**Auspicious Imagery in Edo-period Japanese Painting**

On view until July 10, 2016

Arts and culture flourished in unprecedented ways during Japan’s Edo period (1615-1868). During this long era of relative peace and stability, innovative painting styles, such as Rinpa, Maruyama-Shijo, *nanga* and *zenga* were developed and refined alongside traditional painting schools and practices. Irrespective of their artistic affiliation, Edo-period artists responded to their patrons demands for works of art that featured auspicious imagery, particularly that associated with the wish for long life. These works often served as gifts for birthdays and other celebrations.

Artists selected their subjects from a long-established body of legend, folklore and popular religion, often with Chinese antecedents. The subjects ranged from legendary figure subject celebrated for their immortality, animals renowned for their longevity, and plants, such as the pine, whose physical attributes associate them with the theme.

This and nearly thirty other paintings and ceramics, all with auspicious subjects, are currently on view in the Japanese Gallery. Drawn from NOMA’s permanent collection and generous loans from the Gitter-Yelen Foundation, this exhibition explores a few of the multitude of ways in which Japanese artists of the Edo period employed auspicious imagery in their work.

Painting Labels:

**Maruyama Ozui**

Japanese, 1766 – 1829

*Cranes*

Ink and color on gold sprinkled paper

Museum Purchase: George Frierson, Jr. Fund, 2002.328.1, .2

Maruyama Ozui was the eldest son and pupil of Maruyama Ōkyo, founder of the Maruyama school which combined a Western approach to naturalism with Japanese technique and composition.

Cranes were regarded as virtually sacred  in much of East Asia; according to legend, they lived for a thousand years, and thus became a favored image of immortality.

**Kamisaka Sekka**

Japanese, 1866-1942

*Cranes*

Ink and color on silk

On loan from the Gitter-Yelen Foundation, 2005.31

Kamisaka Sekka, widely regarded as the last great proponent of the decorative Rinpa School of painting, brought together traditional Japanese aesthetics and elements of Art Nouveau. According to Chinese legend, cranes were the companions and messengers of the Daoist immortals and often served to symbolize the immortal him or herself.

**Matsumura Goshun**

Japanese, 1752-1811

*Tobosaku*

Ink and color on silk

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Philip H. Meyers, 83.136

The Daoist immortal Tobosaku (Ch. Dongfang Shuo), was a second-century BCE Chinese Han dynasty official who reputedly achieved immortality by stealing a peach of immortality from the Queen Mother of the West. The edge of the peach, with its leaves,  is visible at the left of the figure.

Goshun began his study of painting with the literati-school master Yosa Buson (1716-1784), but in the 1780s aligned himself with Maruyama Okyo (1733-95), founder of a naturalist tradition of painting that bears his name. Goshun developed a distinctive style that combined elements of both traditions, and upon Okyo’s death established his own school, known as Shijo.

**Yamaguchi Soken**

Japanese, 1759-1818

*Birds, Flowers and Immortals*

Ink on paper

Gift of Kenzaburo Marui in honor of Kurt A. Gitter, M.D., 98.6.1,2

A student of Maruyama Okyo (1733-1795), Soken painted a broad range of subjects. Here, he alternated paintings of figure subjects with bird and flower paintings. The six bird-and-flower paintings follow the seasons of the year from left to right. At far right is the newly blossoming plum, symbolic of the New Year, and at far left are bare tree branches in snow.

The figures depicted may be identified as immortals, most omost from the Chinese Daoist pantheon, but also from the world of Zen worthies. Among them are Osho, at far right, receiving a missive from his teacher via an airborne umbrella, and Taishin O Fujin, riding her dragon. Immortals, through their moral virtue faith and discipline transcended the natural world and served as paragons of self-cultivation.

Chinese paintings featuring images of the Daoist immortals first came to Japan in the 15th century. The immortals slowly became absorbed into the Japanese Buddhist and secular pantheon of deities. In the Edo period, the Daoist immortals became a common theme, denoting a general wish for immortality.

**Okamoto Toyohiko**

Japanese, 1773-1845

*Cranes and Pines,* 1849

Inscribed and dated by Shinozaki Shochiku (1781-1851)

Ink and color on silk

Museum Purchase, 82.19

Symbols of long life and old age, pines and cranes are among the most traditional of Chinese-derived Japanese themes. In the early 19th century Toyohiko became the most important teacher of the Shijo style, and his work came to the attention of Shinozaki Shochiku (1781-1851), an important figure in the literary world of the Kyoto-Osaka area.

