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Cherry Blossom on Mount Yoshino

Matsumura Goshun

Not on display

Title/Description: Cherry Blossom on Mount Yoshino

Artist/Maker: Matsumura Goshun (Artist)

Born: 1783

Object Type: Scroll painting

Materials: Fibre, Ink, Paper, Silk, Watercolour

Technique: Painting

Measurements: h. 1168 x w. 391 mm

Inscription: 'Painted from the inn 2 days before the full moon'

Accession Number: 646

Historic Period: Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

School/Style: Bunjinga, Maruyama-Shijō, Nanga

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

Trained as a literati artist of the 'Southern Painting' School (J. *Nanga*), Matsumura Goshun's (1752-1811) style was influenced thematically and technically by Chinese landscape paintings and brushwork. Using ink and light colours on silk, Goshun has created an uplifting scene of forested mountain peaks and crags, framed above and below by branches of flowering cherry blossoms.

Goshun has created his mountainscape from loosely applied washes of ink, over-painted in areas with a vigorous, descriptive line. At the heart of the composition, a cascading waterfall is suggested by layered, wet brushstrokes of translucent ink. The artist has disrupted the verticality of the painting by introducing a green, jagged outcrop, which juts out dramatically from the right side of the composition. The upward tilt of the rock harmonizes with the diagonal placements of an overhanging cherry branch. To draw the viewer's attention back to the foreground, Goshun has used a white pigment made from ground oyster shells (J. *gofun*) to accent the mist of pink petals.

The black calligraphic inscription informs the viewer that Goshun made this work while staying in mountain lodging in Yoshino. Mount Yoshino in Nara prefecture is a famous beauty spot renowned

for the seasonal blooms of its cherry trees. Yoshino is so strongly associated with cherry blossom and springtime that the place name alone has been used as an evocative 'poem pillow' (J. *utamakura*) in countless *waka* poems. Possibly the earliest poetic reference to Yoshino, is found in the 'Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves' (J. *Man'yōshū* 万葉集) poetry anthology, compiled in the late 8th century. [1]

In the top left corner of the composition, Goshun has recorded the date of the painting as 'two days before the full moon in the third month of the year *Mizunoto-u* in the Temmei era' (equivalent to 1873) [2]. 1873 may have been a challenging year for Goshun, who, after having lost his wife and his father in 1871, was forced to contemplate the imminent death of his artistic mentor Yosa Buson (1716-1784). During this period of uncertainty, Goshun refined the literati style he had learnt from Buson. [3]

At the beginning of his career Matsumura Goshun had been a pupil of the haiku poet and Nanga artist, Yosa Buson. After Buson's death, Goshun explored other artistic styles, particularly that of Maruyama Ōkyo (1733-1795). Goshun is best remembered for forming the Shijō School (Maruyama-Shijō School) in the late 18th century, which synthesized the naturalism of Ōkyo with the idealized landscapes of literati painting. [4]

On the lid of the painting's inner storage box is the signature and seal of Goshun's younger half-brother, Matsumura Keibun (1779-1843) authenticating the artwork. [5] Goshun's pupils, Matsumura Keibun and Okamoto Toyohiko (1773-1845), popularized the style of the Shijō School after their master's death. [6]

Vanessa Tothill, June 2020

[1] Lawrence Smith and Yutaka Mino in Steven Hooper, ed., *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection: Catalogue* (Newhaven; London: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, 1997) vol. 3, cat. No. 126, p. 174.

[2] Hooper, p. 174.

[3] Penelope Mason *History of Japanese Art, 2nd edn* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005) p. 322.

[4] Mason, p. 322.

[5] Hooper, p. 174.

[6] Mason, p. 322.

Further Reading

Addiss, Stephen, *Nanga Paintings* (London: Robert G Sawers, 1975)

Addiss, Stephen, *Zenga and Nanga: Paintings by Japanese Monks and Scholars. Selections from the Kurt and Millie Gitter Collection* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1976)

Hooper, Steven (ed.), *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection: Catalogue, 3 vols* (Newhaven; London: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, 1997)

Mason, Penelope, *History of Japanese Art, Second Edition* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005)

Rosenfield, John M. and Miyeko Murase, *Unrivalled Splendour: The Kimiko and John Powers Collection of Japanese Art* (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2012)

Provenance

Acquired 1976
