



Views of Itsukushima and Wakanoura (detail), Japanese, Edo period, mid-17th century. Ink, color, and gold leaf on paper; pair of six-panel folding screens. SBMA, Museum Purchase, Peggy and John Maximus Fund.

Paths of Gold: Japanese Landscape and Narrative Paintings from the Collection

On View November 10, 2018 – February 10, 2019

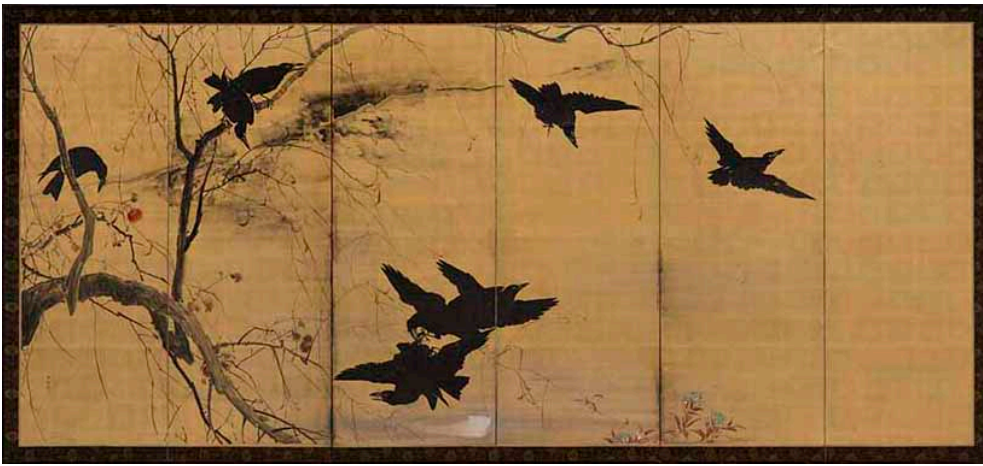
October 4, 2018—Traditional Japanese houses were constructed of wood with paper windows and doors, and rice-straw matting (tatami) covering the floors. Each room—separated by sliding door panels—was like a virtual blank slate that could be repurposed as a study, sleeping quarters, or a place to meet guests. This plain and malleable interior would be redecorated to suit each purpose, and, for certain occasions, could be outfitted with glistening screens and objects of color and gold.

This exhibition examines the aesthetics of Japanese art within both private and public interiors by showcasing nine folding screens, two scroll paintings, and examples of lacquerware selected from the permanent collection, supplemented by two local loans. Most impressive among these is the folding screen, or *byōbu* (literally “shield-wind”), which through its sheer scale and often glittering gold background defined room ambience and afforded its painter a broad field for expression. Screens were changed seasonally or commissioned specifically for a celebration, a gathering of like minded friends, or a political assembly. A gilded screen enhanced the ambient light in a room, and at the same time, impressed, or even humbled visitors as it reflected the wealth or status of the patron.



Paths of Gold features screens dating from the 16th through the 19th centuries, at the end of which Japan opened to European and American trade. The earliest example is a set from the Hasegawa school of the late Momoyama period (1573–1615) that was adapted from sliding doors appropriate to a temple or the home of a noble. Economic changes in the Edo period (1615–1868) brought more merchants into the art market, and broadening tastes prompted new art schools with a proliferation of styles. Screens of famous places or flora of Japan from the 17th and early 18th centuries could be ordered by a wealthy merchant or samurai for the scenes of landmarks, and a noble or a merchant with poetic proclivities for the seasonal flowers. Politics also played an important role in painting themes, as samurai were encouraged to have Chinese-style paintings—many with Confucian themes—on display in their homes; the shogunal government of the Edo period (1615–1868) was organized on Confucian principles, promoting its study among the samurai.

Kitagawa Sōsetsu, Japanese, mid-17th century, Spring and Autumn Flowers and Grasses (detail). Ink, color, and gold on paper; pair of six-panel folding screens. SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by Wright S. Ludington.



Kishi Chikudō, Japanese, 1826-1897, *Crows in Early Winter*. Ink and color on gold ground; pair of six-panel folding screens. SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree, Priscilla Giesen, and special funds.

Among the treasures in the exhibition is a lavishly decorated 17th-century set of three handscrolls, attributed to Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691). Painted with exquisite mineral pigments and gold, *The Tale of Bunshō* narrates a story about the rise of the merchant class and the struggles of women. On display as well are a hanging scroll and screen paintings from the Meiji era (1868–1912), a time when formats and subjects were introduced for the newly-conceived public exhibition hall. Also on display are examples of lacquerware from the collection, decorated with various gold techniques, adding to the multi-faceted painterly splendor in the Japanese interior.



Left: Picnic Set with Food Boxes and a Sake Bottle, Japanese, late Edo-Meiji period, 19th –early 20th century. Lacquer, gold, and silver on wood; metal handle and fittings; signed "Ipposai." SBMA, Gift of F. Bailey Vanderhoef, Jr. Right: Attributed to Tosa Mitsuoki, Japanese, 1617–1691, *The Tale of Bunshō, the Salt-Maker* (detail). Calligraphy by Sanekage Mushanokōji (1662–1738), calligraphy dated 1688. Ink, color, gold, and silver on paper; set of three handscrolls. SBMA, Museum purchase made possible by John and Peggy Maximus Fund and SBMA Friends of Asian Art

This exhibition is co-curated by Hollis Goodall, Curator of Japanese Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Susan Tai, Elizabeth Atkins Curator of Asian Art at SBMA.

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