up, no time to inspect them—
There they are: black pearls dangling from my belt!

— Translation by Jonathan Chaves

Contrary to usual practice, Motsurin wrote his columns of text from left to right (as transcribed above), rather than right to left.
28. 祖栄  白鷺図
Soei (early 16th century)
White Egrets
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

In Chinese poetry, the egret represents purity, as its feathers remain unsoiled even though it wades through muddy ponds seeking its dinner. Ink painters in East Asia loved the challenge of painting this bird, because its body is created by applying ink washes around an area of unpainted paper or silk.

Little is known about Soei, whose seal appears on this scroll and several other paintings of egrets. Since his style resembles that of the sixteenth-century monk-painter Sesson (see the painting of the Chinese immortal, on view nearby) who was active in eastern Japan, Soei is believed to have been active in this region as well.
29. 絵：作者不詳 書：良尚入道親王 兼好法師
Artist unknown
Ryōshō, the Imperial Prince Novice (1623–1693), calligraphy
Dharma Master Kenkō
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The text inscribed on this portrait of the monk Kenkō (ca. 1283–ca. 1352) is an excerpt from his *Essays in Idleness*, a literary work well known to Western audiences through many translations. In this passage, Kenkō celebrates the pleasure of reading as a way to reach across the centuries to authors of the distant past. This intimate sketch, *rapidly executed in fluid, confident ink lines*, seems to fit the abbreviated astringency of Kenkō’s writings. The artist is unidentified, but the calligraphy is by Ryōshō, an imperial prince who became a Buddhist monk, a common career choice for superfluous princes.

_Hitori tomoshibi no moto ni / fumi o hirogete / minu yo no hito o / tomo to suru koso / koyonō nagusamu / waza / naru_

Sitting alone in the lamplight, with a book spread out before you, making friends with people of a distant past you have never known: an incomparable comfort!
30. 斎藤等室 樓閣山水図
Saitō Tōshitsu (died 1668?)
Landscape with Pavilions
Six-panel folding screen; ink, light color, and gold on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

This folding screen is from a pair that Saitō Tōshitsu painted of the four seasons. The right, which would have shown spring and summer scenery, has been lost; in this, the left, withered reeds and geese symbolize autumn, while the snow-covered mountains represent winter. This combining of seasons into one picture is often found in Japanese painting.

The second-generation head of the Saitō family of painters, Tōshitsu was active in what is today the city of Iwakuni, on Japan’s Inland Sea. His style was modeled on that of the great fifteenth-century painter Sesshū.

31. 雪村 費長房図
Sesson (1504–1589?)
The Chinese Immortal Fei Zhangfang
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

At the upper left, perched precariously on a cliff, sits Fei Zhangfang, a Chinese immortal who carried a magical bamboo staff that would turn into a dragon when thrown into a certain lake. Here he has just flung down the staff, and in response, the head of a whiskered dragon rises out of turbulent waves. A waterfall spurts forth from a cleft in the rocks, arcing down to welcome the dragon.

Sesson was a Zen monk-painter at a time when all of Japan was immersed in civil war. He spent his entire career in the eastern part of the country, roaming far from the capital, and painted scenes inflected with his own unique humor. This painting offers a glimpse of his warm personality.
32. 深江蘆舟 牡丹図  
Fukae Roshū (1699–1757)  
Peonies  
Panel of a folding screen remounted as a hanging scroll; ink, color, and gold on paper  
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles  

The details of Fukae Roshū’s life are unknown, other than that he modeled his style on that of late sixteenth-century artist Sōtatsu. (In this exhibition, Sōtatsu did the underpainting for a calligraphic work by Shōkadō—see the neighboring gallery.) For his time, Roshū’s style is a bit old-fashioned, with a charming, unaffected quality.

Peonies is included among the ink paintings in the exhibition because Roshū draws on ink painting techniques: mottled washes are created here in gradations of mineral pigments rather than in shades of gray and black, overlapping and blending together to evoke pictorial depth and emotion.

33. 作者不詳 (伝雪舟) 山水図  
Artist unknown; traditionally attributed to Sesshū (1420–1506)  
Landscape  
About 1550  
Hanging scroll; ink on silk  
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles  

Japan’s most famous ink painter, Sesshū trained to be a Zen monk and painter at a monastery in Kyoto. In his mid-thirties he moved to western Japan to serve under a daimyo who had become wealthy from trade with China. In 1465, Sesshū joined a diplomatic mission to the continent and stayed for three years, studying ink painting at the source of the tradition. At a time when his peers modeled their work after imported paintings of an earlier period, Sesshū embraced the contemporary Chinese trend toward more dramatic compositions and bolder brushwork. While not a work by Sesshū himself, this painting closely conforms to his style.
34. 岩佐又兵衛 瀟湘八景図
Iwasa Matabei (1578–1650)
Eight Views of Xiaoxiang
Pair of hanging scrolls; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

A popular theme in Chinese painting, Eight Views of Xiaoxiang was taken up by Japanese artists from the fifteenth century onward. Although Xiaoxiang refers to a specific place, painters in both China and Japan were more concerned with evoking the poetic moods of the titles of the works than in depicting a particular topography. Here Iwasa Matabei uses pale ink washes to create landscapes of haunting stillness. At right, a full moon hovers over a mist-shrouded mountain; at left, the white of the snow-covered pines and peaks blends imperceptibly with the white of the icy waterfall, creating the impression that the entire land mass is suspended, weightless, in the chill winter air. The overall effect is a magical, quiet lyricism.

In Matabei’s configuration, the Eight Views are arranged as follows, from top to bottom:

Right scroll:
- Autumn Moon over Lake Dongting
- Evening Bell from a Mist-Shrouded Temple
- Mountain Market in Clearing Mist
- Fishing Village in Evening Glow

Left scroll:
- River and Sky in Evening Snow
- Wild Geese Descending to a Sandbar
- Sails Returning from a Distant Shore
- Night Rain on the Xiao and Xiang Rivers
35. 狩野探幽 山水図
Kano Tan’yū (1602–1674)
Landscape
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

One of the most prolific and talented artists of the early Edo period (1615–1868), Tan’yū led the Kano school workshop in Edo and enjoyed the direct patronage of the Tokugawa shoguns. An astute student of the past, he absorbed a wide range of stylistic precedents to create a distinctive synthesis that would become the foundation for successive generations of Kano artists. Here he draws on Sesshū, but subdues the Muromachi master’s roughness and vigor, transforming it into something elegant and lovely. One notices immediately the wide areas of open space, a signature aspect of Tan’yū’s style.

In ink painting, unpainted areas are not empty space; the lack of brushwork and ink is not an indication of absence, but rather of portentous presence. Through suggestion rather than definition, the painter invites the viewer to complete the image. The ambiguity of space is the key to the serene refinement of this painting.

