

TOUCHING THE MOON: TWENTY-FOUR SHIKISHI

Michael Dylan Welch

come outside!
 we can almost touch
 the spring moon *Teijo Nakamura*

On September 17, 1978, for the tenth anniversary of the Haiku Society of America, the society's annual meeting in New York City was a particularly special occasion. It included a visit by a distinguished haiku scholar and notable poet from Japan, and the donation of twenty-four *shikishi*, or poem cards, to the society. The society's twentieth anniversary book, *A Haiku Path*, portrays the event as follows (163):

For the annual meeting of 1978, the critic Kenkichi Yamamoto and the haiku poet Sumio Mori were invited by the HSA to come from Japan to speak on haiku. Held on September 17 at Japan House in New York City, this historic occasion was opened by HSA President Cor van den Heuvel welcoming the distinguished speakers and thanking those who had helped make the event possible, especially the co-sponsor, Japan Society, HSA vice president Yasko Karaki, Kazuo Sato of Tokyo's Museum of Haiku Literature, and Japan Air Lines. A short address by Yukio Sugano, representing the Consul General of Japan, stressed the universality of haiku and the value of the HSA's efforts on its behalf. Yasko Karaki introduced the two speakers. Takako Lento interpreted for them as they gave their talks.

Kenkichi Yamamoto (1907–1988) is described in *A Haiku Path* as being “the most influential haiku critic and commentator in modern times” (163). Sumio Mori (1919–2010) was editor of

the haiku journal *Kanrai* (*Cold Thunder*) from 1957 to 1971, and was one of Japan's leading haiku poets. The talks given by these two poets and scholars appeared in *Frogpond* 1:4, 1978, and in *A Haiku Path* (pages 163 to 173).

As is common among the Japanese, the two visitors came with a generous gift, described as follows in *A Haiku Path* (174):

Messrs. Yamamoto and Mori brought with them a set of twenty-four haiku written on *shikishi* by contemporary Japanese haiku poets as a gift from the Museum of Haiku Literature in Tokyo to the Haiku Society of America. A *shikishi* is a more or less square decorative paperboard and is commonly used by the haiku poet to write his haiku for presentation or display. The twenty-four *shikishi* were displayed at Japan House during the HSA annual meeting.

Those in the audience each received a copy of *Haiku Selected for Shikishi*, with one-line translations of the twenty-four haiku by Hiroaki Sato. The booklet was published by Ikuta Press in Kobe, Japan, in an edition of 500, which were also given to HSA members until they ran out.

Over the years, the *shikishi* were displayed occasionally at HSA meetings, and were featured at the Dalton School in New York City at the 2003 Haiku North America conference. In 2006, the HSA deeded the *shikishi* to the American Haiku Archives, and joined the rest of the HSA's official archives at the California State Library in Sacramento. At about this time, William J. Higginson estimated the value of these *shikishi* at between \$100,000 and \$120,000, based on the typical rate original *shikishi* by these famous poets would sell individually. In the decade since then, their value has gone much higher. As a set, their value is now perhaps as much as \$500,000, but as a gift their value is priceless.

On September 26, 1998, HSA president Kristen Deming wrote to Dr. Kevin Starr, California State Librarian. She said "Thank you for your letter of congratulations on the Haiku Society of America's 30th Anniversary. . . . You can rightly be proud of the Library's haiku collection, surely the richest and most inclu-

sive in the country.” She also said that the society “has an important collection of haiku *shikishi* (original calligraphy on special paper display cards) by some of Japan’s most famous haiku poets, which we would like to send to the Archives in the future. Perhaps someday you would like to exhibit them at the Library along with translations and some information about the poets.”

Kristen Deming’s desire is now reality. In December of 2017, and until the end of April 2018, the California State Library is exhibiting the Haiku Society of America’s twenty-four shikishi with new translations by Michael Dylan Welch and Emiko Miyashita. This exhibit helps to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Haiku Society of America in 2018, as do the twenty-four shikishi haiku translations presented here along with four shikishi color reproductions. A complete presentation of all twenty-four shikishi and supplementary material can be found online at the American Haiku Archives website (americanhaiku-archives.org).

