Eve Loh

Kawabata, Ryûshi (川端龍子) (1885 - 1966)

Kawabata Ryûshi was one of the few artists who was adept at both Nihonga (Japanese-style painting) and Yôga (Western-style painting). Originally trained in the latter, Ryûshi was successful with his pointillist Impressionist works exhibited at the Tokyo Industrial Exposition (1907) and the government-sponsored exhibition, the Bunten. In 1912, Ryûshi travelled to the United States where his encounter with the collection of Japanese art at the Boston Museum made him turn towards Nihonga. He was successful in making the switch and his works were accepted for the Taishô Exposition in 1914 as well as the Japan Art Institute’s 2nd annual exhibition. After Ryûshi was made a full member of the Institute, he left his illustration job to become a full-time artist. Following his departure from the Institute, in 1929, Ryûshi established the Blue Dragon Society (Seiryû-sha). There, he advocated painting large-scale works meant for exhibition purposes. This was a radical departure from traditional Nihonga works that were conventionally designed for smaller spaces such as the interiors of Japanese homes. Some of Ryûshi’s better-known works were paintings created during Japan’s participation in the war, and include narrative paintings based on the Japanese mythical creature the Kappa. In 1956, Ryûshi painted dragons on the ceilings at the Asakusa Sensôji Temple. In 1959, he was awarded the Order of Culture by the Japanese government.

References and Further Reading

----Modern Art in Wanderings: In Between the Japanese-and Western-style Paintings. (2006). Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Conant, Ellen. (1995) Nihonga, Transcending the Past: Japanese-style Painting 1868 -1968. St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum.

Moriya, Katori. Jomonjin Kawabata Ryushi. http://www.ne.jp/asahi/inlet/jomonjin/ryushi.html