One more delight in paintings such as this is in recognizing and identifying certain details. Motifs representing the Eight Views of Xiaoxiang, seen in Iwasa Matabei’s pair of scrolls on view at left, are here as well, set like jewels into the landscape. Look closely to see if you can find the Mountain Market, Sails Returning from a Distant Shore, the Fishing Village, or the Mist-Shrouded Temple, for example. One senses Tan’yū’s wit in his inclusion of these pictorial clues, as though inviting us to play “find the eight views.” The artist clearly expected his audience to be familiar with a tradition of ink painting stretching back to twelfth-century China.
36. 狩野伊川院栄信 岳陽楼図
Kano Isen’in Naganobu (1775–1828)
Yueyang Tower
1823
Pair of hanging scrolls; ink, color, gold, and other metallic pigments on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Born eight generations after Kano Tan’yū, Naganobu illustrates the remarkable longevity of the Kano school as the official painters to the Tokugawa shoguns, rulers of Japan between 1615 and 1868. Trained in his family workshop, Naganobu began painting at age ten, and by his thirties he was in high demand. He was known for creating pictorial compositions by knitting together motifs drawn from multiple Chinese models, an approach seen here, where he assembles Chinese architectural and landscape elements and narrative vignettes into imaginary views of the famous Yueyang Tower.

Located on the shore of Lake Dongting in southern China, Yueyang Tower had its origins as a military fortification in the first or second century. Over time, it became the site of battles as well as a destination for peaceful pleasures, and a frequent subject in poetry. Two well-known verses are:

*Climbing Yueyang Tower*

I’ve long heard of the waters of Lake Dongting,
Now at last I climb the Yueyang Tower.
Wu and Chu to east and south here split;
Heaven and Earth here day and night float on.
Relatives? Friends? Not one word from them;
Old and sick, I’ve just my lonely boat.
Horses of war come, north of the mountain passes:
I lean on the railing, tears flow on and on.

by Du Fu 杜甫 (Chinese, 712–770)

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves
Accompanying My Uncle the Vice Director on an Excursion to Lake Dongting: Three Poems Written Upon Becoming Intoxicated

Today, a banquet in the Bamboo Grove
   With sagely Vice Director of our clan!
Three cups sufficient—then this “Little Ruan”
   Drunk, becomes a wild and crazy guy!

Once aboard, we join in boating fun;
   At the heart of the lake, float homeward through moonlight.
White gulls, calm, don’t bother to take off,
   But strive to swoop athwart us as we drink.

As if planed smooth, Junshan Mountain is so fine!
   Rippling smoothly, Xiang River flows beyond.
At Baling, no limit to the wine:
   We’ve killed Lake Dongting’s autumn getting drunk!

by Li Bai 李白 (Chinese, 701–762)

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves
37. 岐阜県 鼠志野草芒文大鉢
Gifu Prefecture, Japan
Nezumi Shino Deep Bowl with Pampas Grass Design
Early 17th century
Stoneware with design incised through iron-rich clay slip; three low loop feet
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Shino ware emerged in the late sixteenth century, with the new vogue for tea ceremony wares. This exceptionally large bowl for sweets features bold, freehand drawing and small-scale, repeated ornamental motifs. Nezumi Shino (Mouse Shino) is made by a three-step process. First, the white clay body is coated with an iron slip. The design is scratched through, revealing the white body underneath, and then the entire piece is covered with a thick, translucent feldspathic white glaze. The white-on-iron fires to a beautiful, mottled gray.
III. LITERATI CULTURE

Literati painting is a concept borrowed from China where it referred to painting by well-to-do scholar-officials of the Song (960–1279) through Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. For men in this privileged class, painting was, like calligraphy and poetry, a form of self-cultivation and personal expression. These literati had a common heritage of centuries of Chinese poetry, history, and Confucian philosophy, and their paintings reflected the values of that tradition. They disparaged painting by professional artists done for the Chinese court, which tended toward decorative realism and bold compositions; instead, they favored brushwork that resembled calligraphy, simultaneously disciplined and individualized.

In Japan, knowledge of Chinese literati painting trickled in slowly. Émigré monks of the Ōbaku Zen sect, loyal to the Ming dynasty that had fallen to the Manchus in 1644, established a new head temple near Kyoto that became a magnet for Sinophile intellectuals in central Japan. The monks introduced Ming-style calligraphy (see the example by Feiyin Tongrong in the previous section), literati painting, and sencha (steeped tea) to an eager audience. Ike Taiga was especially close to the Ōbaku community. A second source of information about Chinese painting was printed books that provided models of motifs and brushwork for aspiring painters; their influence is evident in both Taiga’s work and that of his contemporary, Yosa Buson. Yet another point of contact was the port of Nagasaki, where the occasional visiting artist, calligrapher, or poet from China would soon be surrounded by Japanese pupils. Sō Shiseki and Tanomura Chikuden both spent time in Nagasaki studying with visiting Chinese. By the early nineteenth century, Japanese artists such as Yamamoto Baiitsu could benefit from access to newly formed private collections of Chinese painting. This wide diversity of sources fostered tremendous variety in Japanese literati painting during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Japanese artists who were drawn to literati painting differed from their Chinese counterparts in that few of them came from wealth. The majority were from low-ranking samurai families, a status that granted them an education in the Confucian classics, if not an income. Rai San’yō and Tanomura Chikuden, for example, were samurai who became respected scholars and historians in their home domains, but left to pursue artistic freedom—and because they needed to earn money by selling their artwork. Perhaps more importantly, Japanese literati artists found a much-needed intellectual and emotional home in closely knit circles of like-minded friends.
38. 与謝蕪村  寒山茆屋図
Yosa Buson (1716–1783)
Thatched Retreat on Cold Mountain
Early to mid-1770s
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Yosa Buson is known as a poet of haikai verse, short poems of seventeen syllables. But he is also one of the most revered painters of the eighteenth century, a time when urbanization and prosperity fueled a burst of creativity in the arts.

Buson’s paintings, like his poems, speak directly to the soul. His dense web of dry and wet brushwork, laid over modulated washes, creates realms of the imagination where we are invited to roam. Here, a recluse dwelling in a mountain cottage looks at us in welcome, with tea already on the table.
39. 山本梅逸 青緑蘭亭図
Yamamoto Baiitsu (1783–1856)
Orchid Pavilion in Blue and Green
1855
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

This complex composition by Yamamoto Baiitsu makes a fascinating comparison with Yosa Buson’s *Thatched Retreat on Cold Mountain*, on view nearby. While Buson drew inspiration from a variety of Chinese sources, his mature style was his own unique fusion. Baiitsu and his generation of artists were better informed about Chinese literati painting, through access to original works and theoretical treatises. That scholarly interest and his own fastidious personality inform this ambitious work, where the relationship to Chinese subjects and pictorial prototypes is much more direct.

