

Itsukushima Shrine: *Komochi Yamauba*

Not all *ema* images depict animals, historical heroes, or other auspicious motifs. This painting by the Kyoto-based artist Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799) portrays a fearsome-looking *yamauba* (“mountain witch”) and her adoptive child. The boy is Kintaro, whose legend is one of the staples of Japanese folklore. Raised by the *yamauba* on a mountain in Hakone (just south of Tokyo), Kintaro was a child with superhuman strength who fought monsters and demons from an early age. In his free time, he would throw rocks the size of a small house and fell trees with his bare hands. Rosetsu depicts the infant Kintaro clinging to his mother, whose once vivid but now faded kimono hints at her past as a courtesan in Kyoto. Considered one of the artist’s finest achievements, the painting was donated to Itsukushima Shrine in 1797 by a group of wealthy merchants from Hiroshima, some of whom had housed Rosetsu during his visit to the city a few years earlier. The painting displayed here is a reproduction.