

竟政壬子后二月念三日醉作  
葵邱之條約居席間

沈



#### 44. Kushiro Unsen (1753-1827)

鉤雲泉

"Mountain Recluses" 1792

山水圖

Hanging scroll, ink on paper  
161.9 x 40 cm. (63 3/4 x 15 3/4 in.)

Inscription:

"On the twenty-third day of the second month of the year 1792 during the Kansei era, painted after drinking while at a feast at Kikyū's Green Bamboo Dwelling, Unsen."

Artist's seals:

*Taishū; Seisen* ("Listening Immortal")

Two scholarly recluses pause on a mountain path, one with hand extended as he drives home a point to his companion. The scene seems to pulsate with kinesthetic energy and potential movement, derived in the main from the curving brushstrokes used for rocks, hills, and mountains, from the pointillistic treatment of the tree foliage, and from the high and distant mountains which balance visually on perilously undercut bases. Done in ink monochrome, the work is yet rich in coloristic contrasts from the highly skillful manipulation of ink values from deep black to palest gray. Much of the approach here was derived from Ike Taiga (1723-1776), one of the greatest masters of the generation previous to that of the present artist, Kushiro Unsen.

Kushiro Shū, *azana* Chūfu, familiar name Bumppei, *go* Rairaku Koji, Rikuseki, Taigaku, and Unsen, was born in Shimabara in Hizen province but moved to Nagasaki, where he studied directly with Chinese artists then resident there. That experience led also to Unsen's ability to speak Chinese, a skill rare enough that it was remarked upon by his contemporaries. Unsen then traveled extensively, meeting such famous literati figures as Kimura Kenkadō (1736-1802), Totoki Baigai (1749-1804), Uragami Gyokudō (1745-1820), Uragami Shunkin (1779-1846), and Rai San'yō (1780-1832) in Kansai, Nagamachi Chikuseki (1747-1806) in Shikoku, and Kameda Bōsai (1752-1826), Ōkubo Shibutsu (1766-1837), Hirose Taizan (1751-1813), Tani Bunchō (1763-1840), and Jotei in Edo. Unsen was perhaps closest to Chikuseki, with whom he lived and passionately discussed art until a quarrel led to separation. In later years Unsen moved from the Kansai region to Edo for a short while and then traveled onward to Niigata. Divorcing his wife, Unsen settled down with a woman from the Echigo area, where he became a celebrated recluse-painter

specializing in landscapes.

Several stories told about Unsen suggest that he was self-confident and also rather self-contained. On one occasion Unsen and his friend, Ōkubo Shibutsu, were invited to display their respective talents in a joint work of art. Unsen first painted a landscape and then Shibutsu began to inscribe a poem on the scroll; Unsen, however, quietly rolled up his painting, saying: "Your poem is good for now, while my painting is good for the future, so please do not write on it." Unsen is said to have insisted on preparing his own food and drink, going to great trouble on occasion to obtain water suitable for tea. He was also a passionate fisherman and always carried two bundles when he traveled, one for his brushes and one for his fishing rods. One collector in Shirakawa, in the northern part of Honshū, invited Unsen to stay with him, thinking that he would receive a painting from his guest. Unsen, however, spent his days fishing, leading his host to complain: "I didn't ask you to stay in my house to get fish!" Unsen departed immediately, carrying his two bundles. Tanomura Chikuden wrote that "Unsen is living in Bungo province, in the Kosei Temple that is affiliated with the Higashi Hongan-ji (in Kyoto)... While at leisure from teaching and preaching, he enjoys collecting antiques. Placing these extraordinary things of metal, stone, and wood in line from right to left, he caresses them for his personal pleasure."

The present landscape was painted in 1792, during Unsen's middle years, when he was most likely still living in the Kansai area where the style of Taiga had its greatest impact. The painting displays the confident hand of a master of the brush, one secure in himself and his artistic vision, and the lively, uplifting visual impact of the work suggests that the artist would have been a fascinating dinner or drinking companion.