Baiitsu’s subject is the Orchid Pavilion Gathering, an event that took place in southern China in 353 CE. Forty-some poets assembled to celebrate the Spring Purification Ceremony. Wine cups were floated down a stream and, whenever one stopped, the man closest to it had to drink the wine and compose a verse. The renowned poet Wang Xizhi (303–361), whose fluid calligraphy was said to be inspired by the movements of geese in the water, brushed a preface to the poems created on the occasion. Wang’s text became the most famous work of calligraphy in Chinese history, and the Orchid Pavilion Gathering has been cherished ever since, throughout East Asia, as an unsurpassed ritual of male bonding.

In this single composition, Baiitsu portrays Wang at his desk, gazing at geese; young boys setting wine cups in the stream; and the gathered poets, in various states of inebriation. As a bonus, he added a vignette of poet Mi Fu (1051–1107) inscribing calligraphy on a cliff.
40. 池大雅
高士隠居図巻
題：富岡鉄斎
Ike Taiga (1723–1776), painting
Tomioka Tessai (1837–1924), title
Scholar in Reclusion
About 1750
Handscroll; painting in ink and light color on paper; title in ink on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

One of the towering figures in the history of Japanese art, Ike Taiga played a key role in creating a Japanese literati painting tradition. His theme here is the classic Chinese ideal of reclusion, in which a gentleman of lofty character escapes the dusty world by retiring to the remote countryside, where he can welcome like-minded friends. We enter the handscroll at right to stroll along a riverbank, and soon arrive at a small bridge; on the far bank, a servant waits in welcome by a gate. Beyond a stand of trees, our host plays the qin, a Chinese zither especially associated with scholars. At the end of the scroll, Taiga inscribed a poem by the Chinese poet and calligrapher Wu Kuan (1435–1504). The final lines read,

A cool breeze fills my robe and sleeves,
I stand up, and play upon my qin:
Its tones are harmonious, expansive—
Their lingering resonance echoes all day long.

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves

Although this scroll was done when Taiga was in his twenties, it already reveals elements of his signature brushwork in the patterned treatment of foliage and the stark contrasts between pale and dark ink.

In 1901, this handscroll came into the hands of Tomioka Tessai, the leading literati painter of a much later era. Tessai so esteemed the painting that he added a title that claims,

It would take a thousand pieces of gold to get this painting. 沽金千著應圖此

Not content with that, he felt compelled to attach a lengthy encomium at the end. A second colophon by monk-artist Teiryō (1839–1910), dated 1902, is equally effusive.
41. 松村呉春 双鹿図
Matsumura Goshun (1752–1811)
Pair of Deer
Early 1780s
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

In Japanese poetry, deer are associated with autumn, and the stag’s call with parting from one’s beloved. Matsumura Goshun plays on that imagery in this lyrical landscape, where stag and doe take the place of poets enjoying the sound of a stream in a pine forest.

Goshun was the most capable of Yosa Buson’s pupils, and there are clear echoes of Buson’s style here. Comparison with the Buson landscape on view nearby shows that Goshun’s brushwork is more relaxed, especially in his use of long, ropey lines to define the ripples in the stream and the bark of the tree trunks.

42. 青木夙夜 池大雅富士十二景図四月模写
Version of the Fourth Month, from Ike Taiga’s Twelve Views of Fuji
1789
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Although most landscapes by Japanese literati artists are imaginary views of China, Mount Fuji was also a popular subject. Aoki Shukuya’s mentor, Ike Taiga—whose work is on view nearby—climbed the peak many times and painted it frequently. This painting is modeled on a famous work by Taiga, one of twelve compositions depicting the mountain at different times of the year. Fuji can be recognized immediately by its concave, symmetrical slopes. The blue-and-green foothills, separated by clouds above and the shoreline below, are dotted with clusters of blossoming peach trees.
43. 亀田鵬斎 観瀑図
Kameda Bōsai (1752–1826)
Viewing a Waterfall
About 1810
Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Kameda Bōsai studied both calligraphy and Confucian texts as a young man. By his mid-twenties he had opened his own school of Confucian studies and entered the sophisticated social world of poets, writers, and painters that was flourishing in the city of Edo. He was a self-taught painter, and his whimsical landscapes were much in demand. Here, we encounter a scholar by a waterfall. Science has shown that waterfalls generate negative ions, which relieve stress and boost energy, and this theme is often found in East Asian art. In Bosai’s hands, the impressionistic scene is rendered in rapidly brushed washes of gray, blue, and light rose.

Suddenly noticed: blue-green screen
and the Milky Way descending!
This river’s source I know for sure
is way up in the sky.
The Lord of Heaven takes
this Silver River’s tail in his hand,
And sprinkles it among these mountains
into a waterfall thousands of feet high.

Inscribed by Okoru*

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves

*Okoru is one of Bōsai’s many art names.
Tokuyama Gyokuran (1727/8–1784)

Old Plum, West Lake

Pair of six-panel screens; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Tokuyama Gyokuran is a rare example of a woman painter specializing in the literati style. Edo-period literati culture drew inspiration from China, and Chinese studies were always considered masculine. Although Gyokuran composed verse in Japanese, she had been trained since her youth in Chinese painting styles, an interest strengthened by her lifelong partnership with Ike Taiga (whose handscroll is on view nearby). Here she combines a gnarled old plum in full bloom in winter—a symbol of the fortitude of the quiet scholar—and a fanciful view of West Lake in Hangzhou, China. Gyokuran’s compositions are animated by a rhythmical repetition of rounded forms, and her brushwork is energetic yet light and playful.
45. 太田垣蓮月 徳利とぐい飲み各一対
Ōtagaki Rengetsu (1791–1875)
Pair of Sake Flasks and Cups
1869
Stoneware with incised decoration under ash glaze
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

In her late forties or early fifties, Rengetsu began to produce lovely, rustic ceramics for drinking tea and sake. Enormously popular in her own lifetime, these vessels combined pottery, poetry, and calligraphy written in her wire-thin, flowing script. Each work was handmade and unique, with poems at turns lightheartedly playful and achingly poignant. Here, on tiny cups and flasks known as tokkuri, verses were carved with a sharpened bamboo implement before firing.

古たぬき
酒もとむるや
雨の夜の
そのつれづれの
ささびなるらん
蓮月

Old Badger
asking for sake—
This is the pleasure
of leisure hours
on a rainy night.
Rengetsu

—Adapted from a translation by Kuniko Brown
46a. Rai San’yō  
Peonies of the Capital in the Spring Breeze  
About 1830
Hanging scroll; ink on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Like many well-educated samurai of the late Edo period (1615–1868), Rai San’yō spurned a career in government service to pursue a bohemian lifestyle. The son of a Confucian scholar and teacher, he moved to Kyoto in 1811 to open a small school. For the rest of his life, he was at the center of a lively group of thinkers, writers, and artists.

