

# The Shogun's Hawk The Fourth Room of the Ohiroma

Important Cultural Property (Paintings): Most of the murals in Ninomaru-goten Palace at Nijo-jo Castle were painted by Kano school artists during the large-scale renovation in 1626, during the time of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu (1604-51).

This year, as part of the series “Birds-and-Flowers Paintings in a Different Key,” we focus on the murals depicted in the rooms located in the northeast of each building of Ninomaru-goten Palace. These murals depict bird and flower scenes that share similarities with other rooms while also possessing distinct characteristics.

This exhibition introduces the mural “*Matsutaka-zu (Pines and Hawks)*” from the Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room) located in the northeast of the Ohiroma of Ninomaru-goten Palace.

## The Role of the Ohiroma and the Birds Depicted

Among the rooms in the Ohiroma, the Ichi-no-ma (First Room) and Ni-no-ma (Second Room) were official audience chambers for the shogun, while the San-no-ma (Third Room) was where those waiting for an audience were said to wait. Historical documents regarding the use of the Fourth Room have not yet been discovered, but it is believed to have served a supplementary role.

The murals from the First to Fourth Rooms of the Ohiroma depict giant pine trees and birds against a gold leaf background. In the First Room, golden pheasants are depicted, while peacocks are depicted in the Second and Third Rooms. These were all rare exotic birds with beautiful plumage and were also presented as gifts to those in power. It is believed that depicting such beautiful gifts served not only to decorate the rooms but also to demonstrate power. On the other hand, the birds in the Fourth Room depict majestic hawks and eagles, giving it a different atmosphere from the First to Third Rooms.

## Hawks and Those in Power

Falconry—hunting with trained hawks—has been practiced by those in power since ancient times. In Japan, falconry itself had characteristics related to military training, and hawks and their prey played an important role as gifts exchanged between powerful individuals to establish and confirm master-servant or friendly relationships. In ancient times, the emperor practiced falconry, but from the 12th century onward, this practice declined among emperors and was instead taken up by warriors. For example, we know that Oda Nobunaga (1534-82), who laid the foundation for the unification of Japan in the latter half of the 16th century, and his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-98) engaged in falconry. In 1591, after practicing falconry in the Mino, Owari, and Mikawa regions, Hideyoshi returned to Kyoto with over 150 falconers and several hundred mounted soldiers, displaying more than 37,000 prey animals as he passed by the south side of the Imperial Palace before returning to his castle, Jurakudai. Besides presenting prey to the emperor, he also hosted banquets at Jurakudai for imperial messengers, regent families, and monzeki (priests of imperial or aristocratic lineage), using hawks and their prey as tools to demonstrate his military might throughout Kyoto.

After them, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), who achieved unification of the country, became the Seii Taishogun (commander-in-chief against the barbarians), established the shogunate in Edo, and built Nijo-jo Castle in Kyoto, was known especially for his love of hawks and falconry, engaging in falconry more than a thousand times in his lifetime. In 1612, the shogunate prohibited falconry and hawk ownership among court

nobles—a move purely driven by the political significance these activities held. The shogunate's policy aimed to control court nobles to prevent them from maintaining military power. Iemitsu, who admired his grandfather Ieyasu, also frequently engaged in falconry, suggesting that at the time when the murals of the Fourth Room of the Ohiroma were created, hawks were considered important birds symbolizing military power that supported authority.

The fact that birds representing splendid gifts that resulted from possession of power were depicted in the First to Third Rooms used for audiences, while hawks symbolizing the military strength that backed up that power were depicted in the Fourth Room behind them, can be seen as the result of efforts to visualize the shogun's power in each room.

## Carrying on the Legacy of the Momoyama Style

The murals in the Fourth Room of the Ohiroma were painted by Kano Sanraku (1559-1635). Born as the son of Kimura Nagamitsu (birth and death dates unknown) who served Azai Nagamasa (1545-73), Sanraku served Toyotomi Hideyoshi and his son Hideyori (1593-1615), and on Hideyoshi's orders, became an apprentice of Kano Eitoku (1543-90). Sanraku is said to have been the most successful artist in carrying on the legacy of the Momoyama painting style represented by Eitoku, which was highly favored by Nobunaga and Hideyoshi. After the fall of the Toyotomi family, Sanraku was temporarily a fugitive as a Toyotomi retainer, but received amnesty from the second shogun Hidetada (1579-1632) and continued to work as a painter.

The murals of the Fourth Room that Sanraku was responsible for carry on the legacy of the Momoyama style. For example, on the south side (front of the exhibition room), the upper part of the pine is hidden by clouds, and on the east side (left of the exhibition room) and north side (not exhibited), parts of the pines and oaks are hidden by clouds, indicating that the clouds are in front of the trees. Also, on all four wall surfaces, water flows are depicted as partially hidden by trees and rocks, indicating that these elements are in front of the water flow. In other words, the overlap and arrangement of motifs show spatial depth from front to back. This way of depicting three-dimensional space where motifs exist is one of the characteristics of Kano school paintings from the Muromachi to Momoyama periods, and contrasts with the depiction method in the murals of the First to Third Rooms, which largely avoids overlapping motifs.

Additionally, while the birds in the First to Third Rooms are depicted close to their actual size, the hawks and eagles in the Fourth Room are painted larger than their actual size, creating a powerful visual impact. We can see commonalities with Momoyama paintings in such placement and sizing of motifs.

On the other hand, the west side (right of the exhibition room) has no clouds in front of the pine trees and the entire pine tree is visible, which is a feature shared with the murals in the First to Third Rooms. The First to Third Room murals were the responsibility of Eitoku's grandson, Kano Tanyu (1602-74). Tanyu's style, which eliminated depth, is characteristic of the new painting style of that time. The fact that Sanraku eclectically used both the old Momoyama style and the new Edo style in these *Matsutaka-zu* indicates that this work exists in a transitional period when painting styles were changing.

Please take the opportunity to view the majestic hawks painted by Sanraku, who lived through the transition period from the Momoyama era to the Edo era.

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