

---

# Kawakami Ryoka: *Early Summer* and Nihonga Works

---

TADOKORO Natsuko

## 1. Introduction

Kawakami Ryoka (1887–1921, birth name Kawakami Otojiro) was born in Hongo, the Bunkyo district of Tokyo, the third of five sons.<sup>1</sup> Along with Kishida Ryusei (1891-1929), he was a central figure in the Fusain-kai group of young artists. His *Railroad* (1912, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, fig.1) is considered a pioneering example of Japanese Post-Impressionism. Literary critic Aono Suekichi (1890–1961) commented, “Ryoka’s strange paintings attracted much attention, his fame possibly surpassing that of Kishida at the time of the 1st Fusain-kai exhibition.”<sup>2</sup> Because his career as an artist was short lived – he succumbed to tuberculosis at the young age of 34 - and most of his work was destroyed by fire during the war, he is not well known today. *Kawakami Ryoka Gashu* (*Kawakami Ryoka Collected Paintings*), still the most important source on Ryoka’s work, was published in 1936 by Omori Shoji (1891–1973), an artist from Kumamoto who lived with Ryoka for a while in the Higashi-Nakano area of Tokyo, and businessman and art collector Sakai Okuhiro (1894–1983). Other basic references include *Kawakami Ryoka Retrospective Exhibition Catalog*, also published in 1936 (Shiseido Gallery), the exhibition catalogues for *There Was a Painter Named Kawakami Ryoka* (Yorozu Tetsugoro Memorial Museum, 2001), and *100th Anniversary of Kawakami Ryoka’s Death* (Iwao Gallery, 2001), as well as analysis by Japanese scholar Tanaka Atsushi.<sup>3</sup> As other sources are very limited, this paper relies on *Collected Paintings*, the three exhibition catalogues, and Tanaka Atsushi’s research.

Kawakami’s *Early Summer* (1919, fig. 2) in the Artizon Museum collection was donated by Sakai Okuhiro. Painted two years prior to Kawakami’s death, it is thought of as a late work. At present, only four Kawakami oil paintings are known to exist, all from Sakai’s original collection. Sakai donated two of these *Railroad*, 1912, and *Scene of a Botanical Garden*, 1913 to the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, and one, *Thistle* (1914, fig. 3), to Kawakami’s heir. Sakai kept *Early Summer* until 1982, one year before his death, suggesting his strong attachment to the painting.

*Early Summer* is a delicately depicted beautiful work with contrasting blue, yellow, green, and red colors. It represents a dramatic departure from Kawakami’s earlier work and reflects influences from his charcoal drawing study with Omori Shoji from November 1914 to the end of 1915. Focusing on *Early Summer*, we will explore the impact of Kawakami’s living environment on his creative output and his transition from charcoal to Nihonga (Japanese-style painting).

## 2. Before *Early Summer* – Taiheiyo-gakai, Fusain-kai, and Nakano

Ryoka’s career as a painter began in 1905 when he joined Taiheiyo-gakai (Pacific Painting Association). The Association was established in 1904 as successor to the Meiji Bijutsu-kai (Meiji Art Association), Japan’s first Yōga (Western-style painting) group. In contrast to Kuroda Seiki and Kume Keiichiro, founders of the Hakuba-kai (White Horse Society) who studied with Raphael Collin, Ryoka’s teachers were Kanokogi Takeshiro and Nakamura Fusetsu, both of whom had studied under Jean-Paul Laurens in France. While connected with Taiheiyo-gakai, Ryoka’s work included studies of nudes in charcoal and oil (one of these remained in Okada Tetsuo’s collection), a small number of oil landscapes, quite a few watercolor landscapes, and a few still lifes.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there are no confirmed works from this time but, according to Omori, Ryoka asserted that he and Nakamura Tsune, also Taiheiyo-gakai members, were the best artists in the group. Nakamura moved from the Hakuba-kai Western-style painting group to the Taiheiyo-gakai in 1907. At the time, Ryoka’s painting style was influenced more by Gauguin and Matisse than by Cézanne and Van Gogh, but it also had a strong flavor of Japanese haiku. In 1907, Kishida Ryusei and Kawamura Nobuo formed the Shiko-kai and hand produced about 15 issues of their magazine, *Shiko*.<sup>5</sup> Ryoka had a central role in editing the magazine, making clean copies of member submissions. The lettering was so beautiful that Kitayama Seitaro, editor of *Gendai no Yōga* (*Contemporary Western Painting*), wanted to create a photo print of it. Suzuki Shintaro, a Shiko-kai member commented on Ryoka as follows:

