

Autumn in Kuroshoin The Fourth Room of the Kuroshoin

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 murals of the Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room) located in the northeast of the Kuroshoin of Ninomaru-goten Palace.

Function and Murals of the Kuroshoin

The Kuroshoin of Ninomaru-goten Palace was recorded as Kohiroma (Small Hall) in historical documents from the early Edo period. While the Ohiroma (Great Hall) served as an audience chamber for meetings between the shogun and daimyo or foreign envoys, the Kohiroma (Kuroshoin) was used for audiences with high-ranking court nobles and daimyo who were close to the Tokugawa family. During Emperor Go-Mizunoo's (1596-1680) imperial visit to Nijo-jo Castle from September 6-10 in 1626, the Kohiroma served as a banquet hall for high-ranking court nobles including the regent families and ministers.

The murals in each room of the Kuroshoin have three major characteristics. First is the use of elaborate techniques such as *kirihaku* (cut gold foil), *kin-sunago* (gold dust), and *moriage gofun* (raised gofun whitewash); second is the change in composition and subject matter above and below the *nageshi* (horizontal beams); third is the depiction of seasonal motifs, the Ichi-no-ma (First Room) and Ni-no-ma (Second Room) feature spring, the San-no-ma (Third Room) depicts autumn to winter, and the Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room), which we introduce in this exhibition, shows autumn. These characteristics of the Kuroshoin murals contrast sharply with those of the Ohiroma, which feature large-scale compositions extending from floor to ceiling depicting evergreen pines, exotic rare birds, and hawks symbolizing power. This difference likely stems from the distinct functions of these spaces: while the Ohiroma aimed to showcase the shogun's unchanging authority, the Kuroshoin was designed to welcome guests as special visitors and foster intimate relationships.

A Special Autumn

The Fourth Room of the Kuroshoin featured in this exhibition is located in the northeast of the building, behind the First Room and Second Room which are positioned on the north and south sides of the building's west wing. The murals likewise reflect this positioning: while the First Room and Second Room depict spring scenes, the Fourth Room shows autumn motifs with pampas grass and fan shapes above the *nageshi* and chrysanthemums below. This positioning of the Kuroshoin's front and back is thought to be emphasized through the depiction of contrasting seasons - spring and autumn.

The “*Akikusa Senmenchirashi-zu (Folding Fans Falling on Fall Flowers)*” above the *nageshi* in the Fourth Room depicts pampas grass swaying in the wind along with a total of 46 fan shapes dancing in the breeze. Each fan features different motifs—flowers, birds, plants, figures, and landscapes—painted using various techniques including *kirihaku*, *kin-sunago*, *moriage gofun*, and *suiboku* (ink wash painting). No two designs are alike, making it like a miniature art museum. Historical records show that folding screens

with fan attachments against autumn grass backgrounds were appreciated in the circles of emperors and shoguns as early as the mid-15th century.

The “*Kiku-zu (Chrysanthemums)*” below the *nageshi* depicts chrysanthemums, fences, and flowing water. The so-called “Chrysanthemum Water Legend,” which holds that dew from chrysanthemum flowers has life-extending properties, was transmitted from China to Japan and incorporated into the designs of arts and crafts as well as performing arts like Noh theater. The Chrysanthemum Festival ceremony, where sake with floating chrysanthemum petals is consumed to pray for longevity, also came from China to Japan and became a court ritual in the early Heian period (794-1185). The chrysanthemums and water flow depicted in the Fourth Room's “*Kiku-zu*” directly evoke this chrysanthemum water legend.

Ninomaru-goten Palace contains other murals depicting autumn scenes in locations such as the Third Room of the Kuroshoin, the Second Room of the Roju-no-ma (Senior Councilors' quarters) in the Shikidai, and the Chodai-no-ma of the Tozamurai and Shiroshoin, but these represent autumn through familiar motifs like wild geese, herons, bush clover, and harvested fields. However, the Fourth Room of the Kuroshoin is distinctive in how it represents autumn while emphasizing splendor and auspicious meaning through fan shapes painted with various subjects and chrysanthemums symbolizing longevity.

Young Artist and Classical Style

The murals of the Fourth Room in the Kuroshoin are said to have been created primarily by Kano Naonobu (1607-50). Naonobu was the younger brother of Kano Tanyu (1602-74), who led the creation of Nijo-jo Castle's murals in 1626 and though only 20 years old at the time, his exceptional artistic talent is already evident in the Fourth Room murals.

In the “*Akikusa Senmenchirashi-zu*” above the *nageshi*, fan shapes dance gracefully among swaying pampas grass, overlapping or separating, turning sideways or downward in varied arrangements. The curved lines created by the outlines of the pampas grass and fans repeat rhythmically, while the “*Kiku-zu*” below the *nageshi* emphasizes vertical and horizontal elements through chrysanthemums extending upward, water flowing horizontally, and bamboo fencing that incorporates both vertical and horizontal elements. Such repetition of curved lines and compositions based on geometric forms of horizontal and vertical elements are considered characteristic features of Kano school painting during the Genna-Kan'ei period (1615-44).

On the other hand, the “*Kiku-zu*” also displays features that could be called classical for its time. This is evident in how the chrysanthemums are layered with brushwood fences, bamboo fencing, gold clouds, and earthen slopes. This method of expressing spatial depth by layering motifs was a traditional spatial technique in Kano school painting that continued from the late 16th century. In contrast, the murals Tanyu created for the First Room through Third Room of the Ohiroma employ spatial expression that avoids layering motifs as much as possible, leading toward a new period style.

In the Fourth Room murals, Naonobu skillfully combined traditional depth expression with contemporary compositional sensibilities, creating murals that are splendid yet possess delicacy and lightness.

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