

FLOWERS & BIRDS

Four seasons of Japan

19th November–3rd December 2024
Palace of Art Madlena



Japanska ambasada u Srbiji
Embassy of Japan in Serbia





◀ **IKEDA, Yōson**
(1895–1988)
The Cherry Tree in Gion
ca. 1960s
color on silk
45 x 51 cm



KANASHIMA, Keika ▶
(1892–1974)
Cherry Blossoms
color on paper
44.5 x 53 cm

GREETINGS FROM THE COLLECTOR



It is my great honor to present my collection of Nihonga works to the Serbian public at Palace of Art Madlena as part of “Japan Month 2024.”

After Japan opened to the West in the mid-19th century, paintings influenced by European modern art began to be widely produced by Japanese artists. Those who had adhered to traditional methods of painting started to question whether they should abandon their conventional style. Ultimately, they named their works “Nihonga,” or Japanese painting, and embarked on a journey of trial and error, seeking to incorporate a modern sensibilities while preserving a distinctly Japanese aesthetic.

Since the late 19th century, many Japanese people have faced an identity crisis: how to reconcile tradition with modernity? Although Japan lost certain elements of tradition and made mistakes in the course of this process, one of the keys to its success in modernization has been the ability to maintain cultural traditions. It may look like a paradox but I believe this was also true in case of Nihonga.

My collection, featured in this exhibition, includes works of 28 representative Nihonga painters who engaged in this transformative process. Many of their pieces focus on the theme central to the Japanese sense of beauty;

nature, which subtly transforms with the changing seasons. Among them, floral and avian themes, favored by the Japanese, are particularly prevalent.

I believe this is the first time such a significant number of Nihonga works have been exhibited in Serbia, marking a rare opportunity in the long history of cultural exchange between Japan and Serbia.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Madam Madlena Zepter of the Palace of Art Madlena for providing me with this unique opportunity to showcase my collection. I also extend my appreciation to Ms. Svetlana Veličković and Ms. Zorica Rakić of the Palace of Art Madlena for their dedicated efforts in making this exhibition possible.

It would bring me great joy if you could experience the world of traditional Japanese beauty and deepen your understanding of Japanese culture.

今村 朗

**Akira
Imamura**

Ambassador of
Japan to Serbia

MESSAGE FROM THE SERBIAN MINISTER OF CULTURE



Esteemed Ambassador, art lovers and enthusiasts, It is with great pleasure that we in Serbia and me personally welcome the exhibition “Flowers and Birds: Four Seasons of Japan” that celebrates an artistic journey that this time represents the delicate beauty of nature through the lens of Japanese culture through Nihonga - Japanese traditional style painting in relations to the western style painting introduced in Japan in the 19th century.

Japan has a profound connection to its nature, that has always been reflected in art. The flowers and birds are traditionally the typical theme that reflects the aesthetic sense of Japan—recognizing harmony, beauty, and the passage of time. Also, the breathtaking landscapes of Japan and the changes in nature according to the seasons, bringing a rich tapestry of colors and influencing the way we perceive and experience the nature and the world around us, has long inspired artists and poets alike.

The exquisite works of 31 pieces art of the private collection of Nihonga capture the essence of each of Japan’s four seasons – whereas each season reflecting the beauty and fragility of life.

This is probably the first time that this scale of the Nihonga exhibition is organized in our country.

Therefore, it will be a wonderful opportunity for people in Serbia to meet, engage with, and better understand the deep sense of aesthetic in Japan.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dear Ambassador Imamura for bringing this exhibition to life in Serbia.

I encourage the audience to take a moment to reflect on its own connections to nature and the seasons. Let the artworks inspire all of us to appreciate the fleeting beauty that surrounds us every day.

The Palace of Art “Madlena” is also very suitable venue for this exhibition having in mind that it is famous for the antique collection from East Asia.

We are also pleased to learn that there is a concert of Japanese traditional instruments organized by the Embassy of Japan in Serbia on the opening day, complementing the exhibition.

Enjoy the exhibition!

