**Rinpa Style Painting**

The Rinpa school (which can also be pronounced Rimpa) was a key part of the revival in the [Edo period](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edop/hd_edop.htm) of indigenous Japanese artistic interests described by the term [yamato-e](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/yama/hd_yama.htm). Paintings, textiles, ceramics, and [lacquerwares](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/elac/hd_elac.htm) were decorated by Rinpa artists with vibrant colors applied in a highly decorative and patterned manner. Favored themes, which often contained evocative references to [nature and the seasons](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/seim/hd_seim.htm), were drawn from Japanese literature, notably *The Tale of Genji, The Tales of Ise*, and Heian-period poems composed by courtiers.

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Two of the most important participants in this revival were Hon'ami Koetsu (1558–1637) and Tawaraya Sotatsu (d. ca. 1640). Both were upper-class Kyoto merchants, a group known as *machishu*, who allied themselves with the culturally influential yet impoverished nobility, who spearheaded the call for a return to aristocratic ideals of the late [Heian period](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/heia/hd_heia.htm). While adept in several media, Koetsu is best known for his fluid and elegant calligraphy, inspired by Heian examples. Sotatsu is thought to have been a professional painter who revived classical *yamato-e* themes and images and infused them with a new stylization, drama, and emphasis on surface decoration. These men collaborated successfully to combine Koetsu's graceful calligraphy written on top of Sotatsu's decorative paintings, producing objects with a strong sense of rhythm, pattern upon pattern, and refined elegance. While these artworks understandably appealed to imperial patrons, they also attracted a number of [samurai](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/samu/hd_samu.htm) clients, who appreciated the sophistication of the court and often had close ties with the nobility.

*Rinpa* is a bit of a misnomer in that the term identifies artists who worked in a particular style, occasionally together, but did not form an organized or hereditary school. Although Rinpa traces its origins to Koetsu and Sotatsu, it derives its name (*pa*, or school, of [Ko-]rin) from Ogata Korin (1658–1716). Korin and his brother Kenzan (1663–1743) were members of a Kyoto family of textile merchants that serviced samurai, a few nobility, and city dwellers. Distantly related to Koetsu, the Ogata family owned a number of objects made by Sotatsu and Koetsu, which Korin studied carefully. Working in vivid colors or ink monochrome, often on gold ground, the prolific and versatile artist developed a painting style that was more abstracted and simplified than the compositions of his predecessors. Korin used his decorative and bold designs not only to ornament paintings but also for textiles, lacquerwares, and ceramics. Transmitted by means of pattern books and manuals, the work of the Ogata brothers inspired numerous other craftsmen.

The Rinpa school's popularity was revived in the early nineteenth century, largely due to the work of the painter Sakai Hoitsu (1761–1828), who succeeded in establishing the Rinpa school in Edo. A member of a samurai family who had patronized Korin, Hoitsu intensively studied Korin's artworks. However, he shifted the themes on which he focused, concentrating on natural images, especially representations of the four seasons, rather than scenes from classical literature. He also brought a greater attention to detail in his painting style. Hoitsu's chief student Suzuki Kiitsu (1796–1858) introduced a greater sense of naturalism to his representations of flowers and plants. The Rinpa style continued to influence artists working in a variety of media throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the style associated with Rinpa changed as other movements, such as [*ukiyo-e*](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ukiy/hd_ukiy.htm) and Nihonga, were blended with it, altering and diluting the Rinpa style and its devotion to classical themes and characteristics.