

## **Painted Panel**

### **(Collection of the Himeji Center for Research into Castles and Fortifications)**

When Himeji Castle was renovated in the mid-twentieth century, workers found a cedar panel under a section of wall plaster in the West Bailey gallery. Traces of paint and a faint outline suggest that it once bore the image of a pine tree.

The panel below is a product of scientific detective work that shows what it might have looked like centuries ago. The image on the original is almost completely faded, so researchers used infrared photography and X-rays to examine the tiny fragments of paint that remained. They identified several pigments, including two kinds of green that were used to create the tree's needles, and a reddish-brown paint called *taisha* that was used for the branches. They also were able to confirm that the image was a stylized depiction of a Japanese red pine.

Conservators filled in the missing details. First, they created an outline based on surviving paint traces and transferred the shape to a new cedar panel using carbon paper. Then the image was colored using traditional paints, starting with an undercoat of whitish-green. More light green was used to give the needles depth, but because the conservators could only guess at the details in the original, the tops of the needles were left blurry. Shading was added to the bottom of the tree with a grass-green pigment called *kusanoshiru*. The trunks and branches were painted using India ink and *taisha*. The moss was added with *kusanoshiru* and the white-green paint used for the undercoat of the needles.

The result is a naturalistic image in the style of the early Edo period (1603–1867), but it should be considered an educated reimagining of the original painting, not an exact reproduction.