A historian, philosopher, and author of poetry in Chinese, San’yō also produced calligraphy that is admired by collectors in Japan and abroad for its decisive, forthright style. He wrote these lines of Chinese verse, praising a colleague’s painting of tree peonies, in response to a request from a friend:

Against spring winds along the river in the capital, I always shut my gate;  
Nor do I visit Yao-yellows and Wei-purples, to drink beside carved balustrades.  
But, autumn lamp illuminating half the wall, in my remote studio at night,  
I do expose the frosty silk to gaze at peonies.

— Translation by Jonathan Chaves

Yao and Wei were families in the ancient Chinese capital of Luoyang famous for their peony gardens. The meaning of San’yō’s verse is that he prefers gazing at peonies painted on silk, by lamplight, to strolling through a crowded garden during the day.
46b. 松村景文 牡丹図
Matsumura Keibun (1779–1843)
Peonies
About 1830
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Matsumura Keibun was the much younger brother of Goshun, whose painting of deer is on view nearby. By the time Keibun began to paint seriously, Goshun’s style had moved away from Buson’s lyrical brushwork toward a decorative realism that found a ready clientele among Kyoto’s aristocracy and merchants. Keibun’s own work tended to be more refined and to have an intellectual quality. Here, he enjoys combines “boneless” trunks with leaves fluidly outlined in bold, black ink, while the blossoms themselves are brilliantly rendered in washes of white and pink. Keibun and San’yō were contemporaries who moved in the same literati circles in Kyoto.
Like many other Japanese artists of the eighteenth century, Sō Shiseki turned for inspiration to the port of Nagasaki, where he had access to both imported Chinese paintings and an émigré Chinese teacher. He was drawn especially to a style of decorative naturalism rooted in the Chinese courtly tradition of bird-and-flower painting. Exotic birds and blossoms, depicted with carefully observed detail, are artfully arranged among more freely brushed foliage and rocks. Shiseki was a master of elegant compositions and brilliantly orchestrated color.

The son of a Kyoto teahouse owner, Aoki Mokubei was fascinated by Chinese antiquities from a young age. An encounter with an important Chinese manual on ceramics led him to take up pottery, especially wares for sencha (steeped tea). He also made paintings for his friends, a circle that included Rai San'yō and Tanomura Chikuden.

Mokubei’s rare paintings are cherished for their idiosyncratic brushwork as well as their warmth and humor. Recent research suggests that this scroll may be based on a model by Cheng Zhengkui (Chinese, 1604–1676), although Mokubei’s brushwork is freer and more animated.
49. 青木木米 染付盧同七句煎茶碗

Aoki Mokubei (1767–1833)

Sencha Cups incised with Lu Tong’s Poem Seven Cups of Tea
Porcelain with painted decoration in cobalt blue under transparent glaze; lacquered wood saucers with metal rims
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Aoki Mokubei, who painted the landscape scroll in the adjacent case, is more renowned for his ceramics than his painting. He was primarily self-taught, relying on a famous Chinese manual, *Explanation of Ceramics*. At his Kyoto kiln, he specialized in wares for *sencha*, the steeped tea popular among literati circles. These seven teacups have been handed down with their companion saucers and custom boxes.

The Chinese poet Lu Tong (790-835) was devoted to tea, and made it the subject of most his verses. Mokubei has numbered his teacups and inscribed excerpts from Lu Tong’s *Seven Bowls of Tea* 七碗詩:

一碗喉吻潤  
二碗破孤悶  
三碗搜枯腸  
惟有文字五千卷  
四碗發輕汗  
平生不平事盡向毛孔散  
五碗肌骨清  
六碗通仙靈  
七碗吃不得也  
唯覺兩腋習習清風生

The first bowl moistens my lips and throat;  
The second bowl breaks my loneliness;  
The third bowl searches my barren entrails but to find,  
Therein some five thousand scrolls;  
The fourth bowl raises a slight perspiration  
And all life’s inequities pass out through my pores;  
The fifth bowl purifies my flesh and bones;  
The sixth bowl calls me to the immortals.  
The seventh bowl could not be drunk,  
only the breath of the cool wind raises in my sleeves.

— Translation by Steven R. Jones
50. 渡辺崋山 夏山煙雨図
Watanabe Kazan (1793–1841)
Summer Mountains in Misty Rain
1837
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Watanabe Kazan is one of the most intriguing of the samurai scholar-painters of the nineteenth century. Impoverished for most of his life, he painted to earn a living. He introduced elements of Western-style realism into his penetrating portraits, a revolutionary idea in his time. This lovely landscape reveals a lesser known aspect of Kazan’s art: his profound understanding of the Chinese literati painting. The simplified, blurry forms of mountains and trees seen here, created with repeated short, horizontal dots of wet ink, derive from the “Mi” style associated with famous Chinese painters Mi Fu (1051–1107) and his son Mi Youren (1074–1153).

51. 田能村竹田 風雨渡江図
Tanomura Chikuden (1777–1835)
Crossing a River in Wind and Rain
1829
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

A low-ranking samurai of a domain in northern Kyushu, Tanomura Chikuden traveled often from his home province to Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo, winning patrons along the way. He made this painting for a friend in Osaka, who apparently asked for it several times before Chikuden obliged. The striking scenery was inspired by stormy weather the artist had experienced in Nagasaki two years earlier. The lengthy inscription in classical Chinese includes a poem by Jiang Yunge (1780–1833), a noted Chinese scholar and poet who tutored Chikuden and others in Chinese during his stay in Nagasaki.
52. 田能村竹田　碧山白雲図
Tanomura Chikuden (1777–1835)
Green Mountains, White Clouds
1832
Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The second son of a samurai physician, Tanomura Chikuden was recognized as a promising scholar at an early age. Commanded to compile a history of his home province, he traveled to Edo in 1801. The scholars and artists he met en route—including Uragami Gyokudō and Rai San’yō, whose works are on view nearby—became his lifelong friends and mentors.

Green Mountains, White Clouds is a superb example of Chikuden’s mature style, with its animated brushwork and his unique palette of vibrant blue-green, rosy pink, and taupe. As always with Chikuden, the subject is the joy of companionship.

The inscription, written in Chinese in archaic seal script, opens with two lines from a famous verse by Chinese poet Li Bai (701–762); it then explains that this painting was done for a friend:

> You ask me, for what reason
> I reside in azure mountains?
> I smile, and do not answer
> my heart entirely at peace.

> Master Ryō has asked me to do a painting for him for three years now. I have done this one to present to him, unable to satisfy fully the solemnity of his wait and the intensity of his hopes. Ashamed, I apologize.

