



The Rinpa School

In the early seventeenth century, when Hon'ami Kōetsu, a member of Kyoto's wealthy merchant class, encountered Tawaraya Sōtatsu, the artist and proprietor of a fan shop, a new style of art was born. That style is known as Rinpa, which has proved to have a lasting and profound impact on the world of Japanese art.

The Rinpa School started in the Edo period and its stylized aesthetic has been continuously passed on ever since to this day, but while it is known as the Rinpa School, it is entirely different from other artists organizations like the Kanō School.

The Kanō School was an authentic school, a family system that continued for four hundred years, starting in the sixteenth century. From the Ashikaga shogunal family to the Edo period's Tokugawa shogunate, it remained powerfully connected to the governing authorities, fulfilling orders for the public art they commissioned, a kind of general contractor of the art world.

On the other hand were the Rinpa School artists, who basically had no familial ties and were even born roughly one hundred years apart, never to meet each other, hardly an association you could call a school.

The Rinpa artistic styles and strategies were passed on, by Ogata Kōrin, one hundred years after Tawaraya Sōtatsu's art from the early seventeenth century, then by Sakai Hōitsu, one hundred years after Ogata Kōrin's art, each artist entranced by, revering and adhering to his predecessor. As a result, later generations grouped them into a single school, and after the Edo era ended, began referring to them as the Rinpa School.

In other words, the Rinpa School is an artistic style, a lineage sustained by the artists' respect for their predecessors' visions, unlike other artists groups such as the Kano School.

The world of Japanese waka poetry has a tradition called *honkadōri*, in which poets allude to classic poetry to bring new meaning and elevate them into greater beauty.

Just as Kōrin created his own homage to Sōtatsu's *Wind God Thunder God* folding screen, the Rinpa artists began by copying their predecessors' works, in that sense adhering to the aesthetics of *honkadōri* that had originated centuries earlier in the Heian period.

"Rinpa ni wa 'honkadōri' to iu Nihon bunka no kongen ga aru" [The Rinpa School's Roots in Japan's Cultural History]. *Waraku* 142, Special Edition: "Rinpa' tte konna ni sugoi!" (October 2013): 53, 56. Translated by Linda Hoaglund.



Ogata Kōrin; *Cranes* (detail); late 17th–early 18th century; pair of six-panel folding screens; ink, color, gold, and silver on paper; 65 3/8 × 146 1/16 in (166 × 371 cm), each. National Museum of Asian Art, Freer Gallery of Art Collection, Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment (F1956.20-21).