

Special Exhibition

April 13 (Sat.) - June 2 (Sun.), 2024 / The Original Wing Galleries

Flowers Bloom and Winds Blow: Nature Motifs in Classical Japanese Art

In Japanese, the *kanji* characters for the title of this exhibition, though written “Blooming Flowers, Gentle Breezes,” are read “laughing flowers.” It might seem strange even to Japanese readers to see the *kanji* read this way, but if you look at the ideographs for bloom 咲 and laugh 笑, you can see that they have common roots and even today in poetic and literary circles the act of flower buds opening is sometimes expressed as “laughing” or “smiling.”



In nature, the flowers, having bloomed, are soon scattered by the breezes and the nourishing rains. The seasonal beauty of the natural world is ever-changing, transforming itself minute-by-minute, without interruption. In Japan, the Buddhist view of impermanence through the constant cycle of life and death has fostered a tendency in people to find beauty in the changing nature of things, especially in the seasonal features of the natural world. Throughout the ages, the fleeting beauty of natural phenomena, such as the flowers bursting in full bloom, the wind and rain scattering their blossoms, the brilliant maple leaves and bright moon of autumn, and the lightly falling snow of winter, have inspired poems that reflect people’s innermost feelings. These motifs have also been depicted in paintings and used to adorn a host of decorative objects, forming the foundation of aesthetic life not only in Japan but throughout East Asia.

This exhibition presents the elegant world of classical literature, painting, and decorative arts with a focus on their diverse representations of natural phenomena, such as wind, rain, and snow, throughout the seasons.



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