

ROSETSU – Ferocious Brush

6 September to 4 November 2018

For eight weeks, Japan's most famous tiger will reside exclusively at Museum Rietberg in Zurich. The story goes that the Japanese artist Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799) painted this monumental tiger together with its counterpart, a dragon, on the sliding door panels of the Zen temple Muryōji in a single night in the year 1786. Now the entire temple's painted walls and a number of other, awe-inspiring masterpieces by Rosetsu are being shown for the first time outside of Japan. Rosetsu's highly dynamic paintings created with vigorous brushstrokes and sometimes with his fingers, but also his delicate compositions painted with fine brushes and rich colour are replete with energy, wit and modern appeal.

Renowned as one of the most eccentric and imaginative artists in early modern Japan, Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799) produced visually exciting, classification-defying works during his brief career. The exhibition "Rosetsu: Ferocious Brush" unravels the many mysteries of this enigmatic career. An exclusive and expert selection of works by Rosetsu chosen in consultation with the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Government of Japan (Bunkachō) reveals his painting subjects, his relationship to Zen Buddhism, his contacts with patrons outside Kyoto, and his choice of extraordinarily bold images.

The exhibition at the Rietberg Museum will survey Rosetsu's art through a selection of sixty of his most important paintings, beginning with the earliest works in the realist style of his teacher Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–1795), and ending with the haunting and occasionally bizarre final masterpieces of his career. Screen paintings, scrolls, and albums depicting Zen eccentrics, children at play, ethereal beauties, breathtaking landscapes, and vivacious animals and birds will take viewers on a journey through Rosetsu's own travels and into his fantastic imagination. These works, some of them compellingly realistic and others surprisingly abstract, take us into an Early Modern Japan we did not know and which feels very contemporary.

The highlight of the exhibition will be a magnificent ensemble of 48 screens and hanging scrolls, displayed in a recreated original floorplan of the Zen temple Muryōji. This Zen temple in the southern part of Japan's main island holds the largest and most important collection of Rosetsu's paintings, created in 1786. Various stories recount the creation of this breathtaking ensemble. The installation of these works would present an unprecedented opportunity to view and examine the paintings in a single venue outside their home in Kushimoto, and indeed the first such installation of architecturally specific paintings in an exhibition outside Japan.

Approximately one-third of the works to be exhibited are registered as Important Cultural Properties or Important Art Objects. Complementing these masterpieces from Japan, paintings from museums, temples, and private collections in Japan, Europe, and the United States will trace the phases of Rosetsu's life as he pursued his livelihood in Kyoto and the surrounding provinces. The exhibition will close with a dramatic display of abstract landscapes, ghosts, and perhaps his most astonishing work of all, a depiction of 500 Disciples of the Buddha on a surface of only one square inch.

Rosetsu, who hailed from a low-ranking samurai family, gained his reputation among art circles in the imperial capital Kyoto and its neighbouring regions with his untamed personality and his unusual talent. The exhibits run the gamut of formats and subjects, from exquisitely executed scrolls depicting birds and flowers in brilliant polychrome pigments to large-scale sliding doors and folding screens with fantastic landscapes, bizarre figures, and adorable animals. With his unconventional compositions and

powerful brushwork Rosetsu always offers a fresh take on traditional subject matter. His paintings never fail to surprise, entertain, and charm.

The show at the Museum Rietberg is the first comprehensive presentation ever to take place outside of Japan.

The exhibition is jointly curated by Dr Khanh Trinh, Curator of Japanese art, Museum Rietberg, Zurich, and Dr. Matthew McKelway, Takeo and Itsuko Atsumi Professor of Japanese art history; director of the Mary Griggs Burke Center for Japanese Art, Columbia University in the City of New York.

A catalogue in German and English will be published and distributed by Prestel. It will cover ca. 250 pages, with essays, entries, and colour illustrations for all exhibits. The catalogue will present most recent scholarship on the artist and will be the new standard work on Nagasawa Rosetsu in Western languages.

During the exhibition period, public and private guided tours as well as workshops for school groups will be offered. The public program of the exhibition will include several special events.

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