Sō Shizan (1733-1805)

宋紫山

"Tigers in Landscapes"

猛虎圖

Pair of hanging scrolls, ink and color on silk
Each 88.5 x 33 cm. (34 7/8 x 13 in.)

Inscriptions:
"Sō Shizan."

Artist's seals:
Sō Shizan

Box inscription:
Written by Yūei in 1828 when he obtained the paintings from the Kanryū-in.

Within a dynamic composition unified by striated streams of water sweeping diagonally across the background frolic two young tigers, their teeth bared and claws extended in mock battle. Although the artist clearly intended a naturalistic presentation of his subject, his genius for decorative design manifested itself in the delightful patterns of the tigers' pelts and the coloration of especially their eyes. Also noteworthy here is the difference in style between the tigers and their respective backgrounds, with the former painted in great detail and realistic colors while the latter is done in ink only with minimal detail, an approach which throws due emphasis on the most important aspects of the paintings.

Fig. 1. Sō Shiseki: "Tiger," after *Nagasaki-ha no Kachōga*, volume II, Kyoto, 1981, pl. 147.

Kusumoto Hakkei, called Sō Shizan and Shizan, was the adopted son of the well-known Edo master Sō Shiseki (1715-1786).[1] Shiseki had gone to Nagasaki perhaps about 1755 or so and studied directly with the Chinese master Sung Tzu-yen (J: Sō Shigan), from whom he also derived his name. Using the imported style, and blending it with stylistic elements derived from European art then being imported through Nagasaki by Dutch traders, Shiseki created a new art free of the strictures of the official Kanō style of painting. His influence was far-reaching, being extended by many pupils such as Shizan and by his various publications.

A painting of a "Tiger" by Shiseki (figure 1) demonstrates the close stylistic relationship between the two masters, a similarity which extends even to the calligraphy. Shizan's work is lighter, however, with a more playful mood and great decorative impact, suggesting the direction in which his personal style evolved during his years of maturity.

1. For a biography of Sō Shiseki see *Kaikodo Journal* V (Autumn, 1997), cat. 36 p. 156.