

Yamagoshi Amida zu (Amida crossing the mountains)



Painting, hanging scroll, Japan, Ink and colours on silk. H 101cm x W 53.7cm, c1760-1840

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The head of a monumental figure appears in the sky over the tops of the mountains. Golden lines radiate from the head like rays from the sun. The figure is portrayed with elongated ears, narrow eyes and a prominent red spot on the top of the head. The sky is a very deep blue with swirls of clouds around the head of the figure.

Trees are portrayed receding into the distance and the snow and water in the picture are portrayed as wavy lines of black on white. There is a severe compression of the depth of field to the painting with the trees and mountains seeming to rise immediately in front of the massive presence of the figure's head. The rays from the head almost give the impression of radiating magic.

The painting is on silk and is hung on a scroll with a gold patterned surround.

There is a sense of movement in the portrayal of the mountains from the swirls of colour and unreal shapes, almost as if they are being moved. There is a great sense of power given to the figure head by the composition and portrayal.

The British Museum website¹ considers this portrayal as "Thought to be the oldest icon type among the variants on the theme of the descent of Amida to welcome the believer to paradise" and states "Appearing like the rising moon or setting sun over the edge of the western mountain, it is unusual in this case for Amida not to be shown with attendant deities".

¹http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=790480&partId=1