***Agriculture in the Four Seasons* by Kusumi Morikage (1600s)**

This pair of folding screens depicts the customs of seventeenth-century villagers over the course of the four seasons. They were created by the painter Kusumi Morikage (ca. 1620–1690). Kusumi was originally part of the prestigious Kanō School of painting, which prospered between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Kusumi studied under Kanō Tanyū (1602–1674), one of the most successful Kanō painters of the Edo period (1603–1867), but eventually left the school and developed his own painting style depicting rural life in Japan.

Depictions of rural life, such as those of agricultural activities or silk production, are a genre of painting that came from China. This genre, called *kankai-ga*, became popular in the Muromachi period (1336–1573). The paintings were intended, in part, to educate rulers about the daily life of their subjects and remind them of the hardships their people faced. Through the paintings, rulers could see that the people in their domains were working hard, and that they should be treated with compassion. The images also may have been used to educate children of the samurai class.

Many Japanese artists—Kusumi among them—produced paintings of rural life that closely imitated Chinese models, even depicting the people in them with Chinese clothing and dwellings. However, these folding screens are noteworthy because they show Japanese customs, not Chinese. The landscapes, buildings, clothing, and activities illustrated in these screens represent Japanese life in the seventeenth century.

Another unique aspect of the screens is that the seasons are depicted in sequence from left to right. Traditionally, Japanese writing, picture scrolls, and screen paintings progress from right to left. In this work, Kusumi has reversed the order of the seasons, starting on the left with spring and progressing to winter on the right.

The screens have six panels each. Snow covers the treetops and roofs in the first two spring panels. In the next few, the snow disappears, and people can be seen crossing the bridge, fishing in the river, and working in the fields. Figures in the fifth panel are relaxing under the trees in summer. The scene then moves to autumn, where people are hard at work in the fields. In the final panels of the second screen, there is a bustle of activity as people prepare for winter. Children are playing, and an official can be seen collecting the annual tax following the harvest season.