Kawakami died early. I enjoyed his refreshingly cheerful watercolors in *Shiko* every month. He and Kishida were champions of this publication. [...] Kawakami applied paint in sparse strokes with a fine brush while Kishida’s dynamic broad brush strokes covered large areas. Kawakami was prolific - more than ten of his paintings were included in each issue. His beautiful depictions of seasonal scenery charmed us, as did the mysterious allure of his nonchalant exoticism. I looked forward to seeing these original paintings. They were like lessons in Western-style painting.<sup>6</sup>

Ryoka and Kishida Ryusei are often viewed in contrast, as if foreshadowing their later divergence. One of the most striking examples of the difference between them appears in “Private Correspondence: Four Exchanges” in the 3rd issue of the journal

*Fusain* in February 1913. Ryoka, concerned about lethargy in the Fusain-kai, suggested that each member resolve to materialize the group's theory and practice. Kishida, on the other hand, insisted that his art was exclusively personal. The two ideas were diametrically opposed. According to Tanaka Atsushi, Ryoka's idealistic outlook that encouraged 'working together' was overshadowed by Ryusei's 'personal' approach.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to *Early Summer*, Ryoka's oil paintings carried a strong element of 'fantasy.' Tanaka explains that this was more pronounced in Ryoka's works at the Fusain-kai exhibitions such as *Railroad*. Ryoka exhibited five oil paintings in the 1st Fusain-kai exhibition in 1912: *A Worker's Death*, *Night Postman* (fig. 4), *Yahiko in the Fog*, *Field*, and *Drifter*. His works in the 2nd Fusain-kai exhibition in 1913 garnered a strong public response: *Tunnel*, *Snow Approaching*, *Taking Medicine*, *Along the Sea*, *Streaking Sun*, *Sand Dune* (fig. 5), and *Early Winter*. Omori described *Taking Medicine* in particular as a 'ghostly yellow profile self-portrait with a gloomy shadow around the mouth cast by a blue medicine bottle. Along the jawbone, a stroke of strong red looks as if it had been placed by mistake. I overheard someone say the painting was so disturbing that they hesitated to enter the exhibition hall.' Saito Ryokuyo wrote a verse about the freakish expression. Tanaka noted that the expression came from an inner fantasy and, though influenced by Fauvism, was not related to Van Gogh's style.<sup>8</sup>

Ryoka discredited such work in his later years. Sakai Okuhiro noted that everyone else disliked these works as much as Ryoka did. Ryoka's true devotion to painting began in the fall of 1914 when he moved to his studio in Nakano<sup>9</sup>, an area of Tokyo with remaining abundant natural surroundings. Together with Omori, Ryoka began producing charcoal landscapes, seemingly turning his back on his previous style of painting and his relationship with Fusein-kai. The charcoal landscapes may have been initiated out of financial hardship, but as he returned to depicting nature, Ryoka gradually moved away from *après-guerre* modernism and the art circles of Tokyo. He revered Cézanne above other modern artists. At the same time, he became attracted to classical Japanese sculpture and artists such as Mokkei (Muxi), Sesshu, and Hiroshige. His view of nature changed in line with his interest in Cézanne and Japanese art. The result was evident at the 1917 *Special Exhibition of Kawakami Ryoka and Omori Shoji Charcoal Drawings* at the 2nd Japan Artists Association Exhibition.

For this exhibition, Ryoka showed one 1914 work, nine from 1915, and 20 from 1916, all selected from a group of around 380 charcoal drawings done in Nakano. The number is incredible, given the dearth of Ryoka works in existence today. *Collected Paintings* states that this was the largest number of works to be done in a year. However, according to Arishima Ikuma's foreword, the 110 works were chosen from among studies done in 1915 and 1916 - 30 by Ryoka and 80 by Omori.<sup>10</sup> The 30 works Ryoka carefully selected may have represented the culmination of his charcoal drawing studies. After the exhibition, Ryoka gradually shifted to classical Japanese art, as Omori noted. Aside from Muxi and Sesshu, his interests extended to Hiroshige and Ukiyo-e prints. He moved gradually from a black and white palette to a richly colorful painting style. He stopped producing charcoal drawings around February 1918, creating Japanese paintings such as the vividly colored

*Folding Screen with Design of Flowers* (1918, Yorozu Tetsugoro Memorial Museum) and *Wildlife Friends* (1918, Brooklyn Museum). Painted after this transition, *Early Summer* seems to replace the fantasy prominent in Ryoka's earlier work with an his expression of the Oriental affinity to nature.

