

From: Joe Layman
To: JSTUCKY@ASIANART.ORG
Sent: Mon 4/2/2012 8:56PM

Let me first say thank you in advance for your time in receiving this email.

I am searching for information on an old scroll painting that I recently had come into my possession and am attempting to learn what I can about it and am finding resources very slim (or at least difficult to locate).

The scroll itself is marked as being gifted to a member of my family in 1946, so it dates back at least that far. It is complete inside 2 wooden boxes (one is a fancy display type box and the other is an outer protective box, both wooden boxes are built in the same doweled joint-making process) and they both are inside a paperboard box. Below is an image of the end of the exterior paperboard box and the text from the cover of the interior box.



Any assistance you could provide would be much appreciated. I can send additional images via email if you would like.

Again, thank you for any information and your time.

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From: John Stucky [<mailto:jstucky@asianart.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 1:29 PM

To: Joe P. Layman
Subject: Re: Information Request

Dear Mr. Layman--

I cannot tell you too much. First, the writing on the wooden box is upside down which makes it difficult to read. The writing on the wooden box consists of two characters pronounced "*shakuyaku*" which is a kind of peony. I am only guessing that since the second character also means medicine that the flower depicted on the scroll, if that is what it is, may have been used for medicinal purposes.

The label on the exterior box is sideways and so faint and small I can't really make out what it says. The smaller label on the upper right is a numeral and reads "124", which may be a catalog or inventory number.

A larger photo of the label on the exterior box and perhaps some photos of the painting itself with close ups of the signature and seal may help....if the writing is not so loose and cursive that I can't read it.

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From: Joe Layman
Sent Tue 4/3/2012 5:27PM

I thank you very much for your response and time. You are 100% correct, it is an image of flowers. The following link is to all of the photographs I have taken.

<http://www.laymanspc.com/files/Personal/tag/wallscroll/>

Any further assistance you may be able to provide on identifying the origin, artist, or some history would be much appreciated.

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From: John Stucky [<mailto:jstucky@asianart.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 7:39 PM
To: Joe P. Layman
Subject: RE: Information Request

Dear Mr Layman--

OK---I didn't need to see all of the photos of the boxes & wrappings---but I could get some info from the close up of the exterior label which does tell me that it is a work by someone named "Tsuchida ??sen Sensei"...this didn't really help, but photos of the painting colophon told me a lot.

The inscription along the right side of the painting reads: "Painted at Kinugasayama (Mt. Kinugasa) June, 1924 (13th year of Taisho, sixth month) in the Nangabo (Studio of the Scholar Painter) (signed & sealed by) Bakusen". I can combine this inscription with what I can read on the exterior label and find that this is a work by Tsuchida Bakusen who lived from 1887 - 1936. He was a Japanese style painter (Nihonga). He was born on Sado Island but moved to Kyoto in 1903 to study with Suzuki Shonen & Takeuchi Seiho, both well known early masters of modern Japanese style painting (Nihonga). Bakusen went on to receive many awards for his work. He also lived and studied painting in Europe from 1921 -- 1923. So this painting must have been done shortly after returning to Japan in 1924. He was also a member of the Imperial Fine Arts Academy. He is known for his attempts to blend Japanese decorative style with Western realism. This information is extracted from: Roberts, Laurence P. *A Dictionary of Japanese Artists....* Tokyo, New York : Weatherhill, 1976, pg. 188.

A personal remark: I can tell the influence of the earlier Rimpa masters of the Edo period (1600-1868) in the use of washes in the leaves of the peonies. This is a special style known as 'tarashikomi' where more than one color and thickness of paint is distributed in a puddle of water to create the mixed light and dark and multi-color effect. The name of his studio "Nanga Bo" is a reference to the Southern School of painters as Nan = Southern, and Ga = painting, while Bo = studio. The so-called Southern School painters were the Confucian scholar amateurs of China. After the fall of the Ming dynasty in China in 1644 many scholars and Buddhist monks loyal to the native Ming rulers fled to Japan and largely settled in the Kyoto area. The Confucian amateur style of painting was introduced to the Japanese at that time (late 17th century)---the Japanese perfected this style and then went on to develop it in their own unique way. Anyway, this is why I translate the name of the studio as "Studio of the Scholar Painter" even though Bakusen's style is anything but a work in that tradition as it refers to an older native Japanese style of painting as observed.

The two words on the wooden box stumped me because the second character is not in any dictionary that I have readily at hand here. Finally I just guessed that it must be an abbreviated form for the word "yaku" meaning medicine. When I looked up the first character it did combine this character with the character for medicine to designate a certain kind of peony. In looking at your painting I realized that my guess was pretty good, it is a painting of peonies. In Japan, I don't think peonies hold any special meaning, other than being so beautiful. However, the Chinese consider the peony to be a symbol of wealth and nobility and deeply prize it.

Treasure your painting as that is what it truly is! I also like the personal little inscription on the outside dated 1946....it adds more personal meaning and family history to the work.

--with a bow,

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From: Joe Layman
Sent: 4/3/2012 10:19PM

WOW.

Sorry about the extra pictures but the photos were taken as a photo-log of how it was found.

Again I say "WOW". I am amazed with what you have told me. I cannot begin to thank you enough for your assistance and insight.

Some of the items my Great Aunt had managed to acquire in her lifetime are truly unique and this is definitely one of them. I am thoroughly enjoying researching items such as this and learning the history of them, and you have given me a great deal to research and learn about and I truly am very grateful.

Thank you so very much for your time,

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From: John Stucky [<mailto:jstucky@asianart.org>]
Sent: Wednesday, April 04, 2012 12:06 PM
To: Joe P. Layman
Subject: RE: Information Request

Dear Mr. Layman---

I am only too glad I could help. It isn't often that a painting inscription is so legible and easy for me. You lucked out in more ways than one. Also, I want to add that as your painting has much bright color to NOT expose it to any direct sunlight. If you hang it, please only hang it for a month or two and no longer. Watercolors are very volatile, especially the warmer colors. You may want to pass it on to your children, it does look to be an exceptional piece...and I do not say this lightly as we see a lot of art that is far less than exceptional.

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From: Joe Layman
Sent: 4/4/2012 3:51PM

Dear Mr. Stucky,

I do consider myself very lucky and blessed to have had a Great Aunt who collected and cared for such works of art as she did, as well as lucky and blessed to have located you to assist me in identifying this piece. I am very thankful to you for all your information and assistance. I enjoy reading about interesting things, and needless to say this has me interested. I have been looking and there is actually a fair amount of written history available and will truly enjoy researching this artist, his work, and his influences.

I do not think I will be hanging it. My Great Aunt kept it preserved by keeping it inside the 3 original boxes, wrapped in paper, and tucked in a dark closet. I will likely do the same and only take it out on occasions it can be properly admired by those that would appreciate it for what it is. I somewhat hate to do that to a work of art; but I cannot afford, nor would my home accommodate a UV protectant display case for something this size (it is about 8 feet long).

When I first found the scroll, I didn't see the inscription on the back and thought it was much newer than it is due to the condition. It truly is in amazing condition for being 12 years shy of 100 years old. There are no frayed edges and the binding at the ends are flawless. Once I realized how old it was from the inscription on the back, I knew it would need protected from light but I do thank you for your interest in helping maintain the quality of my piece.

It will definitely be something to pass down to future generations. I only hope I can do as well preserving it as my Great Aunt has done.

I thank you for your time and assistance. You have been a great help!

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