



Taro Leaves and Bell Cricket Under Full Moon

Suzuki Shuitsu

Not on display

Title/Description: Taro Leaves and Bell Cricket Under Full Moon

Artist/Maker: Suzuki Shuitsu

Measurements: h. 1667 x w. 350 mm

Accession Number: 1270

Historic Period: 19th century

Suzuki Shuitsu's (1823-1889) scroll painting on silk captures the luxuriant growth of a taro plant (*J. satoimo*), a type of potato harvested in autumn and winter. The narrow, vertical format of the scroll painting draws the viewer's attention to the taro's thick stem and generous leaves, which tower above the ground. The vibrant, lush green of the plant is refreshing and invigorating, and conveys the fertility of nature.

This impression of strength is contrasted with the delicacy of the pale full moon, suggested in the upper section of the painting by an incomplete ring of ink wash. The inclusion of the harvest moon introduces a sombre feeling that works in counterpoint to the vitality of the plant. Through this contrast, the artist alludes to the passive and active forces in nature. [1] Moonlight picks out the light green veins of the taro's leaves, adding structural detail to the plant's stylized form, and casts grey shadows on the ground.

Shuitsu has created a gentle and harmonious composition that invites the viewer to reflect on the difference in scale between the taro plant and the small bell cricket (*J. suzumushi*) seen emerging from blades of grass at the bottom of the painting. The *suzumushi* owes its name to the clear, high-pitched ring the insect produces when it rubs its forewings together. In combining the naturalistic motifs of full moon, taro plant and bell cricket, Shuitsu has created a seasonal mood that is evocative of an evening in early autumn.

The painting is signed Seisei Shuitsu 西井水月 and has one red seal (*shukurinsai* 西井印) in the shape of a double gourd. Suzuki Shuitsu trained in Edo Rinpa-style painting under his father Suzuki Kiitsu (1796-1858). Kiitsu's transmitted the revived Rinpa tradition that he had received from his teacher, Sakai Hōitsu (1761-1828). [2]

Vanessa Tothill, June 2020

[1] The interacting forces of positive/active and negative/passive are the principles of Chinese *yin-yang* philosophy and divination. In Japan, this cosmic duality is known as *inyō*, or the Way of Yin and Yang (J. *onyōdō*).

[2] John T. Carpenter, *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), pp. 31-33; Penelope Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 2nd edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), pp. 312-19 (p. 317).

Further Reading

Carpenter, John T., *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012)

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

Provenance

Acquired 2003. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 1270