### 3. *Early Summer*

This work features tall slender trees against the background of a simplified pastoral landscape. The Japanese title, *Bakushu*, refers to the early summer season when barley is harvested. The yellow of the barley field and the partially golden sky contrast beautifully with the rich green summer foliage and blue sky. There seem to be small figures of people harvesting the crop in the lower section of the frame, but the brushwork is abstract and the depiction indistinct. A band of light blue above the wheat field is perhaps the shadow of clouds. Instead of an accurate depiction of the landscape, Ryoka seems to have been more interested in the effects of the complementary colors and the vertically and horizontally intersecting geometric strokes. He used the broken brushstroke technique of layering repeated short brush strokes. The same technique can be seen in *Railroad*, his painting considered to be in Van Gogh style. In contrast to *Railroad*, where intricately layered colors seem to blend together, *Early Summer* is approached more abstractly with more restrained brush strokes. Therefore, rather than derivative of Van Gogh, this painting suggests influences of early Fauvist bright colors and stippling, or Cézanne's simplified renderings of nature. Further, the yellow, blue, green, and red colors and the abstracted composition recall Paul Sérusier's *Talisman* (1888, Musée d'Orsay). Whether or not Ryoka was aware of Sérusier's painting is uncertain, but Ryoka's affinity with the Nabis has previously been pointed out.<sup>11</sup> Though the colors and décor of Ryoka's painting may approximate the Nabis, they may also be based in Ryoka's study of Ukiyo-e, also a source for the Nabis artists. Ryoka's interest during this period in Hiroshige and Ukiyo-e, and his creation of several impressive Nihonga paintings will be further discussed below.

In 1919, the year *Early Summer* was painted, Ryoka produced five or six oil paintings, three of which were completed – *Early Summer*, *Country House with Carp Streamers* (1919, location unknown, fig. 6), and *Still Life* (1919, location unknown). These were the first paintings since Ryoka's *Thistle* of five years earlier. Ryoka was habitually a slow painter and even *Country House with Carp Banner* (46 cm × 33 cm) took more than a month to complete. Around 1918, the failure of the *Niroku Shimpo* newspaper, where Ryoka was working as an art reporter, created financial difficulty for him. His health was also deteriorating. The three paintings created during this difficult time were his best to date. Because his health made it difficult for him to travel, he mostly painted the garden of his studio and the farmhouse on the property. Seeing the bright freshness of *Early Summer*, it is difficult to imagine that Ryoka painted it under dire circumstances. Perhaps his production the previous year of the colorful Nihonga paintings *Wildlife Friends* and *Folding Screen with Design of Flowers* had a positive influence. Sakai reported on Ryoka's interests during this time as follows: "While in his studio, he devoted himself to work inspired by artists he admired. He appreciated Sesshu's robust skill, Kano Tanyu's

beautiful compositions, Hanabusa Itcho's light touch and wit, and Utamaro's style. Ryoka's painting experienced a clear shift in his use of color and simplified composition.

*Early Summer* never changed hands during Ryoka's lifetime, but was among works formerly owned by Sakai that were donated to the Artizon Museum in 1982, along with *Paulownias and Wheat* (1917, charcoal on paper) and *Early Summer* (1919, watercolor on paper). In addition, Sakai donated five works, including the important *Railroad*, to the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, and six works, including *Thistle* to Ryoka's heirs. Sakai eventually acquired *Folding Screen with Design of Flowers* from Hosokawa Moritatsu and is known to have been in possession of at least 15 of Ryoka's approximately 20 extant works, undoubtedly making him the largest collector of Ryoka's work.

When Sakai acquired *Early Summer* is unclear. He is not listed as the owner in the 1936 *Kawakami Ryoka Retrospective Exhibition Catalog* (Shiseido Gallery), though the price is listed as ¥80, the highest among the exhibited works. Sakai probably acquired the work after Ryoka's death, sometime between 1936 and the end of the war. He displayed it for a time at his uncle Issey Hatakeyama's home in Shirokane (fig. 7) and kept it with him until a year before his death, when he donated it to the Artizon Museum. Sakai spoke of Ryoka as follows:

My friendship with Kawakami Ryoka, an unforgettable friend, began around 1913 when I visited him with my late friend Toyama. Ryoka had just finished attending the first meeting of the Fusain-kai where his eccentric style had become a matter of concern. He was often featured in newspapers and magazines. We continued to have a strong relationship and visited each other frequently. This is also around the time Omori Shoji became acquainted with him and the two of us continued to be his companions, watching over him until the end.