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves
Takahashi Sōhei was a pupil of Tanomura Chikuden, a scholar and artist from his hometown in northern Kyushu. In some of his work, especially his monochrome studies of classical literati subjects such as bamboo, his brushwork echoes Chikuden’s fastidious elegance. This handscroll has a somewhat different flavor, no doubt because Sōhei’s inspiration is an actual Japanese landscape, rather than an imaginary scene in China. Instead of the familiar formula of soaring peaks and waterfalls, he has captured the rolling low hills, bamboo thickets, and rice paddies of central Japan.

The inscription relates that Sōhei had traveled to the town of Itami, a sake brewing center southwest of Kyoto. One of his patrons there, the “Master of White Snow”—a sake brewer—persuaded him to come along on a riverside excursion to the coastal village of Kanzaki, and then pressed him for a painting of the scenery.

Sōhei peppered the landscape with a few Chinese motifs, such as water buffalo and a scene of scholars gathered on a hillock for tea, but otherwise the scenery faithfully reflects the rural topography of central Japan. Low, rolling hills topped with dense stands of bamboo separate patches of rice fields and clusters of houses with thatched roofs. Just as the patron requested, the painting evokes the warm nostalgia of a leisurely journey through familiar scenery.
54. 浦上玉堂 青山雨歇
Uragami Gyokudō (1745–1820)
Green Mountains, Ceasing Rain
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Uragami Gyokudō was descended from a famous warlord family. A scholar, poet, painter, and calligrapher, he was best known to his contemporaries as a master of the guqin, an ancient type of Chinese zither. He held an important administrative office in the Okayama domain, until an ideological dispute led him to resign. He left office to travel, making music and art among congenial friends.

Gyokudō’s energetic and eccentric painting style, although based on Chinese models, is uniquely his own. Here, mountains, trees, and figures are painted with such abandon that they verge on abstraction.

55. 立原杏所 風雪山水図
Tachihara Kyōsho (1785–1840)
Wind and Snow Landscapes
Pair of hanging scrolls; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The son of a Confucian scholar of the Mito domain in eastern Japan, Tachihara Kyōsho was active primarily in Edo, where he was a disciple of the prolific painter Tani Bunchō (1763–1841). These striking landscapes, although undated, are superb examples of his mature style, which is utterly unique in its use of washes and spidery brushwork to evoke atmospheric conditions. In the autumn scene, the full moon peeks through a break in swirling clouds, illuminating a solitary fisherman playing a flute. In the winter scene, all lies still beneath a heavy coat of snow and an icy gray mist. Braving the chill, a man props up a shutter to look out at the frozen world.
56. 橋本関雪 雪中行旅図
Hashimoto Kansetsu (1883–1945)
Traveling in the Snow
1920s
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The son of a Confucian scholar, Hashimoto Kansetsu was a lifelong student of Chinese culture. In 1913, he made his first trip to the Asian mainland, traveling along the Yangtze River in the south and to Beijing and Manchuria in the north. This painting, done about a decade after that journey, reveals his preference for subjects and brushwork inspired by Chinese literati painting. A traveler makes his way through a formidable landscape of towering cliffs, icy waterfalls, and heavy snow.

At the upper right Kansetsu inscribed a Chinese poem of his own composition:

Meditations coiling up to Heaven, reaching the ends of the earth;
Brushwork driving scudding clouds, and billowing waves;
The joy of riding the wind and breaking through waves;
Views that clear the heart/mind, and startle the eye:
Often in the midst of serenity and quietude,
I just happen to encounter them!

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves
In the late nineteenth century, as Japan was making the transition to a modern, industrialized nation on the world stage, new ideas about art, culture, and society spurred extraordinary innovations in Japanese painting. In 1907, the Japanese government established national exhibitions, known as the Bunten, after the model of the French Salon. The Bunten divided modern Japanese painting into two categories: Nihonga (traditional-style Japanese painting) and yōga (Western-style painting). Nihonga relied on long-established themes, formats, and media, such as ink and mineral pigments on paper or silk. Yōga focused on oils on canvas and often featured subjects inspired by European painting, such as female nudes. For artists in both Nihonga and yōga circles, the great challenge was the question of how to create a modern Japanese idiom that was not overwhelmed by Western influence. Was tradition a hindrance, or a reservoir to be mined?

Although these two modes of modern painting were theoretically opposed, in practice artists had been negotiating these boundaries since the 1880s. Public and private art schools in Tokyo and Kyoto offered courses in both disciplines, and many artists tried their hand at both. Shimomura Kanzan, Kimura Buzan, and others in the Japan Art Institute, impressed by the effects of light in European plein air painting, experimented with mōrōtai, a style that rejected line in favor of suffused, atmospheric washes. Morita Tsunetomo, Kosugi Hōan, and Kondō Kōichiro trained in Western techniques but turned toward Japanese media after travels in Europe made them reflect on their identity as Asian artists. Murakami Kagaku and his friends in Kyoto formed the Association for the Creation of National Painting, with the explicit goal of creating a fusion of Western and Eastern art. In the Taishō period (1912–1926), a new emphasis on individualism and self-expression led to a reappraisal of earlier literati painters such as Ike Taiga, Uragami Gyokudō, and Tomioka Tessai; Tomita Keisen was among the pioneers of a New Literati Painting movement.

Despite the myriad classifications that splintered these artists into various factions, they share an acute sensitivity to the seasons and an emotional intensity that imparts a lyrical quality to their work.
57. 富岡鉄斎
Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924)
Obsessions
1895
Handscroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Often called “the last literati painter,” Tomioka Tessai had a seven-decade career that spanned the wide gap between feudal times and Japan’s emergence as a modern nation-state in the late nineteenth century.

A scholar of Buddhist and Confucian texts, Tessai was mentored in his early years by the nun Ōtagaki Rengetsu, whose calligraphy and ceramics are on view in this exhibition. He viewed himself primarily as a scholar, and his thousands of paintings are usually inscribed with Chinese verses: for Tessai, text and image were indivisible.

Here Tessai presents imaginary portraits of eight distinguished Chinese literati known for their “obsessions.” In an introductory passage, he attributes the humorous subject to an earlier compilation by Chinese statesman and scholar Tang Binyi (1567–?).

1) 鶴癖 An Obsession with Geese
Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), the great Chinese calligrapher, is said to have been inspired by watching the movements of geese. Here he gazes at the birds in a cage and prepares to write on a fan.

2) 茶癖 An Obsession with Tea
Lu Yu 陸羽 (733–804) is the author of The Classic of Tea 茶經 (Ch. Chajing), a famous work in which he describes how to grow and harvest the tea plant, as well as how to brew it properly. Next to his chair is a basket of charcoal and a teapot on a brazier.

3) 書癖 An Obsession with Books
Seated with his back to us is Chinese historian Liu Jun 劉峻 (462–521), known to his contemporaries as a “book addict.” He is flanked by a pile of scrolls and a large book basket.

