

POEM SCROLL *with* DEER
鹿下絵和歌卷



SAM

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Poem Scroll with Deer

A rare masterpiece in the Seattle Art Museum's collection, *Poem Scroll with Deer* (known as *Deer Scroll*) was created by two prominent artists: calligrapher Hon'ami Kōetsu and painter Tawaraya Sōtatsu. On seventy-two feet of paper, Sōtatsu used gold and silver pigments to depict deer in various poses, jumping, standing, alone, in a crowd or calling out to each other. He also decorated the reverse side with square-shaped gold and silver leaves. On this scroll, Kōetsu transcribed twenty-eight autumn poems selected from the thirteenth-century Japanese classic *Shin Kokinshū* (*New Anthology of Classical and Modern Japanese Poetry*), also referred to as *waka* poetry. SAM owns the second half of the original scroll, which is approximately thirty feet long.

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Kōetsu and Sōtatsu worked on several projects together, and the *Deer Scroll* represents their most successful collaboration. It combines the image of the deer, a symbol for autumn in Japan, with the calligraphy of a selection of *waka* poems that also refers to autumn. The scroll was created during a time when Japanese artists were concerned with revising the classic culture and art. The beautiful harmony of Kōetsu's rhythmic calligraphy and Sōtatsu's charming deer embodies the fresh sensibility of the time, often referred to as the Japanese Renaissance. The artists' decorative sense and style, now called the Rimpa style, influenced later generations of artists.

Conservation work conducted on SAM's section of the scroll during 2003–2004 recovered the harmonies of gold, silver and ink on the cream-white paper and also revealed Kōetsu's written signature that was hidden on the wooden roller.

Hon'ami Kōetsu

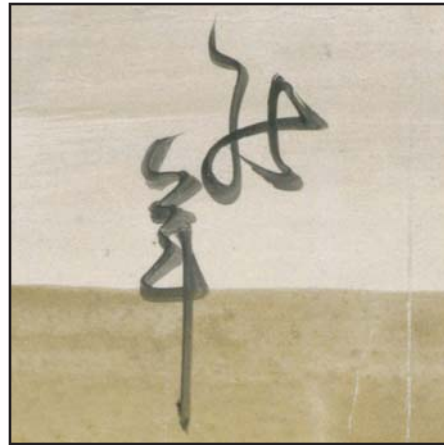
(1558–1637)

Kōetsu was born in 1558 into a wealthy and established family of sword connoisseurs in Kyoto, who appraised, polished and preserved the sword. His family was also known as ardent worshippers of the Hokke denomination of Buddhism. Although he took over the family sword business, he is best known for his work as a calligrapher, potter and designer of lacquerware. As a calligrapher, he revered the traditional styles and the works of ancient master calligraphers. He developed his original style characterized by strong and free brushwork, which established Kōetsu as one of the “Three Brushes from the Kan’ei Era (1624–29)”. The section of the *Deer Scroll* owned by SAM, contains the inscription “Tokuyūsai,” which was one of his pseudonyms. He learned the art of tea and studied with the tea master Furuta Oribe, and created *raku* tea bowls in his retirement at Takagamine, Kyoto. It is also known that he created an innovative style of lacquerware, which is now named *Kōetsu makie*.

As an educated person and a versatile artist with diverse interests, Kōetsu was a leading figure of the cultured people in Kyoto, who masterfully created an elegant and impressive decorative style that was applied to painting, lacquer, ceramic and textiles and is now known as the Rimpa style.



Kōetsu's Calligraphy



The style of handwriting seen here, known as *sōsho* or cursive style, requires a high degree of artistic skill. Formed by an irregular or free arrangement of letters, this is called *chirashi gaki* or scattered writing, which is used for writing *waka* poems and letters during the eleventh century in Japan.

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Kōetsu rendered *waka* poems in a harmony of fluid Japanese *hiragana* syllabaries and bold Chinese characters, with a variation of thick and thin ink color. This technique reflects Kōetsu's strong artistic sensibility and experience. Kōetsu studied various calligraphic styles ranging from popular contemporary to ancient, such as the work of Buddhist priest Kūkai (774–835) and Chinese Song dynasty calligrapher Zhang Jizhi (1186–1263). Based on the study of classic calligraphy, Kōetsu crafted his own original style showing a forceful and rhythmic beauty. More important, his unique work reflects his attitude toward calligraphy as a means of his artistic expression. The *Deer Scroll* illustrates his calligraphy at the height of his aesthetic art.

Tawaraya Sōtatsu

(active in early 17th century)

Little is known about Sōtatsu's personal and family history, but a few records reveal that he owned a shop in Kyoto that sold paintings, decorated fans and papers. Sōtatsu's ability to create innovative designs and work with rich colors caused a sensation, making him a popular towns-painter. As a skillful artist, he belonged to a rising social class called *machishū* or townspeople, who led cultural activities in town. Early in his life, Sōtatsu collaborated with Hon'ami Kōetsu on the *Deer Scroll* and other works. These works are characterized by his motifs painted exclusively in gold and silver, while his body of work can be recognized by his usage of materials ranging from small paper strips and fans to large screens, rendered in color and ink. Sōtatsu's bold design and delicate sensibility give his paintings a sense of lively motion on the paper as well as an expansive feeling of vast space. He is regarded as a co-founder with Hon'ami Kōetsu of the Rimpa style, which influenced many renowned past and present-day artists. A round seal of *Inen*, which appears on the SAM's section of the *Deer Scroll*, is thought to have been used by Sōtatsu and his followers.



