

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

This pair of folding screens depicts the customs of ordinary people during the Edo period (1603–1867) over the course of the four seasons. The screens, which have six panels each, were created by seventeenth-century painter Kusumi Morikage (ca. 1620–1690). Kusumi was originally part of the prestigious and influential Kanō School of painting, but he went on to develop his own style of painting rural life in Japan.

Paintings of rural life constituted a specific genre in Chinese art. They were intended to remind the emperor to have compassion for his toiling subjects. When this genre was introduced to Japan during the Muromachi period (1336–1573), Japanese artists reproduced not only the general theme, but also the Chinese landscapes, clothing, and customs. Kusumi's *Agriculture in the Four Seasons* was original in that he changed the scene from Chinese to Japanese: the scenery, buildings, and activities in these screen paintings portray Japan in the seventeenth century.

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