4) 菊癖 An Obsession with Chrysanthemums
Celebrated Chinese poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427) is known for retiring from public office to enjoy life at his country estate, where he drank wine, played the qin, and wrote poems about the chrysanthemums by his fence.

5) 潔癖 An Obsession with Cleanliness
Wang Wei 王維 (699–759), a renowned painter at the Tang dynasty court, was supposedly concerned with cleanliness. Here he examines a painting of bamboo, rocks, and an orchid.

6) 酒癖 An Obsession with Wine
While many Chinese poets are known for overindulging in wine, here Tessai imagines the figure of Liu Ling 劉伶 (ca. 221–ca. 300), one of the so-called Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. He is seated with a wine cup in his hand, before two large barrels.

7) 石癖 An Obsession with Rocks
Chinese scholars have long collected fantastically shaped rocks for their gardens. As miniature mountains, such rocks were thought to contain the energy of the cosmos. Here painter and poet Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107) kneels reverently before a selection of artful stones.

8) 談鬼癖 An Obsession with Ghost Stories 蘇軾 (1036–1101) to listen to ghost stories.
58. 器：四代清水六兵衛 絵・題：富岡鉄斎 蘭絵葉子鉢
Kiyomizu Rokubei IV (1848–1920), vessel
Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924), painting and calligraphy
Bowl with Design of Orchids, Lingzhi Mushrooms, and Calligraphy
1910
Stoneware with calligraphy and painted decoration in iron brown under ash glaze
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Born into a well-known family of Kyoto potters, Kiyomizu Rokubei IV studied painting himself and often worked collaboratively with other artists. For both these tea ceremony wares—a mizusashi (cold water jar) and a deep bowl for sweets—he employed a Hagi-style clay and glaze, in which the iron in the clay shows as reddish tones under the translucent ash glaze. Hagi ware is prized for its soft, warm color.

59. 器：四代清水六兵衛 絵・題：富岡鉄斎
売茶翁紋水指
Kiyomizu Rokubei IV (1848–1920), vessel
Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924), painting and calligraphy
Mizusashi with Portrait of Baisaō
Early 20th century
Stoneware with calligraphy and painted decoration in iron slip under ash glaze
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Tomioka Tessai did the painting and calligraphy on this mizusashi (cold water jar) and the adjacent bowl for sweets—two wares used in the tea ceremony for matcha, or thick, whipped tea. The charming portrait of Baisaō (1675–1763), “Old Man Tea Seller,” is not without a touch of irony. A monk of the Ōbaku Zen sect, Baisaō vehemently objected to the formal tea ceremony. Instead, he sold sencha (steeped tea) from a street stall in Kyoto. While chatting with his customers, he would preach the compatibility of Zen ideals and daily life.
60. 富岡鐵斎 洞窟賞月図
Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924)
Admiring the Moon from a Grotto
1916
Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Few Japanese painters can match the exuberance and expressive power of Tomioka Tessai. This dynamic landscape is an example of his mature style, which emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century. This assured and confident composition is the culmination of decades of experimentation.

Tessai’s inscription in the upper part of the painting is a poem by Wang Yangming (1472–1529), a Chinese Neo-Confucian scholar and philosopher whose teachings inspired many Japanese reformers during Japan’s radical transition from the Tokugawa period (1615–1868) to a modern monarchy.

When the mountain’s near and the moon far,
we think the moon is small,
And then we say, “This mountain must be
larger than the moon!”
But if a man had eyes as huge as the sky itself,
Then he’d see the mountain small, and the moon
enormous!

A poem by Master Wang Yangming

—Translation by Jonathan Chaves
61. 大河内夜江  秋山遊鹿
Ôkōchi Yakō (1893–1957)
Deer in Autumn Mountains
1930s
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Ôkōchi Yakō earned high honors in the 1920s at the prestigious state-sponsored exhibitions known as Teiten, where his early submissions synthesized literati brushwork, the rich palette of yamato-e (traditional Japanese painting), and Western-style oil painting. This delightful composition dates to a new phase of his art, when interest in Zen Buddhism deepened his engagement with literati painting. Yakō combines rounded mountain forms, stacked vertically, and tall, spindly trees with polished brushwork and vivid color accents. The pair of deer standing calmly at the center impart a sense of intimate, restful quiet to the lyrical and expressive landscape.

62. 下村観山  月下鸛図
Shimomura Kanzan (1873–1930)
Heron under the Moon
About 1920
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

A native of Wakayama, Shimomura Kanzan was born into a family of Noh musicians. At a young age he moved to Tokyo to study painting with two celebrated Kano school masters; later, he became the first graduate of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. In 1898, he and several colleagues left the school to establish the rival Japan Art Institute, with the mission of infusing traditional painting with a modern sensibility.

Kanzan’s mastery of wet brushwork and ink washes is on full display in this nighttime scene. Two herons huddle on a rustic bridge while undulating bands of mist rise up from the river. Above, a full moon shimmers behind a wash of pale green.
63. 西村五雲　鴨崖夕涼
Nishimura Goun (1877–1938)
Enjoying the Evening Cool on the Kamo Riverbank
About 1921
Hanging scroll; ink, color, and gold on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The son of a Kyoto textile dyer, Nishimura Goun is best known for paintings of flora and fauna. In this urban scene, an unusual subject for him, he portrays a group of entertainers enjoying the evening cool on a wooden veranda over the Kamo River. An apprentice geisha appears at right, dressed in a colorful kimono and hair ornaments, while the seated figure facing her may be a kabuki actor relaxing in his private time offstage. Below, a humbly dressed itinerant performer sings while playing the shamisen, while a small child plucks at her sleeve. Wet washes, skillfully manipulated, convey the stifling heat and humidity of a Kyoto summer.
Watanabe Seitei was an accomplished Nihonga painter whose early training emphasized the importance of sketching nature based on close observation. One of the first Japanese artists to study Western painting in Europe, Seitei traveled to Paris in 1878 and stayed for nearly three years. His work impressed many prominent figures in Parisian art circles, including Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, and critic Edmond de Goncourt. After returning to Japan, Seitei developed his own style of bird-and-flower painting, adding lessons absorbed in France to his previous studies as a Nihonga painter.

This set of twelve scrolls explores seasonal imagery in Seitei’s inimitable manner, combining deft naturalism with novel approaches to composition and exquisite handling of the brush in traditional media. For instance, the artist reveals his knowledge of Western painting in the three-dimensional depiction of the birds in the first month’s *Chickens and Adonis*. In the fourth month’s *Peony in Rain* he focuses on the present moment: a large, open flower bears the weight of falling rain, while the petals and yellow-capped stamens of the peony above tumble to the ground. Instead of an idealized representation of timeless beauty, Seitei conveys the transience of life and the passing of time.

