

## 60. Nakabayashi Chikuto (1776-1853)

“Bamboo and Rock, after Li Kan” 1828

Hanging scroll, ink on paper  
151.5 x 83.4 cm. (59 5/8 x 14 7/8 in.)

Inscription:

“One day before the full moon (the fifteenth of the lunar month) during the third month of the year 1828, I painted this after the brush ideas of the Daoist Xizhai (Li Kan). Nariaki, called Chikuto.”

Artist’s seals:

*Nakabayashi Seisho*, Hakumei-shi



Two large rocks and delicate grasses provide visual foundation for five large and several smaller stalks of bamboo that rise above to fill the entire format with their elegant forms. In this very cerebral approach to painting there is great clarity to the placement and arrangement of the stalks. Ink totality is similarly controlled, with layers of dark leaves set off against paler leaves in the background and establishing a limited degree of spatial recession. The composition, however, is basically limited to the frontal picture plane, and visual satisfaction is derived mainly from appreciation of the formal elements of the painting and the expert use of brush and ink.

Li Kan (1245-1320), who called himself Xizhai Daoren, was a high official under the Yuan dynasty and a specialist in painting bamboo (fig. 1).

Nakabayashi Nariaki, called Chikuto, was born the son of a Nagoya doctor named Nakabayashi Gento. During his teens Chikuto began to study painting with Yamada Kyujo and to live with Kamiya Ten’yu, a wealthy local collector of Chinese paintings who played the same patron role in Nagoya that Kimura Kenkado (1736-1802) did in Osaka. Another protégé of Ten’yu at this time was Yamamoto Baiitsu (1783-1856), with whom Chikuto became fast friends. It is said that the two young men one day visited the Daiko-in in Nagoya to see paintings kept there by two famous Chinese painters of the Yuan dynasty, Wang Mien (1287-1366) and Li K’an (1245-1320). Baiitsu was so moved by Wang Mien’s painting of blossoming plums that he took the character for “plum,” *bai*, and used it in his name; Chikuto, equally enamored of Li Kan’s bamboo painting, used “bamboo” or *chiku* in his chosen name. Another early influence on Chikuto was the bamboo paintings of Miyazaki Kimpo (1717-1774), a Nagoya master of the previous generation. In the year 1796, when he was twenty years of age, Chikuto became independent and established his own studio, living the while in a small temple. His illustrated book *Chikuto Gafu* was published in 1800.

Having completed their initial studies and technical training by the year 1803, Chikuto and Baiitsu traveled to Kyoto in order to challenge the higher standards of that cultural Mecca

for literati painters. Despite the sponsorship of Kyukyodo, a shop still in business today, Chikuto seems initially not to have been very successful and, on the death of his father, he returned to Nagoya for some time. Eventually, however, he moved again to Kyoto, and by 1813 he was ranked second on the published lists of *bunjin* or literati masters; from 1830 onward his name always appeared at the top of the list. During these years he joined Baiitsu as member of the circle around Rai San'yo (1780-1832), one of the most important writers of his day, and both men collaborated on 'ordered their own painting silk from the famous Nishijin in Kyoto. This was a special "two-shuttle-weave" material on which ink and colors tended to lie on the upper surfaces of the threads and thus to stand out more sharply against the white of the lower threads, lending an air of spontaneity to the otherwise smooth strokes and creating an interesting illusion of depth to the forms.

Japanese scholars have identified certain phases in Chikuto's life and art: I) 1781-1795, student; II) 1796-1801, independence; III) 1803-1823, early maturity; IV) 1824-39, full maturity; V) 1840-53, scholar-artist. The present painting was thus created during the period of full maturity, when his aesthetic goals were well established and supported by superb technique. During his latest period, when he produced fewer, more routine paintings, Chikuto devoted much time to writing his important treatises on art theory and guidebooks for painters that provided a theoretical foundation for the Nanga or literati school of paintings. Chikuto died in Kyoto and was buried at Shinnyodo in his adopted city.



Fig. 1. Li Kan: "Bamboo and Rock,"  
after *Sogen no kaiga*, Kyoto, 1962, pl. 87.