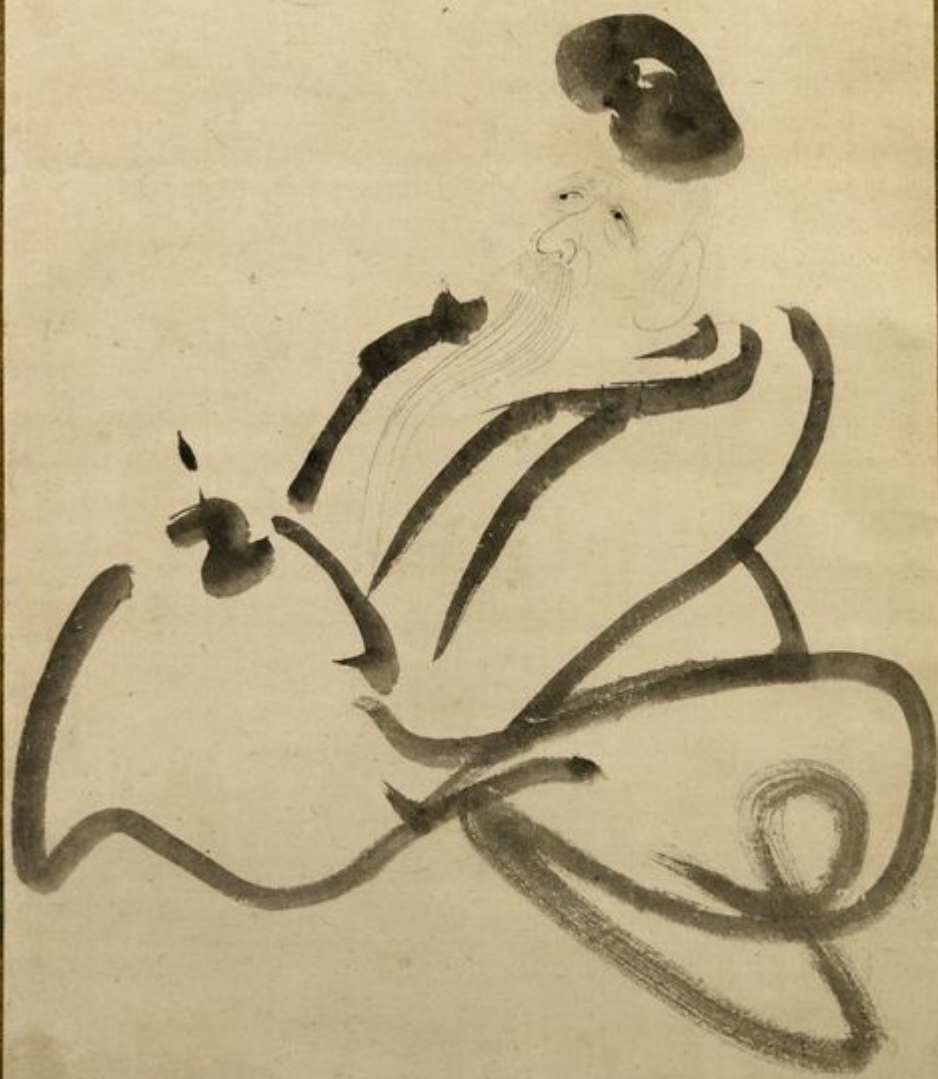


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# Portrait of the poet Kakinomoto Hitomaro (Kakimoto Hitomaru) 柿本人麿

Konoe Nobutada

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Portrait of the poet Kakinomoto Hitomaro (Kakimoto Hitomaru) 柿本人麿

**Artist/Maker:** Konoe Nobutada (Artist)

**Born:** 1607

**Object Type:** Scroll painting

**Materials:** Fibre, Ink, Paper, Silk

**Measurements:** h. 1700 x w. 535 mm

**Accession Number:** 829

**Historic Period:** Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

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This work is known as an ink painting (J. *suibokuga*) that combines poetry and image in one composition. Captured in sweeping calligraphic strokes, the artist has depicted the famous court poet, Kakimoto Hitomaru (c. 653-655 - c. 707-710). Hitomaru's *waka* poems were included in the 8<sup>th</sup> century compilation 'Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves' or *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, and he is remembered as one of the Thirty-six Immortal Poets.