In the next section, I will discuss Ryoka's friendship with Sakai and Omori.

#### 4. Kawakami Ryoka, Sakai Okuhiro, and Omori Shoji

The friendship between Ryoka and Sakai began around the time of the first Fusain-kai exhibition in October 1912,<sup>12</sup> and lasted until Ryoka's death in 1921. Sakai, who aspired to be a painter at the time, exhibited eight works along with Kishida and others at the November 2013 First Former Fusain-kai Painting Exhibition held at the Kanda Free Research Institute.<sup>13</sup> Sakai, who was just starting out, must have been dazzled by Ryoka, a very popular presence on the art scene. Sakai Okuhiro<sup>14</sup> (May 25, 1894–1983) was born in Sado, Niigata Prefecture, the third son of Sakai Naokazu. In February 1918, two years after graduating Waseda University's commerce department, he became a sales representative at Inokuchi Machinery, predecessor of the Ebara Corporation.<sup>15</sup> Inokuchi Machinery designed hydraulic machines, including the Inokuchi Pump developed by Dr Ariya Inokuchi. Director of the factory Hatakeyama Issey (1881–1971) established Ebara Corporation in 1920 as Japan's first modern pump factory. Hatakeyama, a descendant of the lord of Nanao Castle in Noto, was born in

Kanazawa City, and studied under Inokuchi at Tokyo Imperial University Department of Mechanical Engineering. Inokuchi and Hatakeyama founded Inokuchi Machinery in 1911. Aside from his business activities, Hatakeyama collected Japanese, Chinese, and Korean antiques, including tea ceremony utensils now housed at the Hatakeyama Memorial Museum. Sakai was Hatakeyama's nephew and contributed to the expansion of the business. He also later married Hatakeyama's daughter, Mutsu and became the 2nd president of Ebara Corporation in 1962.

Sakai, a skilled businessman, was also interested in the arts and collected Japanese and Western paintings. While Hatakeyama enjoyed Noh theater and was versed in Japanese and Oriental antiques, Sakai favored Western paintings and music. He personally studied Western-style painting at the Hongo Western Painting Institute.<sup>16</sup> He had to give up on becoming an artist because of detached retinas and other eye problems. He admired Western-style painter Nakamura Tsune, and frequently visited Nakamura's studio. After Nakamura's death he took part in the Nakamura Memorial Association, holding meetings at the Ebara Corporation Dormitory in Atami.<sup>17</sup> Aside from Ryoka, Sakai was also friendly with Yasui Sotaro (1888–1955), Tsuda Seifu (1880–1978), and wrote many related articles of art criticism.<sup>18</sup> His friendship with Ryoka was especially close and long lasting, beginning shortly after Ryoka presented his work in 1912 at Fusain-kai. Tsuda Seifu praised Sakai's acuity as a collector, saying: My only close friend is Sakai Okuhiro.<sup>19</sup> He also said 'Sakai likes paintings and has a keen eye, but is seriously short-sighted and it is amazing that he can so well discern quality. Perhaps he does it with his 'mind's eye.'" Sakai's art collection included not only works by Japanese painters he was acquainted with but also paintings by Impressionists and other 20th century French artists.

Sakai's association with the Artizon Museum can be traced back to at least 1956. When Yasui Sotaro passed away in 1955, Ishibashi Shojiro served as an advisor to the committee organizing a posthumous exhibition of Yasui Shotaro's works. Sakai was on the committee, along with other close friends of Yasui including Ohara Soichiro and Hosokawa Moritatsu. Further, Sakai entrusted a Cézanne painting and a Renoir painting included in the 1962 Ishibashi Collection exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris.

Like Sakai, Omori Shoji met Ryoka a few days after the first Fusain-kai exhibition in October 1912. Okada Tetsuo introduced him to Ryoka, saying that in case he wanted to purchase paintings, his friends were poor but promising. Omori was probably also in awe of Ryoka. He had just come from the countryside and had no artist acquaintances. He thought that Ryoka, already active in the Tokyo art circles and senior to him (four years older), was out of his reach. Omori was born into an established family in Yamaga City, Kumamoto Prefecture. He decided to become a painter at the age of 17, after attending a watercolor workshop in Osaka taught by Oshita Tojiro. He studied with Tokyo School of Fine Arts graduate Muto Tadashi who had been appointed art teacher at his local Kumamoto Junior High School. He wanted to enter art school after graduating, but there was strong opposition around him and he went instead to the Kagoshima Seventh High School. His passion for painting, however, never faded. He was fascinated by Millet that he knew of through the *Shirakaba* (White Birch

