



7711 A two-fold paper screen painted in ink and colour on a buff and gold ground with the Uji River and lotus beneath its renowned bridge

Rimpa School, Japan 17th century Edo period

Dimensions: H. 167cm x W. 188.5cm (66" x 74¼")

The depiction of the famous bridge at Uji is from a genre of Yamato-e (Japanese painting) known as meisho-e (paintings of famous places).

Japanese poets have long praised the scenic beauty of the Uji River which flows from Lake Biwa to Osaka Bay. Literary references to the location abound in imperial poetry and pre-date any existing images. The Man'yōshū (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, eighth century) and the Kokin Wakashū (Collection of Poems from Ancient and Modern Times, early tenth century) include references to such features as the arching bridge (first constructed in 646 A.D.), while hinting at the religious associations of this area.

In the 11th century, Uji became home to the Pure Land (Jōdo) Buddhist temple Byōdōin and its famous Hōōdō (Phoenix Hall). The temple and its grounds were a replica of Amida Buddha's Western Paradise, a

three dimensional construction based on the Kanmuryōjūkyō (Contemplation Sutra). Such literal manifestations of imaginary locations helped the aristocracy envision Paradise, a place they clearly hoped to return to after death. If these screens are read in the light of religious connotations then perhaps the bridge represents the connection between this land and the Pure Land.

Uji was favoured by members of the imperial court who used the area as a retreat; historic documents show a screen painting of Uji Bridge in autumn, which was displayed in the imperial palace in the ninth century.