**Nikola
Selaković**

Minister of Culture
of the Republic of Serbia



KAWAMURA, Manshu (1880–1942) ▲
Spring Rain in Arashiyama
1920s
color on silk
133.6 × 50.1 cm



FUKUDA, Heihachirō (1892–1974) ▲
Faint Pink Peony
Early Shōwa period
color on silk
124 × 35.5 cm



SHIMOMURA, Kanzan (1873–1930) ▲

Bamboo and a Bird

ink on silk,
122 × 42 cm



Palata umetnosti Madlena

Muzej antikviteta

Vredna kolekcija stilskog nameštaja, orijentalnih tepiha, slika, skulptura i drugih artefakata iz epohe baroka, rokokoa, neoklasicizma, džordžijanskog i viktorijanskog doba, vremena ampira, ar dekoa, savremene i umetnosti Dalekog istoka.

Antiques Museum

A valuable collection of furniture, oriental carpets, paintings, sculptures and other artifacts from the Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassical, Georgian and Victorian eras, the Empire era, Art Deco, contemporary and Far Eastern art.

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EXPRESSION OF YOHAKU IN NIHONGA

Kei Arai

Professor of Tokyo
University of the Arts
Nihonga artist

Many of Nihonga (Japanese paintings) in this exhibition depict birds and plants. I believe they are compelling pieces of art to understand the natural features of Japan's four seasons to the people of Serbia. I hope you will enjoy experiencing Japan's nature through these paintings.

Have you noticed the unpainted areas surrounding the birds and plants? In some cases, these areas cover more than half of the painting's surface. In Japanese, such areas are called "yohaku," or blank spaces. It's important to note that "yohaku" is not an unfinished area; rather, it is a unique form of spatial expression highly valued in Nihonga. In other words, these unpainted spaces constitute essential part of the artwork.

When Nihonga artists work on white paper or silk (silk fabric for paintings), they pay careful attention to "yohaku," that is intentionally left unpainted. If I were to explain this from the perspective of a Nihonga artist, I would say they first imagine the blank sheet of paper or silk as a space filled with depth, light, and humidity—such as the humid air of an early morning, the midsummer ground beneath the direct sunlight, or the slight warmth emanating from soft winter sunlight. If nothing is painted in those areas, the virtual space exists only momentarily. However, when an artist paints a bird or a flower, that space suddenly becomes actualized. In this way, painting a bird or a

flower transforms the virtual into the tangible. The space created around the painted subject, imbued with such awareness, is what we call "yohaku."

Perspective drawing is a well-known method for expressing space in painting. It involves establishing a horizon line and vanishing point to create a sense of depth, with motifs arranged according to this spatial order. The advent of perspective drawing was groundbreaking in helping humans understand the natural world. The Western perspective drawing was introduced to Japan in the mid-18th century, and the Japanese painters quickly gained a firm understanding of this technique. However, perspective painting requires filling the depth of the space with various motifs—such as distant mountains, progressively smaller alley of trees in the middle ground, and the protagonist in the foreground—which can lead to excessive description of the space. In contrast, Nihonga artists, who traditionally expressed their art through simple lines and colors, seemed to regard this method as redundant.

While painting is often seen as a two-dimensional art form, its appeal lies in expressing three dimensions within that two-dimensionality. In this regard, the distinction lies in how perspective draws the viewer into the artwork through illusion, while "yohaku" invites the viewer to engage their imagination.



YASUDA, Yukihiro (1884–1978) ▲
Rain Puddle
color on silk
127.5 × 43 cm



This doesn't suggest a conflict between two distinct cultures, the Western perspective and the Japanese concept of "yohaku"; rather, it beautifully illustrates the diverse ways we can appreciate and enjoy the quiet, open space within a painting, inviting viewers to see beyond form and color.

As a matter of fact, most of Nihonga paintings in this exhibition were produced in the last 100 years, reflecting the strong awareness of "yohaku" that emerged with the plain arrangement of motifs. This was a popular trend established in the 1920s and 1930s. The acceptance of Western art in Japan as a major direction began with the founding of Tokyo School of Fine Arts (now the Faculty of Fine Arts of Tokyo University of the Arts) in 1889. Consequently, many of the works in this exhibition are produced by the Nihonga artists who were well versed in the basics of modern art, as Japanese painters sought contemporaneity of their work, while preserving traditional practices of Japanese paintings. Ultimately, they arrived at an expression characterized by "yohaku" created by plain motifs. While earlier Japanese paintings also featured blank spaces, they were rarely approached with such sense of urgency. I invite you to appreciate the beauty of these modern interpretations of "yohaku."

