

Fusuma Paintings

Many of the sliding panels (*fusuma*) in the Hondō feature decorative paintings in the style of fifteenth-century Higashiyama culture, but the art is the work of two prominent artists of the eighteenth century: Yosa Buson (1716–1784) and Ike no Taiga (1723–1776). The simple, black-ink depictions of nature reflect the Higashiyama-culture admiration for classical Chinese themes. Both artists were part of a group of intellectual painters who referenced classical Chinese poems and older paintings in their works (Nanga school), and these insider references add an extra layer of meaning to their works.

Yosa Buson was renowned as a master haiku poet as well as a painter. Born in what is now Osaka, he studied poetry and retraced the journey of haiku master Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) across northern Japan as part of his training. After settling in Kyoto, he continued writing and began painting. Two rooms of the Hondō feature *fusuma* painted by Buson in very different styles. *Eight Drinking Hermits* is a comic scene based on a Tang dynasty (618–907) poem, and portrays wise men returning home from a party, assisted—and sometimes carried—by their apprentices. The style is fluid and light. In contrast, *Mynah Birds on Hemp Palm* is rhythmic and dynamic, depicting either a flock of birds, or a single bird perhaps taking off from a rock and flying through the trees, with the panels functioning like frames from an animation.

Ike no Taiga was born in Kyoto and became a professional artist and calligrapher by the age of 14, having first studied calligraphy at Manpukuji Temple as a child. He ran a business painting fans, and was soon discovered by local literati, who taught him to paint in the Chinese tradition. His work largely pays homage to classical Chinese culture and painting, but contains elements considered revolutionary and modern, such as realistic topographical scenes. The panels he painted in the Hondō are called *The Four Accomplishments*, depicting the arts of calligraphy, painting, chess and playing the harp that were considered elegant pastimes by the Chinese upper classes.