

Jichosai (d. 1802/1803)

耳鳥齋

“Sumo Wrestling”

相撲

Folding fan, ink and color on paper
18.2 x 51.7 cm. (7 1/8 x 20 3/8 in.)

Inscription:

“Jichosai.”

Artist’s seals:

Jicho and one indecipherable

Two sumo wrestlers, one having just been thrown, the other with his arms raised in triumph, occupy the center of the arena. A referee and other wrestlers awaiting their bouts appear to the right; spectators sit in front and to the left. Among the latter are those with elongated hats and robes who sit on a raised platform in order to indicate their elevated status. These are Daimyo, feudal lords, dressed so as to honor the Shogun, who would be sitting behind them just out of the picture to the left. The drawing and coloring are quick and informal, sketch-like in nature as a means to capture the excitement and energy of the immediate moment. Almost caricatures, the figures yet display a boldness and freedom that is very appropriate to the subject and an approach to creation that was

very influential on later artists such as Miyatake Gaikkotsu and Okamoto Ippei.

Jichosai (also pronounced Nichosai) was a painter and illustrator who lived in Osaka. His myriad talents and skills enabled him to work as a sake brewer, curio dealer, writer of comedies, in the puppet theater, singer, book illustrator, and an artist known for his *kyoga*.¹ His illustrated books include *Ehon Mizu ya Sora* (“Collection of Kabuki Actors”) in 1780, *Ebanashi Nichosai* (“Eccentrics in Osaka and Kyoto”) in 1782 as well as illustrations in books published by others. Jichosai specialized in images of theatrical characters and *sumo* wrestlers, as seen in the present, very charming fan painting.

1. See his biography in Laurance P. Roberts: *A Dictionary of Japanese Artists*, Tokyo and New York, 1977, p. 60.