Society) magazine, and spent his days doing charcoal drawings. After graduating high school, he entered the English Literature department at Tokyo Imperial University in 1912. Seeing the 1st Fusain-kai exhibition and meeting Ryoka in the fall of that year, he dropped out of the university to pursue a full time career as a painter. In January 1913, he started his studies with Okada Saburosuke and Fujishiima Takeji at the Hongo Western Painting Institute. He studied in Europe for a year, staying for an extended period and painting in Aix-en-Provence, home on Cézanne. He was active in the Nika-kai, Kofu-kai, Kaijusha, and Shunyo-kai art associations. He also demonstrated ability as a writer, publishing his book *Millet*, and articles on Sesshu. Omori met Ryoka at the start of his career as a painter and was greatly influenced by him. On his special relationship with Ryoka, he wrote:

“I feel I am the person most responsible for documenting the work of Kawakami Ryoka. The reason is that we were truly like brothers, both in our lifestyle and our art, living together in Higashi Nakano from the autumn of 1914 (though not for long) and until his death in 1921.”

Omori and Ryoka lived together in Higashi-Nakano for around seven months from November 1914 until June 1915, when Ryoka built a new studio along the tracks in Higashi-Nakano. They studied charcoal drawing together until Omori returned to Kumamoto at the end of 1915. Omori commented that what they were able to accomplish in that year was comparable in quantity and quality to all the years until then combined and was so important that they were able to build on it for the rest of their lives. The two continued their work separately in Kumamoto and Tokyo, but when Omori returned to Tokyo in the spring of 1920, the collaboration in Higashi Nakano resumed. When Ryoka's condition worsened in the spring of 1921, Omori had him admitted, through the introduction of his brother Kenta, to the Kitazato Sanatorium at Kazusa-Okitsu. He also seems to have supported Ryoka financially. Omori acquired *The Sea at Kazusa A* (1921). *Country House with Carp Streamers* (1919), and *The Sea at Kazusa B* (1921) were acquired by Egami Toshiji, a relative of Omori and an influential person in Kumamoto. We can assume that Omori facilitated the purchase.

According to Omori, Ryoka had an aptitude for Nihonga. “He had some knowledge from early on. He inherited the brushes and inkstone, as well as some knowledge of technique, from his deceased brother, a Nihonga artist. He could easily and quickly transfer to skills of ink painting. He had to give up newspaper work and needed to find an alternative. However, I only know of two works, the *Manyoshu Picture Scroll* and *Folding Screen with Design of Flowers* that were completed, and it was only the latter, purchased by Hosokawa Moritatsu, that brought in any money.”

## 5. Kawakami Ryoka and Nihonga

Over more than three years immersed in charcoal drawing studies and depictions of nature in monochrome, Kawakami was gradually drawn to classical Japanese sculpture, and to artists such as Mokkei (Muxi) and Sesshu. According to Omori, Ryoka turned to Nihonga because of the passion for the spirit of Japanese ink painting he gained through work in charcoal. After

1918, he gave up charcoal work to focus on ink.

As far as is currently known, Ryoka produced at least five Nihonga paintings. Two of them are *Folding Screen with Design of Flowers* (1918, Yorozu Tetsugoro Memorial Museum, fig. 8), and another work from around 1918 in a private collection. The other three are the picture scrolls *Spring Picture Scroll* (ca. 1916), *Wildlife Friends* (1918, Brooklyn Museum), and *Manyoshu Picture Scroll* (1919). In 1918 alone, he produced the two folding screens and the more than 5 meter long picture scroll *Wildlife Friends* (1918, Brooklyn Museum, fig. 9), all with detailed depictions in vibrant colors, showing that his interest developed away from ink wash painting to a concentration on large-scale works in color. According to the chronology in Omori's *Kawakami Ryoka Collected Paintings*, Ryoka ceased creating charcoal drawings around February 1918, going on to produce Japanese ink wash Nihonga paintings. I will now discuss three known Nihonga paintings – *Wildlife Friends* and the two *Folding Screen with Flowers*.

### *Wildlife Friends*

This picture scroll depicts anthropomorphic insects and frogs. There is an inscription by Yuri Saito on the wooden box that contains the scroll, and the *Collected Paintings* chronological record notes the production in 1918 of a “picture scroll with insects.” The inscriptions on the scroll are verses that reveal Ryoka's views of nature at the time:

#### From Thoreau's *Walden Pond*:

Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. They say that characters were engraven on the bathing tub of king Tching-thang to this effect: “Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again.” I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages.