Five years after Toyohiko’s death Shochiko inscribed a poem on this painting, expressing the crane’s view of life:

*I have food for more family,*

*Yet I have no need to pay taxes.*

*One does not need to go to Heaven,*

*For Japan is the Isle of Eternal Youth.*

           Inscribed by the old man Shochiku at age 69

**Hara Zaichû**

Japanese, 1750-1837

*Zhuangzi and the Turtle*

Ink and color on silk

Museum Purchase, 82.279

Zhuangzi (4th - 3rd century BCE) a pivotal figure in the history of Daoism, is shown here dangling his fishing pole into the water as two officials stand nearby. The painting illustrates Zhuangzi’s summons to serve at court. He refused, saying: *Is a turtle happier swimming in muddy waters, or sacrificing itself to become an object of veneration by later generations?*  Turtles, because they live for a long time, were common symbols of long life, and objects made of tortoiseshell were considered auspicious.

**Nagasawa Rosetsu**

Japanese, 1754-1799

*Chinese Children at Play*

Ink and light color on paper

Museum Purchase: Women’s Volunteer Committee Fund in memory of Edith Rosenwald Stern, 80.187 a,b

Generations of Japanese and Chinese artists used the subject of Chinese children at play, a theme that expressed the wish for many children, and by extension, longevity. Re-enforcing this auspicious theme are the pine and turtle at the left and cranes at the right.

A student of Maruyama Okyo, founder of the Maruyama school of painting, Rosetsu forged an independent artistic path in his maturity. He is known as one of the “three eccentrics” of 18th century Japanese painting for his later, idiosyncratic works.

**Minagawa Kien**

Japanese, 1734-1804

*Calligraphy Screens*

Ink on paper

Gift of Dr. Kurt A. Gitter and Millie H. Gitter, 82.122.1,2

The Edo government encouraged the study of Neo-Confucianism, resulting in an enthusiasm for Chinese culture, and generations of Japanese Confucian scholars. This screen, calligraphed by the noted Japanese Confucian scholar, art patron and critic Minagawa Kien, is comprised of six Chinese-style poems on the subjects of  pine, crane, bamboo, plum, tortoise and chrysanthemum. The topic of each poem is written in a large character on the right, with the verse on the left side. Each poem, comprised of four lines of five characters each, revolves around its theme using symbolic imagery.

The poems read, from right to left:

Pine

Branches of countless ages have touched cold days,

They form an umbrella sheltering hidden beauty.

Coiled scales of dragons are created by moss;

Plumages of peacocks are dense, needle-shaped leaves.

Crane

After flying in the cool sky,

The fairy appears on the quiet islet.

She stands there as a human being;

Her white wing resembles the shifting crescent moon.

Bamboo

The grove is shrouded by pale shadows,

Autumn colors are in its midst.

As a bright moon rises from the precipice,

The charm of bamboo is unmatched.

Plum

As wind shakes shadows, the moon rises.

Facing the wind, the moon is drawing twigs.

Spring is fragrant in the air;

Who is playing the jade flute and smiling?

Tortoise

You usually wear a garment of hexagonal design;

You can keep your life for a thousand years.

You are able to wag your tail in mud,

There is no need to reach the lotus flower like Buddha!

Chrysanthemum

The fragrance in rosy clouds comes from Mr. Tao’s fence,

In the county of Li, there are many deep springs.

Particularly, you like the Double Ninth festival,

On that day, you urge people to drink merrily.

**Yamaoka Tesshu**

Japanese, 1836 – 1888

*Shoki Calligraphy*

Ink on paper

Museum Purchase, George S. Frierson, Jr. Fund, 98.119

Yamaoka Tesshu, a Zen master and expert swordsman, created a distinctive calligraphic style that exudes strength and power. Here, Tesshu writes the name of the deity Shoki, a legendary Chinese figure famed for protecting the world from evil spirits. According to the legend, the Chinese emperor Minghaung (8th century) dreamt that a small, thieving demon was expelled from the palace by a larger demon dressed in a tattered hat, robe, belt and black boots. Thanked by the emperor for his efforts, the demon identified himself as a scholar who had failed the imperial examinations and killed himself in despair. In gratitude for his service, the emperor granted him an official funeral, and Shoki devoted the rest of his afterlife by protecting the world from evil.

