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Hawk on a Branch

Okamoto Shūki

Not on display

Title/Description: Hawk on a Branch

Artist/Maker: Okamoto Shūki (Artist)

Object Type: Scroll painting

Materials: Fibre, Ink, Paper, Silk

Measurements: h. 952 x w. 330 mm

Inscription: Shūki buko

Accession Number: 1185

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

A majestic hawk, perching on a bough, glares upwards on alert. Its beak curves at the tip, claws sharp and feathers glossy. Its magnificent presence is complemented by the equally dignified old tree at its feet. The texture of the bark is treated with a few delicate layers in a series of short ink brush marks from lighter to darker tones. Moss on the bark is rendered in green dots. A vine plant winds around the tree. The intricate depiction of the tree and the rhythmical pattern of the bird's feathers give a subdued decorativeness to the picture of a fierce bird of prey.

The artist, Okamoto Shūki, was born and active in Edo (present Tokyo). He studied painting under Ōnishi Keisai (1773-1829), who excelled in Chinese style birds and flowers paintings as well as literati-style landscape paintings. Keisai was a retainer of Lord of Nakatsu domain in Kyushu at his Edo residence; Shūki married a daughter of a retainer of Lord of the Odawara domain and himself became a retainer. Shūki is best known for regal bird and flower paintings, in particular of peacocks. His style typically combines depictions deriving from sketching from life and decorative, sometimes flamboyant, flower motifs, as if striving to strike a balance between naturalistic and ornamental qualities in order to maximise the visual impact.

Akiko Yano, July 2022

Further Reading

Hiratsuka City Art Museum, Okamoto Shūki ten: Odawara-han no eshi (Okamoto Shūki exhibition: an artist of the Odawara domain), Hiratsuka City Art Museum, 2004.