#### [No Title]

Cicadas gather in the forest  
Celebrating the start of a happy day  
Their energy, their chorus  
Is strong and brave  
Tata Ta Taa  
Look!

#### *Cricket Song*

Lucky Day Lucky Day  
Totally sunny day  
Happy lucky day  
The earth is alive and rich  
Our throats and bellies  
Pretty moist  
Lucky Lucky Day  
Music goes on without stop  
Happy Day  
Happy Happy Happy Day

From Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Song of Myself #52  
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.  
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fiber your blood.  
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

*Shout of the Ants*

Hey!  
Hard work and struggle  
Trampled as we work  
Please, I beg you  
Have mercy on us  
My mates shout  
Hey ho!  
So many ants.

*Locust Military Marching Song*

Growl in the Shirogane sky  
A lightning bolt  
In the clouds  
The flash of a single enemy plane  
My heart pounding in fear  
Following the plane  
Dew is falling off the leaves  
Ripe seeds let loose  
We fire the gun  
Courage and bullets  
Yah - shoot them down with a single Blow

*Signpost Song*

Gravel roads are paradise  
Sandstone roads are hell  
A gravel road  
Takes me home  
Let's go on the gravel road

*Butterfly Song*

So many kinds of fantastic flowers  
I am overcome, floating  
In the midst of these charms  
Are sharp and confused thoughts  
I take it all in  
Keeping calm

*Red Dragonfly Nursery Rhyme*

A red sunset in autumn  
Drinking all kinds of sake  
Look! How happy I am  
The long awaited sunset  
An ancient grave – blood and tears of the past  
Look! The sun is sinking  
It's sinking away  
  
A mist-filled autumn evening  
The setting sun is dispersing

Like tobacco smoke

Autumn fog is everywhere  
The brilliant glow in the graveyard  
Look! It's spreading everywhere....

The inscription "by Shigaraki Kyujo" appears on the scroll,  
along with Ryoka's signature and seal.

The title of the scroll, *Wildlife Friends*, is thought to be derived from Henry David Thoreau's (1817–1862) *Walden; or Life in the Woods* (first published 1854). Ryoka probably referenced the 1911 first Japanese translation by Mizushima Koichiro.<sup>20</sup> "Brute Neighbors," the 12th of Thoreau's 18 chapters, is translated into Japanese as 'Wildlife Friends'. The chapter advocates living in harmony with sometimes harsh nature, and together with mice and birds, and battling red and black ants. The *Wildlife Friends* scroll depicts crickets, grasshoppers, ants, cicadas, frogs, butterflies, dragonflies, and other small creatures that live in nature. Although Ryoka's subject has much in common with Thoreau, his depictions are not illustrations of Thoreau's text. Ryoka draws on Thoreau's text at the beginning of the scroll. In his 2nd chapter, "Where I Lived, and What I lived For," Thoreau draws on Confucian teaching in the words said to be engraved on King Tching Thang's bath tub: "Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever."

Saito Yori wrote a passage on the scroll's wooden storage box that is similar to what he wrote at the beginning of his article, "Mr. Reika," published after Ryoka's death.<sup>21</sup> Mr. Reika (Ryoka) tries to release a butterfly he used for his picture scroll but feels sorry for the weakened butterfly unable to fly and stops his work. As Tanaka Atsushi pointed out, even though Saito did not witness the scene, he could imagine Ryoka's sympathetic view of nature.<sup>22</sup> Ryoka's attitude seems to have much in common with Thoreau's view of nature.

In all, nine verses are inscribed on the *Wildlife Friends* scroll. The first is a quote from Thoreau, then six nursery rhymes about insects, and then a quote from Walt Whitman's (1819–1892) *Leaves of Grass* (first edition 1855; final edition 1892.). Thoreau and Whitman were both leading 19th century American poets. It is not clear which Whitman translation Ryoka might have used, but he was interested in Whitman prior to Tomita Saika's complete translation published 1919–1920. Ryoka quotes from "Song of Myself," the longest poem in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman was introduced in Japan by Natsume Soseki in the Meiji Period (1868–1912), and had strong influence in the Taisho Period (1912–1926) on Yanagi Soetsu, Arishima Takeo, Takamura Kotaro and others of the Shirakaba (White Birch Society) school.<sup>23</sup> In *Shirakaba*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (May 1914), Yanagi Soetsu discusses William Blake and Whitman as "poets of affirmation." According to Yanagi, Whitman's appeal was in his 'cosmic space,' 'message of friendship,' and 'positive view.' A planned sequel contrasting Blake's profound wisdom to Whitman's instinctive knowledge did not materialize. In a special feature on the 100th anniversary of Whitman's birth in *Shirakaba*, Vol. 10, No. 5 (May 1919), Yanagi provided comment on Whitman's portrait photograph and other materials. The fact that Ryoka incorporated Whitman quotes prior to this suggests Ryoka's sensitivity to contemporary happenings, despite

keeping apart from the central art scene.