"Yohaku" not only represents the three-dimensional area surrounding the birds and flowers but also extends beyond the picture plane. The imagination sparked by these "yohaku" is limitless—what might the little bird perched on the branch be gazing at, or in what kind of garden might a single flower bloom?

Lastly, I would like to highlight one more aspect of enjoying Nihonga: the support medium on which the artwork is created. In the "yohaku" where no paint is applied, the underlying support medium should be visible. Most Nihonga works are painted on paper or silk, each varying in type and texture. Even with the same ink density, colors can differ significantly based on the support medium used. Each artist selects the medium best suited to their expression, making the relationship between the artist's intention and the material an essential pleasure in appreciating Nihonga.

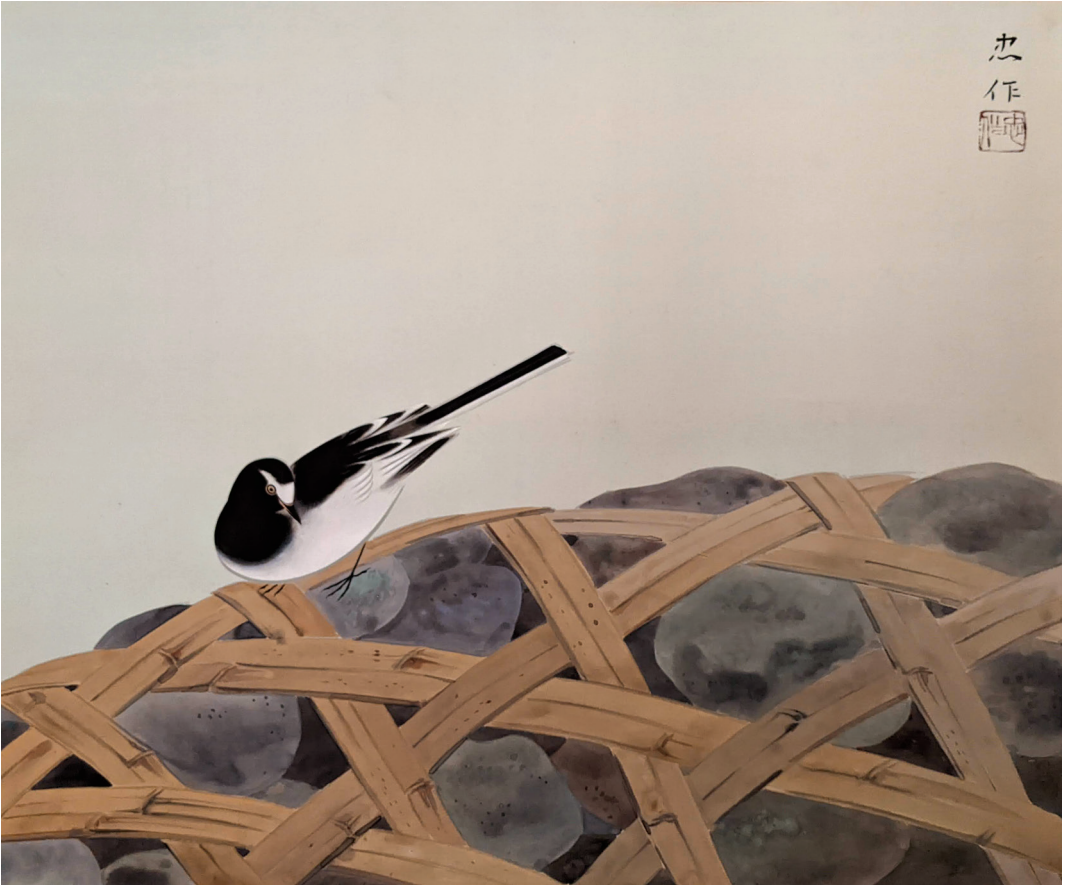
You may already be familiar with Japanese manga and animation in Serbia. The Nihonga paintings featured in this exhibition thoughtfully connect traditional Japanese culture and heritage with contemporary forms such as manga and animation. We hope this exhibition fosters a deeper interest in the rich tapestry of Japanese culture.