The first group of four works from the set of twelve scrolls will be shown from October 13 to November 11, 2018:

**Right to left:**

一月 鶏に福寿草  
First month: *Chickens and Adonis*

二月 糸さくらに駒鳥  
Second month: *Weeping Cherry and Japanese Robin*

三月 雲雀に蒲公英  
Third month: *Lark and Dandelion*

四月 雨中牡丹  
Fourth month: *Peony in Rain*
The second group of four works from the set of twelve scrolls will be shown from November 13 to December 16, 2018:

Right to left:
五月 水中鯉  
六月 黄蜀葵に蝸牛  
七月 鴉  
八月 秋草に蟪虫
Fifth month: Carp in Water  
Sixth month: Aibika and Snail  
Seventh month: Crow  
Eighth month: Autumn Grasses and Katydid

The third group of four works from the set of twelve scrolls will be shown from December 18, 2018 to January 13, 2019:

Right to left:
九月 紅芙蓉に蝶  
十月 杉樹に木菟  
十一月 浪に千鳥  
十二月 雪中雀堂  
Ninth month: Rose Mallow and Butterfly  
Tenth month: Cedar and Horned Owl  
Eleventh month: Waves and Plovers  
Twelfth month: Hall of Sparrows in Snow
65. 冨田澗仙 井手の玉川図
Tomita Keisen (1879–1936)
Tama River in Ide
Late 1920s
Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The Tama River in southern Kyoto Prefecture has inspired Japanese poets since ancient times. Here Tomita Keisen captures the intoxicating beauty of a warm spring day in vibrant hues and wet, loose brushwork. Under a billowing cloud of cherry blossoms, two young boys sprawl on the riverbank while their horse drinks from the shallow stream. Yellow kerria bushes and lush willows complete the scene.

Born in the town of Hakata in western Japan, Keisen was the son of a noodle company owner. In Kyoto he was trained in the naturalist Shijō school, but he voraciously absorbed elements from Buddhist painting, Zen painting, and the exuberant literati painting of his older contemporary Tomioka Tessai, whom he greatly admired. Keisen’s eccentric and ebullient style of Nihonga painting grew out of these combined influences and led to his association with the Japan Art Institute in Tokyo for much of his later career. Keisen was close friends with the calligrapher Kawahigashi Hekigotō, whose work is also on view in this exhibition.
66. 中林梧竹 金文臨書
Nakabayashi Gochiku (1826–1913)
Couplets after Chinese Bronze Script
Pair of hanging scrolls; ink on paper
Portland Art Museum, Gift of Mary and Cheney Cowles, 2017.71.1a,b

The first-born son of a noted samurai family, Nakabayashi Gochiku was shaped by the political turmoil of the Meiji era. When the social structure supporting the samurai class collapsed, Gochiku turned his back on the world to immerse himself in his art.

Recognized as a calligraphic genius from childhood, Gochiku avidly studied rubbings and manuals of Chinese calligraphy, especially archaic scripts. He developed a proto-modern style that emphasized the graphic and pictographic nature of seal script.

This pair of scrolls imaginatively transforms three-dimensional, carved characters inscribed on a Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE) Chinese bronze vessel into two-dimensional ink play:

> There was a cast vessel in use day and night to ensure the good fortune of the royal household.  
> Sons and grandsons forever treasured it.  
> Inscribed by the second lord of Yin, given name Dun, of the Zhou dynasty.

—Translated by Sadako Ohki
Unlike his friend Nakabayashi Gochiku, whose calligraphy is at left, Soejima Taneomi played a significant role in Japan’s transition to a modern nation-state. Soejima, also born to a samurai family, served in high positions in the Meiji political bureaucracy; he even played the role of benefactor to Gochiku, providing his friend with a place to live in Tokyo later in life.

Comparing the work of these calligraphers on the cusp of modernity reveals significant differences in approach. Yet both exhibit a strong individuality, seen in the distortion of character forms, the dramatic contrast of character sizes, and the departure from long-accepted rules of brush handling.

Notice how Soejima manipulates conventions: rather than adhere to a rhythm, he changes character size and spacing, particularly the character for “cold” 寒 at the end of the poem. He even reinvents the order and direction of strokes, subverting the expectation of symmetry in favor of characters that seem almost precariously one-sided.

*Ma faced the eight stems of blue lotuses mounted in front of him.*

*Like Emperor Li of Tang facing the vast ocean in front of him in the cold.*

—Translation by Sadako Ohki
68. 村上華岳  北山仙境図
Murakami Kagaku (1888–1939)
Land of the Immortals in the Northern Mountains
1939
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Born in Osaka, Murakami Kagaku was raised by relatives in the port city of Kobe, to which he would return later in life. As a student at the Kyoto City Painting School, he absorbed an eclectic range of influences, including Japanese traditions and Western-style oil painting. Recognized as one of the leading talents of his generation, he was represented in the prestigious Bunten national exhibitions from the time he was twenty. But within a decade he became dissatisfied with the system and, with four colleagues from his school days, formed an independent group, rather grandly titled the Association for the Creation of National Painting. The next few years saw the production of several figure paintings that today are central to the canon of modern Nihonga, including a voluptuous nude.

In the mid-1920s, declining health forced him to withdraw from the limelight. Back in Kobe, he became obsessed with Mount Rokkō, located just north of the city. In this brooding landscape, painted shortly before his death, broad, undulating lines of pale ink make the mountain pulsate with energy. Pine trees dot the slopes, and pagoda-like structures, seemingly weightless and transparent, enhance the ethereal quality of the otherworldly landscape. Kagaku’s concern here is not external realities, but intense, internal contemplations of the afterlife.
69. 井上有一 喝
Inoue Yūichi (1916–1985)
Shout
1961
Hanging scroll; frozen ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

A traumatic experience during the World War II made Inoue Yūichi suspicious of institutional norms and rules. His calligraphic practice was informed by involvement with avant-garde groups as well as the study of classical models. Seeking the essence of a character, he emphasized raw, unfiltered personal expression. Here, he used frozen ink and heavily sized paper to capture every nuance of the brushstroke. Yūichi drew the character rapidly, his gestures a swirling mass of movement. His choice of subject is fitting, as the katsu (shout) is used in Zen practice to waken seekers of enlightenment from their everyday existence.

70. 須田剋太 関
Suda Kokuta (1906–1990)
Barrier
1986
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Suda Kokuta’s monumental character 関 (kan or seki) conveys several meanings, including “barrier” and “border pass.” Marking an obstacle or a gateway, the character visually evokes the imposing checkpoints that long controlled access between regional domains in Japan. Suda achieved his rough, textured strokes with a coarse brush made of stiff, shredded plant fibers. The most recent work of calligraphy in this exhibition, Barrier sharply contrasts with Inoue Yūichi’s Shout, on view nearby. Both works can be considered avant-garde, but their differences point to the divergent approaches taken by twentieth-century Japanese calligraphers in search of modern innovations.
Kondō Kōichiro, Kosugi Hōan, and Morita Tsunetomo were close friends whose careers tracked a similar path. All of them flirted with Western-style painting in oils on canvas, but later turned to working in traditional Japanese media and formats. Work from Kōichiro’s student days shows the influence of plein air painting, but the artist also was drawn to ink painting. By the late 1910s, he was deeply immersed in the New Literati Painting (Shin Nanga) movement, inspired by Uragami Gyokudō, among others. Travel to Europe and China further inspired him and spurred reflection on how he could create art that reflected his Japanese heritage.