Ryoka painted the two *Folding Screen with Design of Flowers* around the same time as *Wildlife Friends*. Presumably done as a pair, both depict colorful wild flowers and grasses. Swallows in flight mark the theme of spring. Irregularly shaped areas of red, blue and peach interspersed with the flowers and grasses create a fantasy atmosphere while the complementary colors lend an effect of vivid brightness. Despite the difference of approach between Nihonga and oil painting, Ryoka could produce these two large-scale folding screens, over 170cm in height, and the picture scroll *Wildlife Friends*, over 5m in length, at the same time. It is surprising that he took on such large works one after the other. His view of nature and sensibility for rich color gained through Nihonga culminated in his 1919 *Early Summer* produced the following year, his first oil painting in five years.

## 6. The Late Years: After *Early Summer*

In April 1920, after painting *Early Summer*, Ryoka went to Osaka to meet Omori for travel together in Nara and Kyoto and environs before Omori's return to Tokyo. They saw Mokkei's (Muxi) painting at Daitoku-ji, Sesshu at Manju-in, and the *Shakyamuni Triad* at Tofuku-ji. In the fall, Ryoka met Okada Tetsuo in Nasu, and stayed for about a month. His health, however, began to rapidly deteriorate. At the beginning of 1921 he went to Kazusa-Okitsu for recuperation and produced several oil paintings there. According to Omori, these were "the most beautiful works to mark his final days. They had a somber and solitary quality that only a person facing death could create." Although works from this period have not been located, we can suppose from illustrations in *Collected Paintings of Sea at Kazusa A* (1921, fig. 10), and *Sea at Kazusa B* (1921) that they approach abstract painting with restrained colors and simplified subjects, the tendency seen in the 1919 *Early Summer*. The paintings show Ryoka's will to develop his art until his last days.

Omori commented that the quality of Ryoka's work advanced after his charcoal studies. Though attention is mostly given to Ryoka's early Fusain-kai years, the true essence of his art is expressed in works produced after 1918 that were created with his view of nature formed in Higashi-Nakano. *Early Summer* perhaps most clearly demonstrates this.

(Curator, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation)  
(Translated by Cheryl Silverman, CAS Associates, Inc.)

"I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Tsuji Hiroko, heir to Kawakami Ryoka, Mikuni Yasuko, heir to Sakai Okuhiro, Omori Yoichi, heir to Omori Shoji, and Tanaka Atsushi, Director of the Okawa Museum of Art, for their cooperation with this research.

