

62. Ueda Kocho (1788-1850)

“Dance of the Tengu”

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
158.3 x 92.6 cm. (62 3/8 x 36 1/2 in.)

Inscription:

“Using a design of the ‘Eight Immortals of Konron’ I did this as a performance in response to a request from Master Miyoshi. Kocho.”

Artist’s seal:

Kocho no in



Eight figures with wings and beaked faces perform a dance in a circular composition that prefigures that of Matisse’s “La Danse.” These strange figures are *tengu*, mythical dwellers of the forest. These creatures are subdivided into two classes: the Konoha Tengu, which have human form as well as wings and strongly elongated noses; and the Kurasu Tengu, “Crow Tengu,” which have strong beaks like those of crows. The present *tengu* would seem to combine these characteristics, with the human form and wings of the Konoha Tengu and the beaks of the Kurasu Tengu. The striped garments are like those of *yamabushi*, “mountain priests.”

The “Eight Immortals of Konron” is an ancient *bugaku* dance which even now is performed in shrines and temples. This dance was portrayed by Sotatsu (?-1643?) in his “Bugaku-zu” screens. The ancient dance appears very different from that portrayed here but they do share the bell dangling from the mouth and the striped attire.

Ueda Kocho (1788-1850) was a very influential painter but biographical information on him is scarce. Born in Osaka to a merchant family dealing with cotton, he studied painting in Kyoto with the Shijo School master Matsumura Goshun (1752-1811) and was influenced by Goshun’s brother, Matsumura Keibun (1779-1843). Returning to Osaka, Kocho served as painter for a feudal lord in Wakayama, near Osaka. Among his many illustrated books are *Kocho Gafu* and *Suiun Ryakuga*; in the preface to the former, published in 1834, one of his pupils wrote that Kocho published the work because he lacked time enough to deal with his many students.

The present work presents Kocho at his best: charming, imaginative and well-executed. His popularity with the public and students thus is not surprising.