Sōtatsu's Deer

Sōtatsu was commissioned to decorate this handscroll with the images of deer, stag and doe standing in misty air. He did this by using gold and silver pigments (gold and silver powders mixed with *nikawa* glue and water). Some of the deer are rendered by outline, while others are expressed by color shapes without outline.

Far from a realistic rendering, these simplified, rounded deer exhibit an idealistic elegance and liveliness – a common characteristic of Sōtatsu's work. Another unique feature of his work is the bold placement of the deer shapes that creates a sense of space on paper. When looking at the *Deer Scroll*, the viewer sees the deer partly depicted at the edge of the paper, giving an extensive sense of space spreading out from the handscroll. Sōtatsu's elegant design leaves an unforgettable impression with the viewer.

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The Poetry of the Deer Scroll: Shin Kokinshū

The *Deer Scroll* consists of twenty-eight poems from the *Shin Kokinshū* (officially known as *Shin Kokin Wakashū*), or *New Anthology of Classical and Modern Japanese Poetry*. The anthology contains almost 2,000 poems in the thirty-one syllable form known as *tanka* or *waka*, and was compiled by a team of courtiers who were ordered by Retired Emperor Go-Toba to begin work in 1201. It took them four years to complete their initial draft.

The *Shin Kokinshū* is one of the most famous collections of Japanese poetry and many regard it as the finest ever created. As its title suggests, it included works by poets from classic times to the contemporary era. Poetry written during the *Shin Kokinshū* period has been associated with heavy use of allusion, a sometimes fractured syntax and a lyric symbolism. It is the product of a time when poetry was held in high regard and taken seriously, almost as a path to salvation during very troubling times.

Twenty-eight poems presented here are from a chapter of the *Shin Kokinshū* that includes poems on autumn. They express a quiet melancholy in images of loss and evanescence – twilight, dew, wind, lightning and desolate surroundings. Toward the end of the sequence, sadness gives way to autumn's only consolation, the brilliant full moon shining brightly through the crisp, clear air.

Brief interpretations of the poems and biographical notes are included. The notes explain to what degree the compilation of the anthology was a social affair, rather than a strictly literary process – nearly every poet seems to be related in some way to the compilers or to Retired Emperor Go-Toba. And the sequence of the poems reveals the subtle associations that the compilers occasionally glimpsed between one verse and the next.



How to Look at the Deer Scroll

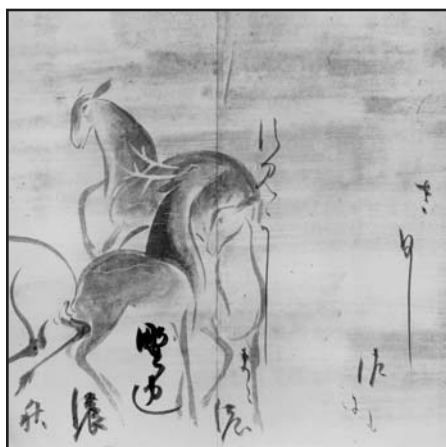
The experience of enjoying a handscroll was originally intimate and personal, much different from the way works of art are currently displayed at museums. The scroll was meant to be unrolled and rolled by a viewer's own hands at the width across his or her shoulders. Moving from the right to the left in a viewer's hands, the time or the story passes at one's own pace. The artists who created the scroll understood this rule, and they made every effort to maximize the emotional impact of imagery and text in this format.

The *Deer Scroll* is not an exception. It will give a viewer a thrill each time the scroll is opened, each time a poem in Kōetsu's calligraphy is read and the different illustrations of the deer are encountered. The scene of a crowd of deer was depicted as if looking at a panoramic scene through a movie camera, panning from the right to the left. Meanwhile, a poem without a deer image prepares the viewer to expect a deer to be forthcoming. Both of the viewer's hands work like two reels of a videotape as the viewer controls this program.

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The Deer Scroll Project

There is no documentation explaining who commissioned the *Deer Scroll* and why. Little is also known about its whereabouts until the late nineteenth century. In 1935, it was divided into two volumes by the owner at that time, Masuda Takashi (also known as Masuda Donnō, 1848–1938), a famous Japanese businessman and art collector. In 1951, the Seattle Art Museum acquired the second half of the scroll, while the first half was cut into a number of fragments and made into individual hanging scrolls and a handscroll. They are now located throughout Japan, owned by five museums and two private collectors. Two segments of the *Deer Scroll* are still missing; the only evidence of their existence is from old black-and-white photographs taken before the work was cut.



The purpose of this interactive computer display is to re-create the original experience of viewing the *Deer Scroll*, to give you, the museum visitor, the opportunity to see the scroll in its entirety and as it was originally intended to be read.

To reproduce the *Deer Scroll* virtually for the computer, SAM spent time collecting and preparing the images of the entire hand scroll. Color transparencies were generously offered from the current owners in Japan, old monochrome photographs, which were taken before the scroll was cut, contributed to fill in the missing parts of the scroll. Computer technology made it possible to turn the black and white gradation to a subtle scheme of gold and silver, showing a perfect match with the rest of the scroll. Carefully stitching all digital scans together and color correcting them gives us the opportunity to see one seamless presentation of the original *Deer Scroll*. The current owner of each segment is identified in the *Scroll Ownership* page and throughout the *Scroll* and *Poem* sections.



Credits

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The conservation project was overseen by Seattle Art Museum staff Nicholas Dorman, Chief Conservator, and Yukiko Shirahara, John A. McCone Foundation Curator of Asian Art.

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Image of conservation process and details of *Deer Scroll* provided by BUNKAZAIHOZON, Nara.

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