**Muromachi Art**

During the Muromachi period (1338-1573), also called the Ashikaga period, a profound change took place in Japanese culture. The Ashikaga military clan took control of the shogunate and moved its headquarters back to Kyoto, to the Muromachi district of the city. With the return of government to the capital, the popularizing trends of the Kamakura period came to an end, and cultural expression took on a more aristocratic, elitist character. Zen Buddhism, the Ch'an sect traditionally thought to have been founded in China in the 6th century AD, was introduced for a second time into Japan and took root.

**Painting**

Because of secular ventures and trading missions to China organized by Zen temples, many Chinese paintings and objects of art were imported into Japan and profoundly influenced Japanese artists working for Zen temples and the shogunate. Not only did these imports change the subject matter of painting, but they also modified the use of color; the bright colors of Yamato-e yielded to the monochromes of painting in the Chinese manner.

Typical of early Muromachi painting is the depiction by the priest-painter Kao (active early 15th century) of the legendary monk Kensu (Hsien-tzu in Chinese) at the moment he achieved enlightenment. This type of painting was executed with quick brush strokes and a minimum of detail. Catching a Catfish with a Gourd (early 15th century, Taizo-in, Myoshin-ji, Kyoto), by the priest-painter Josetsu (active c. 1400), marks a turning point in Muromachi painting. Executed originally for a low-standing screen, it has been remounted as a hanging scroll with inscriptions by contemporary figures above, one of which refers to the painting as being in the "new style." In the foreground a man is depicted on the bank of a stream holding a small gourd and looking at a large slithery catfish. Mist fills the middle ground, and the background mountains appear to be far in the distance. It is generally assumed that the "new style" of the painting, executed about 1413, refers to a more Chinese sense of deep space within the picture plane.

The foremost artists of the Muromachi period are the priest-painters Shubun and Sesshu. Shubun, a monk at the Kyoto temple of Shokoku-ji, has created in the painting Reading in a Bamboo Grove (1446, Tokyo National Museum) a realistic landscape with deep recession into space. Sesshu, unlike most artists of the period, was able to journey to China and study Chinese painting at its source. The Long Handscroll (Mori Collection, Yamaguchi) is one of Sesshu's most accomplished works, depicting a continuing landscape through the four seasons.

**Architecture**

Another major development of the period was the tea ceremony and the house in which it was held. The purpose of the ceremony is to spend time with friends who enjoy the arts, to cleanse the mind of the concerns of daily life, and to receive a bowl of tea served in a gracious and tasteful manner. The rustic style of the rural cottage was adopted for the tea house, emphasizing such natural materials as bark-covered logs and woven straw.