

gregg baker
asian art



6909 A paper kakemono (hanging scroll) painted in ink with a gama (toad)

Signed: Bunchō hitsu

Seal: Gagakusai

Japan 19th century Edo period

Dimensions:

Scroll: H. 201cm x W. 70cm (79¹/₄" x 27³/₄")

Painting: H. 119cm x W. 50.5cm (47" x 20")

Tani Bunchō (1763-1840), gō (art names): Bun'ami, Gagakusai (lit. 'painting-study-studio'), Ichijio, Muni, Shazanrō, Shōsō.

Bunchō was born into a samurai family in Edo (modern day Tokyo); the son of Tani Rokkoku (1729-1809), a well-known poet and vassal of Lord Tayasu, a descendant of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Bunchō first studied Kanō painting under Katō Bunrei (1706-82) and Kitayama Kangan (1767-1801) before moving on to study nanga with Watanabe Gentai (1749-1822) and Kushiro Unsen (1758-1811).

He studied various styles including ukiyo-e and the Chinese school but is generally considered a nanga painter, although his work is wildly eclectic. He was also famous for his realistic portraits. Bunchō was one of the most important painters of his period with a tremendous influence on his contemporaries.

In some instances in Japanese legend and art gama (toads) and kaeru (frogs) are interchangeable.

However, it is the long lived, terrestrial toad that is most closely associated with myth and magic, as is reflected in the expression gama yojutsu (black arts of the toad).

Japanese legend tells of Gama Sennin, also known as Kosensei, a wise old man with a hunched body and a warty face who wanders the land with his toad companion, who teaches him the secret powers of herbs, including the secret of immortality. This tale is similar to a Chinese legend involving a wandering wise man called Liu Hai and his three-legged toad companion Ch'an Chu. The toad knows the secret of eternal life and, for his friendship reveals the secret to the wise man.

In many ancient Chinese tales and legends, the toad is a trickster and a magician, a master of escapes

and spells; he is also the keeper of the real, powerful secrets of the world, such as the secret of immortality. It is such ascribed powers that undoubtedly led the Chinese, and later the Japanese, to associate the toad with Taoists who seek to develop these talents.

Works by the artist can be found in the collections of: The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; The British Museum London; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, California; Freer Gallery of Art, Washington; Honkō-ji, Washizu, Shizuoka-ken; Ishiyama-dera, Ōtsu-shi, Shiga-ken; Kōbe Municipal Museum of Namban Art; Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; Nezu Art Museum, Tokyo; Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio; Ōsaka Municipal Art Museum; Rietberg Museum, Zurich; Seattle Art Museum, Washington; Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo; University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor; The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts.



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