

## **Tawaraya Sotatsu and the Rinpa School**

Tawaraya Sotatsu (c. 1570–1640) was a painter who co-founded the Rinpa school of art. While his date and place of birth are unclear, Sotatsu's fame began to grow with the flourishing of his Tawaraya workshop in Kyoto around the early seventeenth century. The atelier produced painted fans and paper for lanterns, and also carried out private commissions for interior decorating. Sotatsu's workshop favored lavish hues of gold and silver for folding screens and sliding wall panels, which some scholars consider to be a revival of painting styles from the Heian period (794–1185).

Around 1616, Sotatsu worked with the calligrapher and craftsman Hon'ami Koetsu (1558–1637) on the *Sagabon* (Saga Books), a series of Japanese literary classics, the opulent design of which attempted to recapture Heian artistic refinement. This project set the stage for a long-term collaboration between the two men which formed the basis of the Rinpa school.

Rinpa works are characterized by their close studies of the natural world, delicate coloring, abstraction, and the use of precious materials such as gold leaf and lapis lazuli. Associated with the indigenous Yamato-e genre of painting, these works can be contrasted with Chinese-influenced paintings from the Kano school, founded by Kano Masanobu (1434–1530). One famous example of Rinpa painting is Sotatsu's *Wind and Thunder God Screens*, a National Treasure depicting two deities on a broad expanse of gold leaf, now housed in the Kyoto National Museum. It was probably after Sotatsu

completed a series of paintings at Yogen'in in 1621 that he was awarded the honorary title of *hokkyo*, given to the master of a school or shop.