

Chapter II: Hanging Scrolls

Column 2: Mysterious Painting Title: Hanging Scroll Depicting a Person Drinking Sake Directly from a Pot

This work is called “Shuten Sennin” (Drunken Mountain Hermit), but there is no evidence to support this. “Shuten” not only means drinking alcohol, but also refers to drinking excessively and becoming intoxicated.

Only the words “a person” were written on the lid of the preserved box. “Painting of the Drunken Mountain Hermit, owned by the Yura family” was written on an old price card preserved with the hanging scroll in the box. As a result, we can infer that it was called “Shuten Sennin” when it was owned by the Yura family before being acquired by our museum. The box was probably not present when the hanging scroll was created, which suggests that there was a time when it was simply referred to as “a person”, without any deeper interpretation.

Before the early-modern period, it was not customary for painters to give titles to their paintings; they were often referred to by what was depicted. The painting of the Drunken Mountain Hermit is believed to have been painted by Soga Shohaku, whose distinctive works express a sense of madness. He is a famous enigmatic painter. The humorous contours of the hermit’s clothes, which resemble spinning circles, suggest that he was drunk when he created the painting. This whimsical image invites laughter from the viewer. What exactly did he intend to portray in this hanging scroll?