

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Nov OOM 2011 “Snowscape” by Hidaka Tetsuo #98.18.17

Medium: Paintings, Painting-Hanging Scroll | Ink on gold flecked paper

Size: 18 3/4 x 12 3/8 in. (47.63 x 31.43 cm) (image)

Creation Place: Asia, Japan, Nagasaki

Culture: Asia, Japan

Style: 19th century, Edo period

Inscriptions: Signature; Stamps; Inscription 'Tetsuo, age 75', ink ink, at URC; 'Somon, Tetsuo', seals, at URC; 'Painted in spring of 1865 at Tai-so retreat, under the lamplight', inscription, in ink, at URC

Physical Description: bare trees, mountain retreat, crystalline mountain peaks and a solitary fisherman in a boat permeate this bleak winter scene; ink wash background

Credit: Collection Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton

The artist Hidaka Tetsuo (1791-1871) was a **Japanese** Buddhist monk living in Nagasaki who was trained in the Nanga style of painting. Nanga artists explored **Chinese** subjects and symbols, traditional brush and ink styles and the literati tradition of the scholar painter. How did this come about?

Edo Period (1615-1868): At the beginning of the Edo period, the Tokugawa authorities instituted a policy of isolation, bringing trade with the outside world and its financial rewards to an end. Following a theoretical precedent in ancient Confucian literature, the authorities arbitrarily divided the population into four hierarchical classes. The warriors took precedence, followed by the farmer-peasants, the artisans and the mercantile class was last, based on the Confucian view that they contributed nothing productive to society. The merchant class was humiliated. For over two hundred years, limited contact with the outside world was only allowed through the port of Nagasaki, mostly through the merchant class.

Contact with China persisted, but was greatly limited. What little art of the Chinese tradition did make its way into Japan was either imported through Nagasaki or produced by Chinese living there. Chinese merchants were known to dabble in calligraphy and landscape painting while living in Nagasaki. However, the Japanese artists who aspired to the ideals and lifestyles of the Chinese literati during the Edo period were left with a limited view.

The inflexible strictures of the Tokugawa period inhibited any radical or controversial art, and provocative subject matter was prohibited because of the perceived danger that it might disturb social order and tranquility. As a result, there was no overt artistic expression of intellectual or political dissent, much less any manifestation of antiestablishment sentiment in Japanese painting during the Edo period of Tokugawa rule.

Nanga (Southern Painting) also known as **Bunjinga (Literati painting)** was a school of Japanese painting which flourished in the late Edo period among artists who considered themselves literati. While each of these artists was independent and unique, they all shared an admiration for traditional Chinese culture. Nanga grew out of what did come to Japan from China, including Chinese woodblock-printed painting manuals. Nanga emerged as a new and unique art form due to the restrictions of the Edo period and the great differences in culture and environment of the Japanese literati as compared to their Chinese counterparts. *While the Chinese literati were mostly academics aspiring to be painters, the Japanese literati were professionally trained painters aspiring to be academics and intellectuals.*

Nanga paintings were usually in monochrome black ink (the influence of calligraphy) and sometimes in light color. They nearly always depicted Chinese landscapes or similar subjects patterned after Chinese literati painting. The name Nanga is just an abbreviation referring to the Chinese Southern School of painting.

Chinese literati painting focused on expressing the rhythm of nature rather than the technical realistic depiction of it. This style was an outgrowth of the idea of the intellectual, or literati, as a master of all the core traditional arts- painting, calligraphy and poetry. The Nanga form was to a great extent defined by its rejection of other major schools of art, such as the Kano school and the Tosa school. Unlike other schools of art that have definite founders who pass on their style to followers, Nanga was always much more about the attitude espoused by the painter and his love of Chinese culture.

In the western art world, Nanga was originally criticized as trivial and derivative. As a result the style has only attracted academic attention in recent decades.

Daoism and Zen Buddhism: In addition to Confucianism, China's other great philosophical tradition was Daoism with its lore that celebrated unconventional and eccentric behavior. Daoist mysticism included practices of seclusion and meditation. They were a strong influence on the development of Zen Buddhism in Japan, where the believer's fundamental objective of transcendental enlightenment could only be achieved through his own introspective perseverance. Reliance of the individual practitioner on his own resources for the attainment of enlightenment was contrary to communal religious practices of Japanese culture. This tension sometimes motivated the individual to behave in an unconventional or idiosyncratic manner. Thus, eccentricity became equated with creative insight and was a significant factor in the evolution of monochrome ink painting in Japanese Zen monasteries. Nanga painting eventually was termed "eccentric" as amateur painters and many Buddhist priest-painters worked in novel *expressive* modes without altering the artistic heritage.

The Artist: Hidaka Tetsuo was a Zen monk at the Shuntoku Temple in Nagasaki. His monastic name was Somon and sometimes his work is under this name. He was a native of Nagasaki, the son of a barrel maker who was adopted by the abbot of Shuntoku Temple at age eleven. Tetsuo became an austere man-vegetarian, teetotaler, a virtual recluse. He was a sword carrying priest and avid supporter of the restoration of the Emperor (which he lived to see). His interest in painting developed early and he trained with a local artist as well as immigrant Chinese artists.

A monk of the Rinzai Zen sect, Tetsuo became the fourteenth abbot of his monastery. His reputation was that of an "eccentric monk", meaning he had a stubborn independence of spirit rooted in both Zen and literati ideals. The ideals of the scholar-amateur were disengagement from the common world and devotion to refined pursuits, practices that were available to monks. His pictures were in demand and his book of aesthetic theories attracted many readers. He was considered one of the three great Nanga painters of his time.

During the two and a half centuries of the Edo period, Japan's artists were prolific to a degree probably unmatched in a similar amount of time by the artist of any comparable country or culture. Nanga was a part of this production.

Resources:

“Painters of Edo Japan (1615-1868)” by Money L. Hickman. Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN, 2000.

“Extraordinary Persons: Works by Eccentric, Nonconformist Japanese Artists of the Early Modern Era 1580-1868 Volumes 1, 2 and 3”. Edited by Naomi Noble Richard, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, 1999

“Traditions of Japanese Art”. Edited by John Rosenfield and Shujiro Shimada. Fogg Art Museum. Harvard Press, Cambridge, MA, 1970

Wikipedia

“Dictionary of Japanese Artists” by Laurance P. Roberts, Tokyo, Weatherhill, 1976

Oxford Art Online

Questions

1. Where are the signs of human life?
2. What is the scale of human life to the rest of the painting?
3. What significance does that have for you?
4. How does this painting make you feel?
5. What is the intellectual idea behind this painting?