

WHAT IS A JAPANESE PAINTING?

Materials

Typically, the artwork for a hanging scroll is painted on thin paper or silk fabric. This is surrounded by silk textiles that serve as decorative and protective borders. The artwork and borders are lined with several layers of paper and wheat starch adhesive to give them strength and support. These elements are then pieced together to create the overall mounting structure. They are lined again with paper and flattened on a drying board. To complete the scroll structure, a hanging stave is attached along the top and a roller rod is added along the bottom of the mounting to keep the flexible structure flat for display and allow for rolling. Various other elements including a hanging cord, roller knobs, and decorative fittings are also added.

Interactive Art

It is important to realize that hanging scrolls are interactive art objects that are susceptible to damage from use and exposure to the elements over time. As part of the rich tradition of Japanese art, specialized methods, tools, and materials have been developed for the production, appreciation, and care of scrolls.

Remounting

When hanging scrolls are damaged beyond the point of preservation, they are taken to a mounting studio for complete restoration and remounting. This remounting cycle has always been part of the life cycle of East Asian paintings. It is essential to realize that this cycle is entirely dependent upon the care and environmental conditions under which a scroll is handled, displayed, and stored. Under good conditions, remounting may only be necessary every 100 years or longer. Unfortunately, it is often necessary much sooner.

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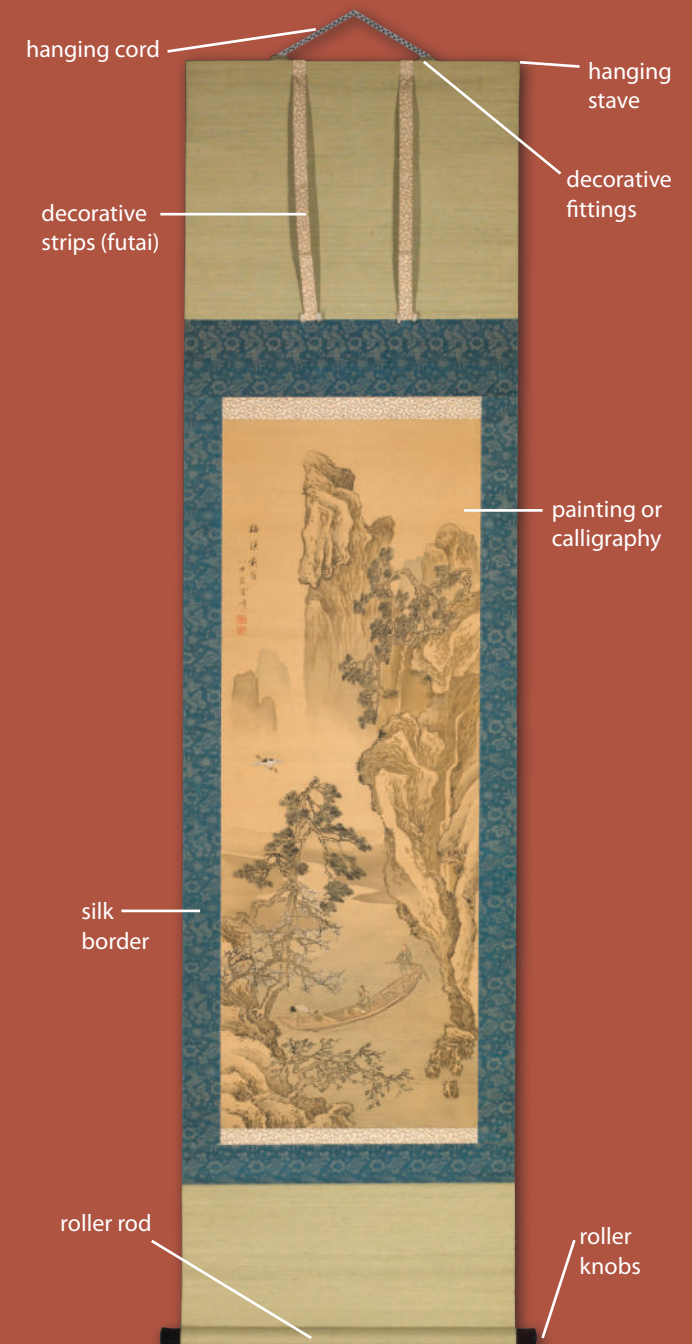
Museum Hours
 Tuesday - Friday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.
 Saturday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
 Sunday, 1 – 5 p.m.
 Second Thursday of every month,
 open 6 – 9 p.m. for Museum Nights
 Closed Mondays and state holidays

What is a Japanese Painting? is organized by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution and the Harn Museum of Art. Andrew Hare, Supervisory Conservator, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution and Sarah Jean Smith, Asian Art Curatorial Assistant, Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art collaborated on the exhibition and publication.

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Front: Ooka Umpho (1765–1849), **With Crane on Blossoming-plum Stream**, 1844, hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, museum purchase, funds provided by donors in memory of Dr. David A. Cofrin (2009.53)

Images: Randy Batista Photography



A Japanese hanging scroll is a traditional format for mounting a painting or work of calligraphy. Evolving over centuries the scroll design provides a flexible support structure for an artwork to be hung on a wall for display and then rolled up for safe and compact storage. The materials used to create Japanese scrolls mainly consist of pigments, papers, adhesives, and silk mounting fabrics.

Adhesives

There are several types of adhesives used for different purposes in varying degrees on different areas of hanging scrolls. Adhesives are used to attach layers of the scroll together and also to bind pigments to each other and to the support. Some common adhesives are animal glues, technical gelatin, seaweed gel, and wheat starch paste.

These adhesives are also used during conservation to mend losses and stabilize loose pigments.



Seaweed Gel (Funori)



Deer Skin Glue (Shika Nikawa)

Silk Mounting Fabrics

Many types of silk fabrics are used to mount Japanese paintings. These include brocades threaded with gold, multi-colored damasks, and plain weave fabrics. The color, pattern, and type of fabric are all carefully considered when choosing which fabrics will be combined to make a mounting.



Dyed Misu Paper (Misugami)



Mino, Misu, and Uda Paper

Papers

Although there are many kinds of hand-made paper produced in Japan, only three types, all made from paper mulberry fiber, are used for mounting. Mino paper is used for the initial lining of paintings and fabrics. Misu paper is used for subsidiary linings to balance the structure of the mounting. Uda paper is used for the overall final backing. Because many Japanese paintings are done on translucent paper or silk, the color of the first and subsidiary lining papers can have a significant effect on the painting image. Therefore, papers are often dyed to an appropriate color using Japanese stick pigments or dyes. These colors are applied using a brush or vat-dyeing process.

Pigments

Traditional East Asian mineral pigments are made from naturally colored minerals that are ground into a fine powder. The powder is then mixed with a binder of animal glue to make pigment sticks that are ground against a smooth stone with water to make liquid paint. Organic pigments, also commonly used in Japanese painting, are made from natural dyes extracted from plants (indigo, gamboge, etc.) and even insects (cochineal). For example, black ink, the most commonly used color, is made with soot taken from burned pine wood or oils. The mineral and organic colors are used to dye lining papers and mounting fabrics and also to tone patches in the painting.



Stick Pigments (Bō-enogu)



Powdered Pigment (Ganryō)



Damask (Donsu)

Patterned Gauze (Monsha)

Gold-threaded Gauze (Kinsha)

Plain-weave Fabric (Muji Grei)

Gold-threaded Brocade (Kinran)