

## Waiting for Spring, Surrounded by Pine Trees: San-no-ma in the Kuroshoin

The original murals of the Ninomaru-goten Palace at Nijo-jo castle were created by Kano-school artists during major renovation of the castle in 1626, in preparation for a visit by Emperor Gomizunoo (1596–1680). This exhibition features all the murals in the San-no-ma (Third Room) of the Kuroshoin at the Ninomaru-goten Palace.

### Role of the Kuroshoin's Third Room and pine trees

In the early Edo period, the Kuroshoin was called “Kohiroma” (lit. “Small Hall”) in contrast to the Ohiroma (lit. “Grand Hall”), which was used for official meetings between the shogun and visitors. In the Ohiroma, the shogun mainly met feudal lords and envoys from overseas countries, while the Kohiroma (Kuroshoin) was used for meetings with high-ranking court nobles and feudal lords close to the Tokugawa clan. It is believed that, in both buildings, the Ichi-no-ma (First Room) was where the shogun sat during meetings, faced by visitors seated in the Ni-no-ma (Second Room), while the Third Room was used as a waiting room for visitors before meetings.

While the murals in the First to Fourth Rooms of the Ohiroma depict pine trees with birds, the alcove in the First Room and the murals of the Third Rooms of the Kuroshoin also feature pine trees. In Japan, evergreen pine trees have been viewed as a symbol of eternal youth, longevity, and permanent prosperity. It is therefore thought that the Ohiroma and the Kuroshoin were decorated with murals of pine trees in hopes of the perpetuity of the power of the Tokugawa shogunate.

### From winter to spring

However, there are some differences between the depictions of pine trees in the Kuroshoin's Third Room and those in the Ohiroma. A huge pine tree extends its branches across each entire wall of the Ohiroma, whereas the mural surfaces in the Kuroshoin's Third Room are divided by *nageshi* (horizontal beams) into upper and lower parts, on which relatively small pine trees are depicted. Therefore, while the pine trees in the Ohiroma exudes a feeling of majesty and grandeur, the pine trees in the Kuroshoin's Third Room have an elegant and light atmosphere.

The mural *Matsu-zu* (Pine Trees) under the *nageshi* in the Kuroshoin's Third Room features not only pine trees but also seasonal motifs that represent the period from late summer to winter. For example, the sliding doors on the east side (displayed on the right side of the gallery when seen from the front) are decorated with depictions of over-leaved pondweeds blooming from late summer to autumn, while the *tobusuma* sliding doors on the south side (displayed on the left side of the gallery) depict gentians flowering in autumn. The four sliding doors on the north side (displayed on the right side of the gallery) show harvested rice fields and a white heron flying over them, while the wall next to the sliding doors depicts a pine tree covered with a light layer of snow and two white herons standing near its base.

As mentioned above, the Third Room of the Kuroshoin was a waiting room for visitors to the shogun. At the appointed time, the visitors entered the Second Room, which is decorated with a spring landscape with cherries blooming and small birds at play, to meet the shogun seated in the First Room. When those visitors passed from the Third Room, which features late-summer to winter landscapes, into the meeting room, they may have received a strong visual impression from the image of a bright and brilliant spring landscape depicted on the mural there. It can be thought that the pine trees in late-summer to winter landscapes depicted in the Third Room as a waiting room were intended to strengthen the impression of the bright spring atmosphere of the meeting room.

### Amanohashidate depicted at shoguns' residences

Above the *nageshi* in the Third Room of the Kuroshoin room is a mural called *Hamamatsu-zu* (Beach with Pine Trees). This beach is composed of two long and narrow sandspits, one extending from east to west on the north wall and the other from west to east on the south wall. These depictions are reminiscent of the geographic feature of

Amanohashidate, a famous place of scenic beauty. Recent studies have revealed that a building called “Shinzokaisho” constructed by Ashikaga Yoshinori (1394–1441), the sixth Muromachi shogun, and the Izumi-nishidono Palace constructed by Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436–90), the eighth Muromachi shogun, were also decorated with murals of Amanohashidate. These buildings were both constructed on the site of Muromachi-dono, the shogun's residence located to the northwest of the imperial palace. Built by Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), the third Muromachi shogun, Muromachi-dono was also called the “Flower Palace.” It has been pointed out that Amanohashidate was selected as a motif for the murals in the residences of Yoshinori and his son, Yoshimasa, probably handing down the tradition originated by Yoshimitsu, who had his residence decorated with a depiction of Amanohashidate, which he often visited. Amanohashidate has been a famous landmark since ancient times and has been a recurrent motif in literary works, such as Waka poems and Noh plays, as well as paintings.

If the *Hamamatsu-zu* in the Kuroshoin's Third Room depicts Amanohashidate, it is plausible to infer that the Tokugawa shogunate created the mural not only due to literary and artistic tradition related to Amanohashidate, but also since it was a motif often used to decorate the residences of the Muromachi shoguns. The various types of birds depicted along with cherries in the meeting room of the Kuroshoin also remind us of the “bird alcove” that existed in the Shinzokaisho constructed by Yoshinori, the sixth Muromachi shogun. The Tokugawa shogunate may have chosen this motif with the aim of demonstrating its own status as the successor to the Muromachi shogunate and the status of the Ninomaru-goten Palace as the residence of the “shogun.” The Tokugawa shogunate may have believed that this message would work more effectively on high-ranking court nobles who entered the Kuroshoin—visitors with knowledge of the residences of the Muromachi shoguns—rather than feudal lords who entered the Ohiroma.

This choice of the motif was possible because the Kano school, which created the murals of Nijo-jo Castle, had served the Muromachi shogunate and fulfilled its commissions since the time of Kano Masanobu (1434?–1530?), the school's founder. Painters at the time reproduced their predecessors' works by hand or maintained an accumulation of their predecessors' sketches, using those reproductions or original sketches as sources of reference for their own creative activities. The residences of the Muromachi shoguns had disappeared by the time of the creation of the murals at the Ninomaru-goten Palace. However, it can be assumed that the murals could not have been created in conformity with the tradition of shoguns' residences without the existence of the Kano-school painters, who had served the shogunate since the Muromachi period and were able to consult their own archives.

### Kano Naonobu, the painter of the murals

The murals of the Third Room of the Kuroshoin are attributed to Kano Naonobu (1607–50). His elder brother, Tan'yu (1602–74), painted the abovementioned mural of the meeting room in the Ohiroma. Naonobu, who was 20 at that time, is said to have received support from well-experienced senior painters. His depictions of golden clouds covering the surface like a curtain and pine trees bending in the form of a circular arc seen in *Matsu-zu* in the Kuroshoin's Third Room suggest his attitude of following the examples of senior Kano-school painters. However, the gentle atmosphere of the entire mural and lovely and delicate depictions of birds and flowers show a sign of his individuality. We hope that you will enjoy exploring what new challenges the young painter took on while following various traditions.