### Notes

1. According to Kawakami's heir Tsuji Hiroko, his two elder brothers died earlier, the eldest on June 11, 1896 and the second son on September 26, 1890.
2. Aono Tokichi, "A Painter," *Zayūho*, Vol. 4/5, September, 1946.
3. Tanaka Atsushi, "Kawakami Ryoka Research Notes," *Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, Tokyo, 1997, pp. 5–35, and "There Was a Painter Named Kawakami," *A Painter's Place*, p. 255.
4. Omori, Shoji, "Recollections of Kawakami Ryoka," *Kawakami Ryoka Collected Paintings*, 1936, pp. 2012. Unless otherwise noted, quotes that follow in the text are from this source.
5. "The Late Kawamura Nobuo," *Yearbook of Japanese Art*, 1907, pp. 85–86.
6. Suzuki Shintaro, "Art Now is the Past," *Footsteps of Art Now and in the Past*, Hakubunkan Shinsha, 1987 pp. 27–29.
7. Tanaka Atsushi, "There Was a Painter Called Kawakami Ryoka," *There Was a Painter Named Kawakami*, exh. cat., Tetsugoro Yorozu Memorial Museum, Chigasaki City Museum of Art, 2002, p. 11.
8. Tanaka Atsushi, "Ryoka Kawakami Research Notes," *Bulletin of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo*, No. 5, 1997, p. 13.
9. Sakai Okuhiro, "Ryoka, Unforgettable Friend," *Kawakami Ryoka Collected Paintings*, 1936, pp. 13–15. Unless otherwise noted, Sakai's statements are quoted from this source.
10. Arishima Ikuma, "Kawakami Ryoka and Omori Shoji," *The Port of the East*, 1936, pp. 121–123.
11. The hills at the left and right of *Railroad* and the red ground tone with scattered green accents remind of Matisse's Fauvism, or the Nabis style of Bonnard but this work is more probably strongly influenced by Van Gogh. (Nakatani Nobuo, "Influences in Modern Japanese Paintings," Tsukasa Kofuji, ed., *The Van Gogh Myth*, Asahi Broadcasting Co., 1992, p. 84.
12. There is also an account of the date as 1912. (Sakai Okuhiro 'Miscellaneous notes (8),' *Ebaradayori*, September, 1973.
13. According to Miyamoto Hisanobu, curator, Wakayama Museum of Modern Art, and the exhibition list reference.
14. Refer further to Tadokoro Natsuko, exh. cat., "Collector Sakai Okuhiro," *Ishibashi Collection Selected for the Exhibition in Paris, Spring 1962*, Bridgestone Museum of Art, 2012, pp. 31–32.
15. Refer further to Kuribayashi Iwao, *Water and Air: Ebara Corporation*, Nihon Kogyo Shimbun, 1970.
16. Based on information from Tomiyama Hideo, former director Bridgestone Museum of Art and Ishibashi Foundation. In a July 6, 1977 letter to Mr. Tomiyama, Sakai Okuhiro mentioned attending the Hongo Institute of Western Painting and visiting Nakamura Tsune's studio.
17. Nakamura Tsune, *The Infinity of Art*, Chuokoron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1963, p. 453.
18. Some examples: Sakai Okuhiro, "Kawakami Ryoka," *Gendai no Me*, no. 106, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, September 1963; Sakai Okuhiro, "Remembering Yasui Sotaro," *Yasui Sotaro Exhibition*, exh. cat., Bridgestone Museum of Art, 1978.
19. Tsuda Seifu, "My Friend Sakai Okuhiro," *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, July 5, 1963.
20. Thoreau original work, trans. Mizushima Koichiro, Buneisha, 1911.
21. Saito Yori, "Reika Sensei," *Bijutsu Shinpo*, Vo. 2, No 9, September 1927. The passage is "Reika, first of all, (saying as he pinches the butterfly between his fingertips) thank you for all your hard work. (He flicks that butterfly away). "Go ahead and fly away." The butterfly falls to the floor, powerless. He picks the butterfly up and says "Is that it? Can't you fly? No more flying. I killed a lot of bugs to make this picture scroll. You want to live, don't you? You hate being killed. Stop it. Stop it."
22. Tanaka Atsushi, "Introduction: There Was a Painter Called Ryoka Kawakami," Exh. cat. *There Was a Painter Called Ryoka Kawakami*, Yorozu Tetsugoro Memorial Museum, Chigasaki City Museum of Art, 2002, p. 13.
23. Natsume Soseki "On the Poetry of Walt Whitman, representative of literary world egalitarianism," *Tetsugakuzasshi*, October, 1892.

---

List of illustrations (pp. 24–33)

- fig.1—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Railroad*, 1912, Oil on canvas, 59.0 × 44.0 cm, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
- fig.2—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Early Summer*, 1919, Oil on canvas, 53.1 × 45.3 cm, Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation
- fig.3—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Thistle*, 1914, Oil on canvas, 41.5 × 49.4 cm, deposit at The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama
- fig.4—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Night Postman*, 1912, location unknown
- fig.5—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Sand Dune*, 1913, location unknown
- fig.6—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Country House with Carp Streamers*, 1919, location unknown
- fig.7—*Early Summer* at Hatakeyama Issey's home (Around 1945)
- fig.8—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Sea at Kazusa A*, 1921, location unknown
- fig.9—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Folding Screen with Design of Flowers*, 1918, Color on paper, two-fold screen, 175.8 × 169.3 cm, Yorozu Tetsugoro Memorial Museum of Art
- fig.10—KAWAKAMI Ryoka, *Wildlife Friends (Yasei no Tomo)*, 1918, Ink, opaque watercolors and possibly lacquer on wove paper decorated with mica, 21.4 × 523.2 cm, Brooklyn Museum, Purchased with funds given by Mr. Mrs. Willard G. Clark and Helen Babbott Sanders Fund, 1993.4