The court poet, painter and calligrapher, Konoe Nobutada (1565 - 1614) has constructed a rebus image from Japanese written characters to create a 'word picture'. (J. *moji-e*) from the *kanji* in Kakimoto Hitomaru's name (柿本人麿). These ideograms have been cleverly placed to describe the seated form of the poet. Reading the image from top to bottom, right to left: Hitomaru's upper body is constructed from the word 'Kaki' 柿 (meaning 'persimmon'); the right knee is formed from the word 'Maru' 丸 (meaning 'circle', 'complete' or 'whole'), and the left knee reads 'Moto' 本 (meaning 'source', or 'origin') and 'Hito' 人 (meaning 'person'). [1]

It has been noted that: **The predominance of *moji-e* in Nobutada's oeuvre may have been due to his Zen training at Daitokuji. It was common practice for Zen masters to use *moji-e* as a teaching device, enabling pupils to probe beneath the surface appearance of things to transcend the duality of word and image.** [2]

Konoe Nobutada produced several versions of the Kakimoto Hitomaru *moji-e* in 1607, possibly as a form of mediation or as a teaching device. A similar work can be found in Yale University Art Gallery (object number: 2012.71.11) [3] Curiously, near identical *moji-e* of Kakimoto Hitomaru exist that are signed Ono no Otsū 大空 大空 (1559/68 - 1631). Otsū was a celebrated female calligrapher and a student of Konoe Nobutada. [4]

The poem in the upper section of the composition is a poem brushed in Man'yōgana - a script that uses Chinese characters phonetically rather than for their meaning. This is traditionally associated with Hitomaru and translates as:

'Dimly, dimly  
in the morning mist that lies over Akashi Bay,  
my longings follow with the ship  
that vanishes behind the distant isle.' [5]

The column of script on the left side reads: 12th day of the second lunar month of Keichō 12, which is equivalent to 1607 in the Gregorian calendar. The ink painting was made in the same year that Nobutada resigned from his position as Senior Regent (J. *Kanpaku*) to Emperor Go-Yōzei. He left Kyoto and travelled to Edo (modern-day Tokyo) to lead the life of a literatus and teacher of classical literature. [6]

Nobutada reproduced the Kakimoto Hitomaru image many times with different poetic inscriptions in the upper section of the composition. There are also numerous calligraphic ink paintings of the 9<sup>th</sup> century court poet and politician, Sugawara Michizane, who after his death was deified as the Shinto god of scholars. [7] The choice of subject matter suggests that these works are devotional and embody Nobutada's veneration of the 'gods' of poetry and learning.

Vanessa Tothill, August 2020

[1] <https://rnavi.ndl.go.jp/kaleido/entry/post-132.php> [accessed 25 June 2020] references Kohitsugaku kenkyūsho, *Kagan bokuhōsenshū* 5 (Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1989), page not known.

[2] Miyeko Murase, *The Written Image: Japanese Calligraphy and Painting from the Sylvan Barnet and William Burto Collection* (Newhaven; London: Yale University Press in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2002), p.171 referencing Christine Guth, *Asobi: Play in the Arts of Japan*. exh. cat., (New York: Katonah Museum of Art, 1992), p. 30.

[3] <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/174624> [accessed 26 June 2020] This work is inscribed with Kakimoto Hitomaru's celebrated *tanka* poem:

Must I sleep alone  
through the long autumn nights,

long like the dragging tail

of a mountain pheasant

(Ashihiki no yamadori no o no shidari o no/ naganagashiyo o hitori kamonemu)

Translated by Joshua S. Mostow in Joshua S. Mostow, *Pictures of the Heart: The 'Hyakunin Isshu' in Word and Image*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p. 149.

[4] Ono no Otsū is referenced in the following posts:

<https://rnavi.ndl.go.jp/kaleido/entry/post-132.php> [accessed 25 June 2020]

<https://sanadamaru-kennkyu-1.blog.ss-blog.jp/2016-09-30> [accessed 26 June 2020]

[5] The Japanese reads: Honobono to / Akashi no ura no / asagiri ni / shima-gakure yuku / fune o shi zo omou. The English translation is by Robert H Brower and Earl Roy Miner.

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/122074/kakinomoto-no-hitomaro-unknown-japanese> [accessed 19 February 2023]

The poem is also discussed in Lawrence Smith and Yutaka Mino in Stephen Hooper (ed.), *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection: Catalogue*, vol. 3 (New Haven, Connecticut; Norwich: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, 1997) p. 167; illus., p. 168.

[6] Stephen Addiss, *77 Dances: Japanese Calligraphy by Poets, Monks, and Scholars, 1568-1868* (Boston; London: Weatherhill, 2006), p. 20.

[7] Stephen Addiss, *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), p. 32-33; 'Daily Tenjin' (*Nikka Tenjin*) illustrated in Penelope Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 2nd edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), illus 306, p. 266.

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## Further Reading

Addiss, Stephen, *77 Dances: Japanese Calligraphy by Poets, Monks, and Scholars, 1568-1868* (Boston; London: Weatherhill, 2006)

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)

Bruschke-Johnson, Lee, *Dismissed as Elegant Fossils: Konoe Nobutada and the role of artistocrats in Early Modern Japan* (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004)

Guth, Christine, *Asobi: Play in the Arts of Japan. exh. cat.*, (New York: Katonah Museum of Art, 1992)

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Mason, Penelope, *History of Japanese Art*, 2nd edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005)

Mostow, Joshua S., *Pictures of the Heart: The 'Hyakunin Isshu' in Word and Image*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996)

Sanada Yoshiko, *Ono no Otsū* (Nagano: Fūkeisha, 1990)

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