



Waves at Matsushima

Tawaraya Sōtatsu (act. ca. 1600–40). Japan, early 1600s.
Pair of six-panel folding screens. Ink, color, gold, and silver
on paper. 166 × 369.9 cm (each, overall). Gift of Charles
Lang Freer, Freer Gallery of Art, F1906.231-232

FREER | SACKLER
THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUMS OF ASIAN ART



About the Artist

Tawaraya Sōtatsu was active in the first half of the 17th century, faded into near obscurity for the next 200 years, and today is one of Japan's most revered painters. Previously, only the wealthy and royalty had been allowed to own art, and only court artisans could use certain themes. But in the 1600s, the imperial court ceded its power to rising classes of warriors and merchants, and a new audience emerged, eager for the trappings of the cultural elite. Sōtatsu's experimental painting techniques and brilliantly conceived compositions transformed Japan's courtly artistic style. His painting shop/studio in Kyoto, the Tawaraya, specialized in fan paintings that were designed and produced for and sold to a wider public. By the 1620s, the shop was enjoying aristocratic and imperial patronage. Today, Sōtatsu's works are instantly recognizable, with bold, almost abstract design, vibrant colors, fields of gold and silver, and the use of wet pigment to create random patterns (*tarashikomi*). These innovations characterized what later became known as the Rinpa style.

About This Work of Art

These two six-panel folding screens are among a small number of screens firmly attributed to the artist. Sōtatsu's dynamic seascape shows a dramatic interplay among the cloud and land forms, the bending pines on rocky islands, and the turbulent, white-capped waves. The craggy rocks are painted in bright mineral colors of green, blue, and red ochre, highlighted with gold. The waves are lines of ink and gold that fold upon each other in varied patterns and shapes. The clouds and embankments are rendered with gold leaf accented with silver, which has darkened over time to a soft black tone. The screens' subject matter—pines (*matsu*) and islands (*shima*)—was once thought to represent the natural beauty of the islands in Matsushima Bay, off Japan's Pacific coast. Recent scholarship suggests, however, that the depicted site is idealized rather than specific, conveying messages of abundant blessings from the sea and welcoming shores.

Japanese Folding Screens

The folding screen is one of Japan's most distinctive forms of art. Many of Japan's greatest artists created paintings and calligraphy for folding screens, known as *byōbu* or "protection from wind." Adaptable to a variety of settings, screens suit traditional Japanese architecture, which often features sliding panels (*fusuma*), rather than solid walls, and rooms with little or no furniture. Compact when closed, they can provide a formal setting for a ceremony or official meeting or a more intimate space for serving tea, reading, writing, or sleeping. They are made of wooden latticework to which large sheets of paper are attached. Painting and calligraphy are usually done separately on paper or occasionally silk, in tones of ink or decorated with silver and gold. The wooden frame may be lacquered and embellished with metal ornaments. Nearly invisible paper hinges join the panels that provide a continuous surface for large-scale paintings.

Related works from the Freer Gallery of Art

When museum founder Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919) first encountered Asian art, he was intrigued by Japanese paintings, stoneware ceramics, and tea utensils. His first Asian art purchase (in 1887) was a painted Japanese fan. Between 1894 and 1911, he made four extended visits to Japan, and by his death, he had collected over 2,000 Japanese artworks. Since then, the Japanese art collection has grown in size and spans more than four millennia; it is especially rich in paintings and ceramics from the 12th to 19th century. Freer first became aware of Sōtatsu in the late 19th century and had acquired many examples of his work by 1906. Today, the museum holds several Sōtatsu masterpieces—including the ones illustrated below—thanks to Freer’s prescience in recognizing the artist’s importance.



Dragons and Clouds
Tawaraya Sōtatsu (act. ca. 1600–40)
Japan, Edo period, early 1600s
Pair of six-panel folding screens
ink and pink tint on paper
Gift of Charles Lang Freer
Freer Gallery of Art, F1905.229-230



Screen with Scattered Fans
“Tatō” seal
Tawaraya Sōtatsu (act. ca. 1600–40)
Japan, Edo period, early 1600s
Six-panel folding screen; color, gold,
and silver over gold on paper
Gift of Charles Lang Freer
Freer Gallery of Art, F1900.24



*Folding Screens Mounted with
Poem Cards from the Shinkokin wakashū*
Tawaraya Sōtatsu (act. ca. 1600–40)
Hon’ami Kōetsu (1558–1637), calligrapher
Japan, Edo period, ca. 1624–37
Pair of six-panel folding screens;
ink, colors, and gold on paper
Gift of Charles Lang Freer
Freer Gallery of Art, F1902.195-196

Additional Resources

We invite teachers of all levels to adapt this resource. Use the poster to spark classroom discussion or inspire student assignments in a variety of disciplines, including art, social studies, science, and language arts.

The Arts of Japan: A Teacher's Guide

www.asia.si.edu/explore/teacherResources/ArtsOfJapan.pdf

This guide was created by Freer|Sackler education staff and Washington, DC, area teachers. It features basic information about Japan, objects with in-depth information, additional resources, and lesson plans. One of the featured objects is a *Waves at Matsushima* screen.

Sōtatsu: Making Waves | Exhibition Catalogue

www.asia.si.edu/sotatsu/catalogue-preview.asp

The artist's life and craft are illuminated in this 368-page volume through a close examination of his contemporaries, his evolution as a master painter, and his increasing stature in Japan and the West, thanks in part to the efforts of collector Charles Lang Freer. With 308 black-and-white and color illustrations. Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Sōtatsu: Making Waves*.

Sotatsu: Making Waves | Website Feature

www.asia.si.edu/sotatsu

Information about the landmark special exhibition on view at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery from October 24, 2015–January 31, 2016.

Waves at Matsushima Explore + Learn

www.asia.si.edu/explore/japan/matsushima/default.asp

Use this resource to look at other works in the museum's collection that show scenes of Matsushima, find out more about Matsushima today, and view *Sōtatsu's* screens in even greater detail via the Google Art project.

Open F|S

www.asia.si.edu/collections

To see additional examples of the artist's work, go to our online collections page, Open F|S, and search for "Sotatsu."



Sōtatsu: Making Waves is co-organized by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Japan Foundation. The exhibition is supported by All Nippon Airways Co., Ltd. Special thanks to Tokyo University of the Arts. Additional generous support is provided by the Anne van Biema Endowment Fund.