His answer was to create a personal idiom, drawing broadly upon the artwork that had most powerfully affected him. In this striking painting, we sense echoes of the turbulence and dramatic contrasts of light and dark found in El Greco, on the one hand, and the obsessive, repeated brushstrokes of Gyokudō, on the other.

The subject is Mount Penglai (or Hōrai-san, in Japanese), a mythical island inhabited by immortals. An auspicious theme in East Asian art, the mountain is most often depicted as an idyllic paradise in brilliant blues and greens, with cranes soaring through the air. Kōichiro upends our expectations in this dense monochrome composition, with pine-covered boulders surrounding a Chinese temple. The startling brilliance of the full moon is utterly magical.
72. 小杉放庵（未醒） 秋山孤屋図
Kosugi Hōan (Misei) (1881–1964)
Solitary Hut in Autumn Mountains
1918
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

While pursuing a career as an oil painter, the young Kosugi Hōan made a living as a cartoonist and illustrator for newspapers and magazines, including a stint as an artist-reporter during the Russo-Japanese War. Later, he turned away from Western models toward his own distinctive interpretation of Nihonga. This work is from the transitional period in his career: it is signed with his early art name, Misei, but shows an artist immersed in literati brushwork and the theme of reclusion. Dry, short strokes define a fantastical rock formation. Below, a solitary fellow gazes out from a rustic cottage, recalling the humorous figures of earlier literati masters Ike Taiga and Yosa Buson.

73. 森田恒友 秋野原図
Morita Tsunetomo (1881–1933)
Autumn Field
Late 1920s
Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Morita Tsunetomo never achieved fame or wealth, but his dedication to a highly personal painting style was deeply admired by fellow artists. Initially trained in oil painting, he began exploring Nihonga after travels in Europe. He worked in both oils and traditional Japanese media for the rest of his career, seeking to create work relevant to everyday life. This intimate landscape, with its deliberately narrow range of tones, exemplifies his unique ink style. A farmer in a straw raincoat tends his field, while his horse grazes on the grass-covered marsh. Distant hills rise to a hazy sky. Tsunetomo’s brushwork is sensitive and mild, imbuing the scene with quiet intimacy.
76. 佐賀県唐津 二彩唐津蓮華花紋皿
Nisai Karatsu Ware Plate with Lotus Designs
About 1620/1650
Stoneware with ash glaze and underglaze copper green and iron brown
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The town of Karatsu, on the coast of a quiet bay in northern Kyushu, became an important center for ceramics in the late sixteenth century, when Japanese warlords brought Korean potters to the area after their unsuccessful invasion of the Korean peninsula. Working with the local iron-rich clay, the émigré potters developed distinctive stonewares based on techniques that originated in Korean *buncheong* ware. In this charming example of a relatively early Karatsu ware plate, lotus flowers dance with the buoyant, freehand drawing in underglaze copper and iron. Karatsu ware is especially prized by tea masters.

78. 器：北村隆 絵・書：清水公照
「虚心堅節」紋久谷花入
Kitamura Takashi (born 1946), vessel
Shimizu Kōshō (1911–1999), painting and calligraphy
Kutani Ware Vase with “Empty Heart” Inscription
About 1984
Porcelain with overglaze gold and polychrome enamels
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

Kitamura Takashi specializes in Kutani Ware, a type of colorful porcelain closely associated with his home prefecture of Ishikawa. In 1984, he invited Shimizu Kōshō, abbot of Tōdaiji monastery in Nara, to collaborate with him. Kōshō was well known for his playful calligraphy and paintings. Here, the abbot painted stalks of bamboo and inscribed a phrase in Chinese that has many layers of meaning: “empty in the center, strong bones” could refer to both bamboo and the vase, but it can also mean “open heart, strong resolve.”
Kusunoki Keishū saw himself as a modern-day heir to the Chinese literati painting tradition, in which the expression of the cultivated mind is the highest goal for an artist and a gentleman. In these lyrical landscapes of the four seasons, he creates an intensely personal vision of nature with frenzied brushwork and, for spring and fall, a unique palette of purples, pinks, yellows, and blue-green hues. Tiny houses and figures dot the scene, but otherwise humans have little presence amid the surging energy of Keishū’s mountains, forests, and waterways.
80. 佐賀県有田 初期伊万里染付吹墨白兎紋皿
Arita, Saga Prefecture, Japan
Hizen Ware Early Imari Plate with Rabbit and Cloud Design
1610s/1630s
Porcelain with reserve design against a spattered ground of underglaze cobalt blue
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

81. 佐賀県有田 肥前染付青竹色紙紋輪花皿
Arita, Saga Prefecture, Japan
Hizen Ware Plate with Bird, Bamboo and Shikishi Design
1650s/1660s
Porcelain with painted decoration in cobalt blue under transparent glaze
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

The town of Arita in Hizen Province (present-day Saga Prefecture), Kyushu, has been a major center for the production of porcelain since the early seventeenth century. As with Karatsu ware, another type of ceramics manufactured in Kyushu, the tradition originated with Korean émigré potters. Because these porcelains reached the West through the port of Imari, they are also known as Imari ware.

These two plates illustrate the rapid development of Arita porcelains over the course of a few decades. The thickly potted earlier plate, with its stenciled rabbit and cloud design, is very close to Korean prototypes. The thinly potted later plate, with its complex combination of hand-painted and molded ornamentation and a barbed rim, is both more ambitious and technically accomplished. Most scholars attribute the change to the arrival in Arita of Chinese potters from Jingdezhen who were seeking employment after the fall of the Ming dynasty in China in 1644.
82. 藤井達吉 月
Fujii Tatsukichi (1881–1964)
Moon
Late 1930s/1940s
Hanging scroll; color on paper
Collection of Mary and Cheney Cowles

A self-taught designer and craftsman, Fujii Tatsukichi resists easy categorization. He visited Portland in 1905 as an employee of a cloisonné company to sell wares at the Lewis and Clark Exposition. A few years later he was exhibiting his own cloisonné in Japan, but soon turned to painting, inspired first by avant-garde Western art, and later by more traditional Nihonga. A pilgrimage of sacred Buddhist sites in Japan in 1935 apparently inspired a series of paintings of celestial scenes, of which this is one. A gibbous moon floats in the sky, partially hidden by mist and swirling clouds. Is there a lake or a forest below? Tatsukichi leaves it to our imagination.