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6883 絹本着色Shiokawa Bunrin (1808-1877)

A silk kakemono (hanging scroll) painted in ink and colour with hotaru (fireflies) flying over the water's surface at dusk on a summer evening

Signed: Kachiku rōjin Shio Bunrin (Shio(kawa) Bunrin, old man Kachiku)

Seals:

Top: Bunrin

Bottom: Shion

Japan 19th century Edo/Meiji period

Dimensions:

Scroll: H. 170.5cm x W. 32cm (67¼" x 12¾")

Painting: H. 95cm x W. 30cm (37½" x 12")

Shiokawa Bunrin (1808-1877). Also known as Zusho. Gō (art names): Chikusai, Kachikusai, Kibutsuan, Kibutsu Dōjin, Kibutsu Koji, Sensei, Tōsai, Unshō.

Bunrin lived in Kyoto, and studied under Okamoto Toyohiko (1773-1845), a leading Shijō School artist. He served as painter in attendance to the Yasui family for much of his career, and had many patrons among the Kyoto aristocracy. Bunrin learned nanga (southern style) painting, and was also influenced by Western style painting. He founded the Jounsha art society in 1866 which served as an important source of support for Kyoto artists of all schools during the difficult period of transition of the Meiji Restoration.

Hotaru (fireflies) appear regularly in Bunrin's work, and there are a series of paintings similar to the one here with fireflies over water which were produced by the Kyoto Shijō School at this time, perhaps the response to a large commission.

One possible inspiration for this painting could be an episode in chapter 45 of the Tales of Ise, 'iku hotaru' ('fireflies in flight'). In this episode, a man has just been told that the woman who loved him has died without confessing her love. That evening as the fireflies come out, he sits and mourns.

A hanging scroll by the artist with a similar subject matter can be found in the collection of the British Museum, 'Fireflies' by Shiokawa Bunrin, ca. 1875.

A pair of folding screens by the artist with a similar subject matter can be found in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Gallery, Kansas City, dated 1875.

Works by the artist are also held in the collections of: The Ashmolean, Oxford; Freer Gallery of Art, Washington; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tokyo National Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

