



Oak Tree, Waves and Reflected Moon

Kanō Tan'yū

Not on display

Title/Description: Oak Tree, Waves and Reflected Moon

Artist/Maker: Kanō Tan'yū (Artist)

Born: 1660 c.

Object Type: Scroll painting

Materials: Fibre, Ink, Paper, Silk, Watercolour

Measurements: h. 1985 x w. 536 mm

Inscription: 'Hōgen Tan'yū'

Accession Number: 891

Historic Period: Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

An autumnal tree branch extending from the lower right has been left only with a few leaves. The tree hangs over rough waves. A hazy full moon is partially revealed; its reflection can be seen on the water. The contrast between the stillness of the moon and the movement of water and leaves makes an interesting design.

Kano Tan'yū is the first Kano school artist who relocated from Kyoto to Edo following the summons of the Tokugawa shogun and served as the top official painter along with his brothers. Tan'yū's iconic painting style heralded a new visual aesthetic with economical use of brush strokes and effective use of wide and suggestive blank spaces. Tan'yū is the most famous Edo-period Kano School artist; his works established the direction of the so-called 'Edo-Kano' style.

This painting exhibits some essence of Tan'yū's style, such as the effective use of ink gradation to capture the texture of the bark and the delicate lines forming the waves, which contrast with the bold lines for the tree. We would, however, expect more technical fluency in the details in a Tan'yū painting. For example, the representation of the leaves remains neither in ink nor in colour. For an ink representation, the control of the brush seems weak. For a colour representation, the application of the green (now faded) pigment looks too casual. Some of the characters in the signature show awkwardness in shape and the use of the 'Mori' seal, shaped as a three-legged vessel, is unusual although not unknown in Tan'yū's works.

The inscription and the seals on the lid of the storage box for this painting reveal that it was in the collection of Ozasa Kizō (?-1980), who was a curator of the Yōmei Bunko Library in Kyoto and active in authentication of historical calligraphic works.

Akiko Yano, July 2022

Further Reading

Kihara Toshie, *Yūbi no tankyū* (In Pursuit of the Deep and Subtle Quality [of Kano Tan'yū]), Osaka University Press, 1998.

Sakakibara Satoru et al., *Kano Tan'yū ten* (Exhibition of Kano Tan'yū), Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha, 2002.
