**Japanese painting – Kano Style**

The Kano school was the longest lived and most influential school of painting in Japanese history; its more than 300-year prominence is unique in world art history. Working from the fifteenth century into modern times, this hereditary assemblage of professional, secular painters succeeded in attracting numerous patrons from most affluent social classes by developing, mastering, and promoting a broad range of painting styles, [pictorial themes](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/seim/hd_seim.htm), and [formats](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pfor/hd_pfor.htm).

Kano Masanobu (1434–1530) is credited with establishing the Kano school as a professional atelier in Kyoto. Although not himself a Zen adherent, Masanobu was closely associated with influential Zen temples and adopted the Chinese painting style that they favored. Imported along with [Zen philosophy and practice](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/zen/hd_zen.htm), Chinese-style painting was characterized by a strong emphasis on brushwork, predominance of ink with little or no use of pigments, and preference for Chinese subjects, especially images of Zen patriarchs and landscapes. Taking advantage of the close relationship between the Zen monks and the [Ashikaga shoguns](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/muro/hd_muro.htm), who looked to the temples for cultural and religious advice, Masanobu and his followers secured and maintained the highly lucrative favor of the [military rulers](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/samu/hd_samu.htm) of the day.

By expanding the repertoire of the Kano artists to include boldly rendered brushwork and bright colors, Masanobu's son Kano Motonobu (1476–1559) widened the school's appeal and devised a style that merged the ink and brushwork emphasized in Chinese paintings with the decorativeness, color, and pattern associated with [native Japanese interests](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/yama/hd_yama.htm). Building on these innovations and versatility, Motonobu's grandson Kano Eitoku (1543–1590) introduced a new strength and dynamism to his large compositions that appealed to the warlords who dominated the [Momoyama](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/momo/hd_momo.htm) period and suited the grand interiors of their massive and impressive castles. His series of sliding doors (*fusuma*) and [folding screens](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fold/hd_fold.htm) (*byobu*) painted with oversize animals, figures, and nature scenes set against scintillating gold foil well illustrated the power and energy the *daimyo* patrons wished to express. Kano Sanraku (1559–1635), one of Eitoku's adopted sons, in his turn added a greater sense of elegance and decorativeness to Eitoku's style, capturing current interest in sophistication and sumptuousness.

Throughout the centuries, the Kano school consisted of numerous studios where groups of well trained and skillful craftsmen worked together to serve clients from almost all wealthy classes, including the samurai, aristocracy, Buddhist clergy, [Shinto](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shin/hd_shin.htm) shrines, and the increasingly affluent merchants. While they kept their production secrets closely guarded, in part relying on family ties, apprenticeships, and copybooks, the popularity and prominence of the Kano school led to the establishment of offshoots in many cities. The Kano school style was transmitted even more widely by artists who were trained by Kano painters but not officially connected with family studios, and by rival artists imitating their style to suit patrons' demands.

In 1600, the main branch of the Kano school moved from Kyoto to the new capital of Edo, following their principle patrons, the [Tokugawa shogunate](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edop/hd_edop.htm). The most successful member of the Kano school in the [Edo](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edop/hd_edop.htm) period was Kano Tan'yu (1602–1674), who was named the shogun's painter-in-residence at the age of fifteen and was commissioned to decorate many of the most important castles of the day. Consistent with the Tokugawa's emphasis on social control, Tan'yu created a style that was more restrained than the grandeur popular during the preceding Momoyama era, incorporating a renewed interest on ink monochrome. An astute connoisseur, Tan'yu enjoyed access to the most important art collections of the day—a privilege that had benefited the work of his predecessors—and produced a number of insightful annotated notebooks on antiquities.

While the Kano school's close association with the Tokugawa shogunate guaranteed their prosperity throughout the Edo period, their prominence declined when the fortunes of their patrons waned. During the end of the nineteenth century, the Kano school functioned as a conservative assembly of painters who were increasingly overshadowed by other artists.

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