**Nakajima Raisho**

Japanese, 1796 – 1871

*Boy’s Day Fan*

Ink and color on paper

Gift of Kurt A. Gitter, M.D. and Alice Rae Yelen, 98.273

Now a festival for all children of both sexes, during the Edo period the 5th of May was celebrated as Boys’ Day. In honor of the day, families with young boys hung banners bearing the image of Shoki (the Demon Slayer) outside their homes to drive away evil spirits.

**Sengai Gibon**

Japanese, 1750-1837

*Shoki*

Ink on paper

On loan from the Gitter-Yelen Foundation, EL.2005.14

A Rinzai sect abbot at the height of his career, Sengai spent his retirement years at Shofokuji, the first Zen temple in Japan, painting and communicating with lay followers. Here, he paints the popular deity Shoki, absorbing subjects from popular culture into his painting repertoire.

**Shibata Zeshin**

Japanese, 1807-1891

*The Gods of Good Fortune at Mount Horai*

Ink and color on silk

Museum Purchase, Asian Art De-accession Fund, 2012.68

Zeshin (1807-1891), a versatile and technically innovative painter and lacquer artist of the late Edo, here depicts a gathering of the gods in their palatial compound atop Mount Horai, the Daoist mountain of immortality. Jurojin, the god of longevity (easily recognizable by his elongated cranium), is seated facing the viewer; Benzaiten, the goddess of love and music is to his right. Replete with symbols of long life - pine trees, cranes, deer, and turtles- this highly detailed work emphatically proclaims its function as a conveyer of good wishes.

**Sakai Doiitsu**

Japanese, 1845-1913

*The Three Friends of Winter: Pine, Plum and Bamboo*

Ink and color on silk

Museum Purchase, the Muriel Haspel Fund, 99.266

Doiitsu, late Edo-early modern Rinpa painter, here depicts the classic theme of the “three friends of winter.” These hardy plants survive the harshness of winter and set forth new growth in the spring, and were traditional symbols for resilience, rebirth and long life.

**Tanomura Chokunyu**

Japanese, 1814-1907

*Pine*

Ink on paper

Gift of an Anonymous Donor, 74.218.1

A leading literati, or *nanga* painter of the Meiji period (1868-1912), Chokunyu was one of the founders, and first director of the Kyoto Municipal School of Fine Arts and Crafts. Here he paints the classic theme of the aging pine, a symbol of fortitude and endurance.

**Kon Iitsu**

Japanese, late 18th century

*Cranes and Chrysanthemums*

*Tortoise and Plum Tree*

Ink and color on silk

Museum Purchase, George S. Frierson, Jr. Fund, 2000.174.1,2

**Hakuin Ekaku**

Japanese, 1685-1768

*Hotei’s Bag*

Ink on paper

Gift of Kurt A. Gitter, M.D. and Millie H. Gitter in memory of Morris Gitter, 77.19

The inscription, located inside the outline of the bag reads:

*While sleeping*

*A Shinto god? A Buddha?*

*--just a cloth bag*

“Cloth bag” refers to the popular deity Hotei (whose name literally means “cloth bag”) and to the sack this jovial deity carried upon his back. Hotei was a beloved painting subject for Hakuin, one of the most influential figures in the history of Zen and Zen painting*.*

**Hakuin Ekaku**

Japanese, 1685-1768

*Treasure Boat*

Ink on paper

Museum Purchase, 88.21

The god of longevity, Fukurokuju*,* identifiable by his elongated cranium, is seated in a boat, which is itself formed of the character *kotobuki*, meaning “long life.” Within the boat are four symbols of good fortune: the lucky raincoat, a straw hat (representing the gift of invisibility from thieves and tax collectors), a magic mallet and Hotei’s treasure bag.

The inscription reads:

*Those who are loyal to their lord and filial to their elders will be presented with this raincoat, hat, mallet and bag.”*

**Sengai Gibon**

Japanese, 1750 – 1837

*Three Gods of Good Fortune: Ebisu, Daikoku and Jurojin*

Ink on paper

Gift of Kurt A. Gitter, M.D., and Millie H. Gitter, 75.407

Ebisu, the god of good fishing, Daikoku, the god of agriculture and merchants and Jurojin, the god of longevity, are playfully depicted by Sengai. Hakuin and Sengai are considered to be the most significant Edo-period Zen painters.

**Kogan Gengei**

Japanese, 1748-1821

*Daikoku*

Ink on paper

Gift of an Anonymous Donor, 84.114