



Autumn Flowers and Grasses

Yamamoto Kōitsu

Not on display

Title/Description: Autumn Flowers and Grasses

Artist/Maker: Yamamoto Kōitsu (Artist)

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Gold, Ink, Paper, Wood

Measurements: h. 180 x w. 530 mm

Accession Number: 1273

Historic Period: Late 19th century

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

School/Style: Edo Rinpa, Rinpa

Inspired by nature, Yamamoto Kōitsu (c.1843-c.1905) has painted two complimentary designs to decorate the front and back leaf of a folding fan. Working with ink and light colours on a reflective gold ground, Kōitsu has combined flowering plants and grasses that are traditionally associated with the autumn months (J. *aki no nanagusa*). The influence of Kōitsu's Edo Rinpa training is evident in the artist's choice of decorative natural motifs combined with a lavish use of gold.

One side possesses a loose and trailing arrangement of white, pink, yellow and blue flowers framed by foliage in varying shades of green. This delicate design is true to life and invites the viewer to identify the seasonal plants. The autumnal flowers are: bush clover (J. *hagi*), Chinese bellflower (J. *kikyō*) (top right); white anemone (J. *shūmeigiku*) and dianthus (J. *nadeshiko*) (bottom right); yellow patrinia (J. *ominaeshi*) and thoroughwort (J. *fujibakama*) (centre); flowering kudzu vine, (top left); and aster (J. *nokongiku*) (bottom left).

In contrast, the reverse side is painted with sweeping, layered grey-brown brushstrokes that are suggestive of grasses and leafy stems. The application of wet ink has become blurry in places, giving the impression of dense vegetation. This technique is frequently found in works by Rinpa artists and is known as 'dripping in' or *tarashikomi*. To refresh the viewer's gaze, Kōitsu has picked out the occasional flower head or grass floret, rendering it in finer detail. The artist's oval seal of red ink has been placed in the bottom right section.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Kōitsu produced designs and sketches for the Kiritsu Manufacturing and Trading Company (Kiritsu Kōshōgaisha). Operational from 1874 until 1891, the Kiritsu Kōshōgaisha exported ceramics, lacquerware, metalware, and paintings to overseas markets, predominantly in western Europe. [1] During this period, the Kiritsu Company employed many skilled painters, like Kōitsu, as designers for their commercial products. Over 700 of these designs have been preserved at the University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts (*Tōkyōgeijutsu daigaku Tōkyōdaigaku bijutsukan*) [2]

Yamamoto Kōitsu learned the Edo Rinpa-style from his father Yamamoto Sodō, who had in turn been a pupil of Sakai Hōitsu (1761-1828). In the Meiji period (1868-1912), Kōitsu and his brother Dōitsu were instrumental in promoting the Rinpa tradition both in Japan and abroad. Kōitsu exhibited his paintings in Japan in 1882, and in Paris at the Japan Fine Arts Exhibition of 1883. In the last decade of his life, Kōitsu worked as a teacher in Kanazawa (Ishikawa prefecture) and Toyama where he fostered the next generation of artistic talent.

Vanessa Tothill, June 2020

[1] Jan Dees, 'Facing Modern Times: The Revival of Japanese Lacquer Art 1890-1950' (Rotterdam: Optima Grafische Communicatie, 2007), p.11.

[2] http://jmapps.ne.jp/geidai/det.html?data_id=21710 [Accessed 12 June 2020]

Further Reading

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

Dees, Jan, 'Facing Modern Times: The Revival of Japanese Lacquer Art 1890-1950' (Rotterdam: Optima Grafische Communicatie, 2007)

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