MATSUKOKA, Eikyū (1881–1938) ▲
*Imperial Messenger to the Kamo
Shrine Festival (Aoi Matsuri)*
Taishō Period
color on silk
137.7 × 50.9 cm



ONO, Chikkyō (1889–1979) ▲
Quiet Sea
1930s
color on silk
37 × 43 cm



ÖYAMA Chūsaku (1922–2009) ▲
Cool and Crisp (A Wagtail on Gabiō)
ca. 1960s
color on silk
42.4 × 51.2 cm



KONO, Bairei (1844–1895) ▲
A Rail on Waterside in Summer
1894
color on silk
111 × 41.5 cm



YAMAGUCHI, Hōshun (1893–1971) ▲

The Beginning of Autumn

color on paper

39.8 × 25.5 cm



YOSHIMURA, Tadao ▶
(1898–1952)
*Listening to the Rain
in the Countryside*
color on silk
131.5 × 41.5 cm



YAMAMOTO, Shunkyo (1871–1933) ▲
Early Autumn in the High Mountains
Early Shōwa period
color on silk
129 × 27.8 cm



YAMAMOTO, Shunkyo (1871–1933) ▲
Old Pine Tree in the Snow
color on silk
112 × 49.8 cm



KANASHIMA, Keika (1892–1974) ▲

Camellia

ca. 1960s

color on paper

33.5 × 24.5 cm

A hanging scroll displayed
in tokonoma (alcove) ▶



NIHONGA FEATURES & ATTRACTIONS

Mayu Takeuchi

Nihonga, a term first established in the 1880s, distinguishes traditional Japanese painting from its Western counterparts. Compared to Western painting styles, the most striking characteristics of Nihonga can be observed in its unique materials and techniques.

In this exhibition, Nihonga employs traditional painting materials such as sumi ink and “iwa-enogu”, which are pulverized rock pigments. Iwa-enogu is crafted from finely ground minerals like azurite, malachite, and cinnabar, while weathered oyster shells provide a white pigment. Artists mix these natural pigments with animal glue, called “nikawa”, to adhere them to the surface.

Silk and Japanese paper serve as support medium. Due to their thin and delicate nature, they must be mounted on another layer of Japanese paper, combined with patterned cloth to enhance the beauty of the work, finally transforming it into a hanging scroll. Besides hanging scrolls, other forms of mounting for preservation and decoration of the artwork include folding screens, scrolls, and frames, but hanging scrolls are a vital aspect of the traditional Japanese architectural space known as the “tokonoma” (alcove). Alongside flower arrangements (ikebana), hanging scrolls adorn this space, entertaining guests and reflecting the changing seasons.

The hanging scroll format necessitates that the artwork be rolled for preservation, which significantly limits the application of thick paint

layers. Unlike in Western painting, on which paint can be freely layered, only a thin layer of paint has to be applied in the case of Nihonga, which makes it nearly impossible to correct mistakes. The unique austerity of Nihonga paintings arises not only from the use of blank spaces (yohaku) but also from the constraints imposed by the materials and support medium.

In terms of technique, typical Nihonga differs from Western painting by avoiding light and shadow to create a three-dimensional effect. Instead, Nihonga employs flat surfaces and outlines to capture forms. Nihonga painters, seeking to grasp the essence of their subjects, engage in a distinctive exploration of reality that diverges from Western approaches.

Some works in the exhibition (Nos. 17 and 30) showcase the classical wet-on-wet technique known as “tarashikomi,” originating in the 17th century, where additional paints are applied before the first layer dries to create unique effects. Others present landscapes abstracted through bold surface and line compositions (No. 5) or effectively integrate realistic shadows reminiscent of Western-style painting (No. 25), taking innovative approaches.

Amid rapid modernization, Nihonga painters were acutely aware of Western painting while simultaneously inheriting a tradition deeply connected to Japanese spirituality. This interplay between tradition and modernization is what makes Nihonga uniquely compelling.

