



Tiger Facing the Mist

Maruyama Ōkyo

Not on display

Title/Description: Tiger Facing the Mist

Artist/Maker: Maruyama Ōkyo

Born: 1780

Measurements: h. 1850 x w. 1160 mm

Inscription: Chūsen

Accession Number: 1227

Historic Period: 18th century

Maruyama Ōkyo was one of the most important artists in Kyoto during his lifetime and thereafter. His style is said to have changed painting in Kyoto. He was born into a farmer family on the outskirts of Kyoto; he came to the capital determined to become a painter. His teacher was Ishida Yutei (1721-1786), a Tsurusawa-school artist. Ōkyo familiarised himself with composition in Western and Chinese styles. His early works, so-called *megane-e* (lens pictures) of the views of famous places in Kyoto rendered in linear perspectives are well known. Ōkyo was keen on sketching from life for his motifs and created elegant compositions combining real-life details with both traditional and new subjects.

This painting depicts a lone tiger sitting at the edge of a cliff. The tiger's mouth is open slightly and the tip of its tongue is visible. Ōkyo apparently created many tiger paintings but during his time, there was no chance to see real, live tigers in Japan; therefore, it is said that Ōkyo studied cats instead to depict tigers. It is not surprising that the tiger here has a more amiable quality than that of fierceness.

A similar pose of a tiger sitting facing upwards can be found in a pair of folding screens in a private collection, which depicts a tiger and a dragon on each screen (no. 29 in McKelway et al.). In this work, the tiger is glaring towards the sky where the dragon appears in the clouds.

In the current painting, the misty space around the tiger is filled with gradations of light ink, which makes the white coat of the tiger's stomach side stand out. The delicate rendition of the patterned coat on the back evokes glossiness and softness. The details of the face of the tiger exhibit elements seen in Ōkyo's other tiger paintings, such as strong whiskers and beautiful light yellow tinted eyes in

a pointed oval shape, with an iris and pupil in resemblance of a half-crescent.

The artist did not, however, extend as much care and concentration to the details of the lower area of the painting. The tiger's claws appear to have been done hastily. The short grasses around the paws look rather mechanical and the treatment of the rock at the cliff edge appears somewhat flat.

With the intention to stimulate further discussion in the future, adding one more tiny detail might be of interest. In Ōkyo's signature, the first stroke in the second character appears to have been brushed twice. In other words, the first attempt is brushed over by the second attempt as if the first was ill-fated. If similar examples of re-striking in Ōkyo's signature are to be found, that would provide a good comparative point.

Akiko Yano, July 2022

Further Reading

Sasaki Jōhei and Sasaki Masako, *Maruyama Ōkyo kenkyū (Study of Maruyama Ōkyo)*, Tokyo: Chūōkōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1996.

Matthew P. McKelway et al., *Traditions Unbound: Groundbreaking Painters of Eighteenth-century Kyoto*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum Chong-Moon Lee Center, 2005.
