Komuro Suiun (1874-1945)

小室翠雲

"Berlin Landscape" 1931

伯林郊外

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
37.5 x 33 cm. (14 3/4 x 13 in.)

Inscription:
"Spring Colors on the Outskirts of Berlin. On the eleventh day of the second month, painted by the Taoist Suiun."

Artist's seals:
Suiun; *Mikan*

Box inscription:
"Scene on the Outskirts of Berlin, painted by Komuro Suiun and owned by Sozan."

Komuro Teijirō, called Suiun, was born the eldest son of Komuro Makisaburō in Tatebayashi, the modern Gumma prefecture.[1] For generations the Komuro family had run a shop for the Tatebayashi clan, but Makisaburō had become independent, operating a shop selling traditional garments and also doing landscape and flower-and-bird paintings under the name of Keison. Under his father's influence the young Teijirō enjoyed painting from childhood, beginning his more formal study in 1888 with Aoki Suizan and the next year, at age fifteen, with Tazaki Sōun (1815-98). Teijiro's earliest name as an artist was Suiko, but at age nineteen he was given the name Suiun, the by-name of Sōun's father.

Following Sōun's death in 1898 Suiun moved to Tokyo and began to study Chinese paintings held in collections there. In 1925 the Tokyo Art Club published a sales catalogue for the Komuro Suiun Collection and mounted an exhibition that offered some of Suiun's early works, including a landscape in the style of Mi Fu (figure 1), paintings by Hine Taizan, as well as paintings by the Chinese masters Wang Chien-chang, Chu Sheng, Chang Hsin, Yun Shou-p'ing, Sheng Mao-yeh, Wu Pin, Sun I, and Lan Ying, and calligraphies by Wang To, Chu Yun-ming, and Ta Chung-kuang.[2]

During that period of time the field of painting in Tokyo was undergoing great changes due to the influence of Ernest Fenollosa, resulting in a division of artists into two groups, the avant guard associated with the Nihon Bijutsu-in and the old guard associated with the Nihon Bijutsu Kyōkai. From about 1902 onward Suiun exhibited with the latter group, sometimes winning awards, and in later years he played an important role in that association. In 1907 the Ministry of Education began to sponsor exhibitions called Monbusho Bijutsu Tenrankai (known in abbreviated form as Bunten) and the conflict between the groups of artists in Tokyo became obvious. In opposition to the Kokuga Gyokusei Kai, Suiun together with Takashima Hokkai (1850-1931), Sakuma Tetsuen (1850-1921), and Yamaoka Beika (1868-1914) organized a short-lived exhibition society called Sei-ha Doshi-kai. Suiun thus did not exhibition in the first Bunten but from the second one onward he participated, winning third prize from the second to the sixth exhibition with his landscapes. In the seventh Bunten exhibition he was awarded second prize for a landscape of "Solitary Dwelling in Wintry Groves" that was bought by the Imperial Household. From the eighth Bunten onward Suiun served as judge for the exhibitions.

Fig. 1. Komuro Suiun: "Summer Mountains, after Mi Fu," after Tokyo Bijutsu Kurabu: *Komuro Suiun Shi Shozōhin Nyūsatsu Mokuroku*, Tokyo, 1925, pl. 101.

In 1919 the name of the Bunten exhibitions was changed to Teikoku Bijutsu-in Tenrankai, "Imperial Art Academy Exhibition" (usually short-

ened to Teiten), and Suiun exhibited in all of these and often won prizes. Despite these personal successes, however, Suiun became worried about the continuing decline of interest in the Nanga tradition of painting and, in company with Ikeda Keisen (1863-1931) and Yano Kyoson (1890-1965), founded in 1921 the Nihon Nanga-in, devoted to the revival of Nanga painting through presentation each year of an exhibition, which included Suiun's works as well.

In 1930 the Gendai Nihonga Ten ("Modern Japanese Painting Exhibition") was held in Berlin under the sponsorship of the German government. Suiun and Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958) were selected by the Japanese government to represent the Japanese-German Friendship Association. The present painting was executed during Suiun's stay in Berlin, very early in the year 1931. "Berlin Landscape" has the quality of a finished sketch, rendered in some detail but with light and swift brushwork, using ink-wash for shadows and light washes of yellow, red-brown, and light green to capture a

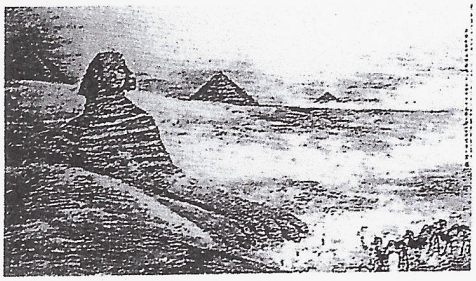

Fig. 2. Komuro Suiun: "Desert Sphinx," after *Nitten Shi* 10, *Teiten-hen* 5, Tokyo, 1983, pl. 158.

vivid impression of the late winter scene. The strong feeling of freshness and discovery is perhaps to be related to Suiun's excitement at the challenges presented by his exposure to new art forms during the course of his travels. After the conclusion of the Berlin exhibition in early 1931 Suiun traveled to England, France, Italy and Switzerland, and his works exhibited later that year at the Teiten and Nanga-in Ten exhibition are very interesting in their subjects (figure 2).

In 1931 Suiun founded the Nanga Kanshō Kai, "Nanga Appreciation Society," intended to inculcate both the practical skills and the concepts associated with Nanga painting, and began to publish the journal *Nanga Kanshō*. In 1941 this society was disbanded in favor of the Daitō Nanshūga-in, "Greater Asian Southern School Painting Society," which made important contributions to painting in Japan through the associations developed with artists in China.

Throughout his professional life Suiun participated in nearly every important Bunten and Teiten exhibition as either artist or judge; he founded the Nanga-in and other societies; he served as member of the Imperial Art Academy and the Art Committee of the Imperial Household; and in general he played a very active and important role in the evolution of Nanga painting as well as in the general development of modern painting in Japan. Komuro retained the name Suiun throughout his life but adopted other names as well: Chōkō Sansō after 1918 when he built a second house in Hakone named Chōkō Sansō, and Karei-an after 1940 when he moved his studio to Izu. During his latest period Suiun painted many flower-and-bird compositions and began to modify his style from traditional Nanga to modern Nihonga.

1. *Komuro Suiun Botsugo Gojusshūnen Kinen-Tatebayashi to Komuro Suiun ten*, Tatebayashi, 1995, pp. 30-31.
2. Tokyo Bijutsu Kurabu: *Komuro Suiun Shi Shozōhin Nyūsatsu Mokuroku*, Tokyo, 1925.