List of exhibited artworks

- IKEDA, Yōson** (1895–1988)
The Cherry Tree in Gion
1 ca. 1960s
color on silk
45 × 51 cm
- KANASHIMA, Keika** (1892–1974)
Cherry Blossoms
2 color on paper
44.5 × 53 cm
- KAWAMURA, Manshu** (1880–1942)
Spring Rain in Arashiyama
3 1920s
color on silk
133.6 × 50.1 cm
- ITŌ, Shinsui** (1898–1972)
Spring Dusk
4 color on silk
41 × 51 cm
- OKUMURA, Kōichi** (1904–1974)
Mountains in Spring
5 ca. 1930s - 1940's
color on silk
42.5 × 51.6 cm
- NISHIYAMA, Suishō** (1879–1958)
Red Plum Blossoms
6 ca. 1930s - 1940's
color on silk
41.5 × 50.3 cm
- OKUMURA, Togyū** (1889–1990)
Early Spring
7 color on paper
28.1 × 41 cm
- FUKUDA, Heihachirō** (1892–1974)
Faint Pink Peony
8 Early Shōwa period
color on silk
124 × 35.5 cm
- YASUDA, Yukihiro** (1884–1978)
Rain Puddle
9 color on silk
127.5 × 43 cm
- SHIMOMURA, Kanzan** (1873–1930)
Bamboo and a Bird
10 ink on silk,
122 × 42 cm
- KABURAKI, Kiyokata** (1878–1972)
*The Heroine Osai in Chikamatsu's
"Gonza the Spearman"*
11 1923
woodblock print
32.7 × 24 cm
- ONO, Chikkyō** (1889–1979)
Quiet Sea
12 1930s
color on silk
37 × 43 cm
- ŌYAMA Chūsaku** (1922–2009)
Cool and Crisp (A Wagtail on Gabion)
13 ca. 1960s
color on silk
42.4 × 51.2 cm
- MATSUKOKA, Eikyū** (1881–1938)
*Imperial Messenger to the Kamo
Shrine Festival (Aoi Matsuri)*
14 Taishō Period
color on silk
137.7 × 50.9 cm
- KAWAI, Gyokudō** (1873–1957)
Riverside District
15 color on silk
132.3 × 41.3 cm
- KŌNO, Bairei** (1844–1895)
A Rail on Waterside in Summer
16 1894
color on silk
111 × 41.5 cm
- YOSHIOKA, Kenji** (1906–1990)
Hibiscus
17 color on silk
34 × 42 cm
- YAMAGUCHI, Hōshun** (1893–1971)
The Beginning of Autumn
18 color on paper
39.8 × 25.5 cm
- MATSUBAYASHI, Keigetsu** (1876–1963)
Autumn Colors
19 Shōwa period
color on paper
140 × 35.2 cm
- ARAKI, Jippo** (1872–1944)
Grapes and Sparrows
20 ca. 1940's
color on silk
147 × 42 cm
- DŌMOTO, Inshō** (1891–1975)
Clear Autumn Sky
21 color on paper
40.3 × 44.4 cm
- KIMURA, Buzan** (1876–1942)
Small Bird on a Pine Tree
22 Early Shōwa period
color on silk
112.5 × 40 cm
- YOSHIMURA, Tadao** (1898–1952)
*Listening to the Rain in the
Countryside*
23 color on silk
131.5 × 41.5 cm
- IMAO, Keinen** (1845–1925)
Reeds and Geese
24 1906
color on paper
111.5 × 41 cm
- YAMAMOTO, Shunkyo** (1871–1933)
Early Autumn in the High Mountains
25 Early Shōwa period
color on silk
129 × 27.8 cm
- YAMAMOTO, Shunkyo** (1871–1933)
Old Pine Tree in the Snow
26 color on silk
112 × 49.8 cm
- NAKAMURA, Gakuryō** (1890–1969)
A Snowy Evening
27 1920s
color on silk
109.8 × 41.3 cm
- KAWAI, Gyokudō** (1873–1957)
Praise for First Snow
28 1956
ink and color on paper
28 × 41 cm
- TOKUOKA, Shinsen** (1896–1972)
A Snipe
29 1934
color on paper
39.5 × 45.3 cm
- KANASHIMA, Keika** (1892–1974)
Camellia
30 ca. 1960s
color on paper
33.5 × 24.5 cm
- IKEGAMI, Shūho** (1874–1944)
Hawk on a Pine Tree
31 around 1934
color on paper
127.5 × 42 cm