

A Poem Born from a Painting, and a Folding Screen Born from the Poem

Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241), a poet who was active between the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, was inspired by a painting titled “Tsukinami (Twelve Months) no Kacho no Uta no E”, and composed twelve poems themed around flowers and birds. Although the original painting he saw has been lost, his poems remain. During the Edo period, turning his poems into paintings became popular due to the public’s admiration for aristocratic culture from a dynastic era. This folding screen is one of the works inspired by his poems, allowing viewers to enjoy it while recalling Teika’s poetic world. Rather than illustrating Teika’s poems in a literal way, the painter selected motifs from each poem and arranged them to suit the corresponding month. The refined world created through soft golden hues and blank spaces invites viewers to interpret the poems in their own way.

Playing in a Wide Landscape Unique to Folding Screens

In the East, paintings depicting natural scenes such as mountains and watersides are called *sansui-ga*. The leaves of trees by the waterside change color, and snow covers the steep mountains. This folding screen shows scenes of fall and winter, and it is believed that there is a matching folding screen depicting spring and summer. It is also enjoyable to empathize with the small figures of people coming and going with the magnificent scenery and to become immersed in the landscape painting.

Moreover, sumi ink, a painting material, can express a variety of textures through gradations of shade and brushwork, allowing viewers to imagine rich colors even in monochrome paintings.

In this exhibition, the side with steep mountains is displayed with the screen only slightly unfolded, while the wide waterside scene is shown with the screen fully opened. The mountainous scene does not depict a Japanese landscape, but rather an imagined view of China, the birthplace of ink painting and a land ancient people long dreamed of. This drawing style follows the fashion of Li Tang from the Song Dynasty.

People Visit the Sights Described in Poems

The folding screen depicts the scenic spots of Wakano-ura, as described in poems, and Itsukushima, which was often portrayed in early modern times. These famous sights, situated between the sea and mountains, are shown from a bird’s-eye view – a perspective that people of that time could not actually see. This view can be interpreted as the perspective of the Shinto gods of the Itsukushima Shrine and the Buddha of Kimiidera Temple, allowing viewers of the screen to vicariously experience these divine visions. The golden clouds on the screen not only soften the actual distances between the sites, but also serve to decorate and emphasize the sacred and renowned places.

Place Where Birds and Monkeys Live

On the right folding screen, gibbons play in willow trees, white herons and swallows fly in the sky, and lotus flowers bloom among rocky outcrops. One of the gibbons, hanging on a willow branch, tries to grasp the moon reflected on the surface of the water. However, since it is only a reflection, the gibbon will eventually fall into the water. This is a typical motif in Zen Buddhism, teaching viewers not to chase illusions or dreams that cannot be realized.

On the left side of the folding screen, a wild flock of geese descends from the sky, honks or rests on a riverbank lined with pines and reeds. These kinds of ink paintings depicting animals were originally favored by Zen practitioners. The depiction of animals detached from human society, free from common sense and worldly concerns, represents an ideal in Zen thought.

In this exhibition, the folding screens are displayed as a waterscape in the center. However, if the left and right screens are rearranged to show trees in the center, it creates a different view. We believe there are various ways to enjoy the folding screens.

Panorama of Inside a House in the Red-Light District

A low folding screen like this, mainly used at a bedside, is called a bedside screen. In the painting, traditional-style artworks are depicted on a hanging screen in an alcove, sliding doors, and *tembukuro* (a small closet above an ordinary closet or staggered shelves in a Japanese-style room), and folding screens with calligraphy and paintings are arranged in various places. These pictures within a picture are not just a part of the scene; they inform viewers of the elevated taste and status of the red-light district.

We want viewers to feel as though they are in a house in the red-light district, so we have arranged the folding screens in a U-shape to surround the viewers.

Folding Screen with Significant Pictures within a Picture

On the folding screen, folding screens are depicted behind the women wearing kimonos with sophisticated patterns. Dianthus and Japanese pampas grasses are shown in the foreground, while mountains are depicted in the distant background. When an artist depicts pictures within a picture, it is not just a scene; additional meanings are often conveyed through the images. This folding screen was created between 1661 and 1673, during a period when depicting dianthus as a main theme was popular. Therefore, the motifs of dianthus, Japanese pampas grasses, and mountains may carry symbolic meanings.