The calligraphy of the twenty-four shikishi contributors varies from simple and utilitarian to flamboyant and decorative. Each poet created his or her shikishi by hand, including brush paintings as well as the calligraphy. These shikishi have importance beyond their significance as artwork, however. In describing this exhibit for publicity purposes, former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts and current California state poet laureate Dana Gioia said the following:

The great haiku tradition of Japan has been part of California poetry since the beginning when Yone Noguchi arrived here over a century ago to introduce the form into English. The haiku tradition was carried on by Japanese Americans who practiced this exquisite art even in the grimness of World War II internment camps. Today haiku is a central poetic form in English-language literature. The public presentation of these twenty-four haiku on shikishi poem cards has a special resonance for California. They deepen our historic cultural link with Japan and recall our diverse past. There is no way to understand our poetry without recognizing the haiku.

These shikishi also resonate with importance for the entire United States and beyond. In Japan, the moon is revered as one of haiku's most important *kigo*, or season words. Through haiku, Japan has shown the moon to the world in a new way. And through the efforts of countless poets, translators, and scholars, the world can now see haiku. The poems in these shikishi represent not just their authors but also the light of the haiku moon as a gift to the world. As with Teijo Nakamura's poem included among these shikishi, we are perpetually invited to come outside to celebrate the moon. We trust that these shikishi created by twenty-four of Japan's leading poets of the twentieth century will continue to inspire all ages of haiku writers in the United States and beyond for many years. The Haiku Society of America and the American Haiku Archives extend much gratitude to the Museum of Haiku Literature in Tokyo and to all the contributing poets for their lasting generosity.

THE TWENTY-FOUR SHIKISHI

Translations by Michael Dylan Welch and Emiko Miyashita. Names are given in the Japanese order, surname first. Image scans courtesy of the American Haiku Archives, California State Library in Sacramento.

ささなみの国の濁酒酔ひやすし 赤尾 兜子
sasanami no kuni no doburoku yoiyasushi Akao Tōshi, 1925–1981

raw sake
 from Lake Biwa's shore —
 soon makes me drunk

今日の月長い芒を生けにけり 阿波野 青畝
kyō no tsuki nagai susuki o ike ni keri Awano Seiho, 1899–1992

harvest moon
 I have arranged
 silver grasses

らんぷ売るひとつらんぷを霧にともし
ranpu uru hitotsu ranpu o kiri ni tomoshi

安住 敦

Azumi Atsushi, 1907–1988

lamp seller—
 one of his lamps
 lighting the fog

火を焚きて美しく立つ泉番
hi o takite utsukushiku tatsu izumiban

平畑 静塔

Hirahata Seitō, 1905–1997

building a bonfire
 the keeper of the well
 stands beautifully

暁は宵より淋し鉦叩
akatsuki wa yoi yori sabishi kanetataki

星野 立子

Hoshino Tatsuko, 1903–1984

the dimness of dawn
 is lonelier than dusk—
 a handbell cricket

ふだん着でふだんの心桃の花
fudangi de fudan no kokoro momo no hana

細見 綾子

Hosomi Ayako, 1907–1997

in everyday clothes
 and everyday mind—
 peach blossoms

ねむる嬰兒水あけてゐる薔薇のごとし
nemuru yaya mizu akete iru bara no gotoshi

飯田 龍太

Iida Ryūta, 1920–2007

like a cut rose
 drawing up water
 sleeping newborn

原爆地子が陽炎に消えゆけり 石原 八束
genbakuchi ko ga kagerō ni kieyukeri Ishihara Yatsuka, 1919–1998

A-bomb site—
 a child disappears
 into the heat shimmer

梅咲いて庭中に青鯨が来ている 金子 兜太
ume saite niwajū ni aozame ga kiteiru Kaneko Tohta, 1919–

plums in bloom
 all over the garden
 blue sharks

原爆図中口あくわれも口あく寒 加藤 楸邨
genbakuzuchū kuchi aku ware mo kuchi aku kan Katō Shūson, 1905–1993

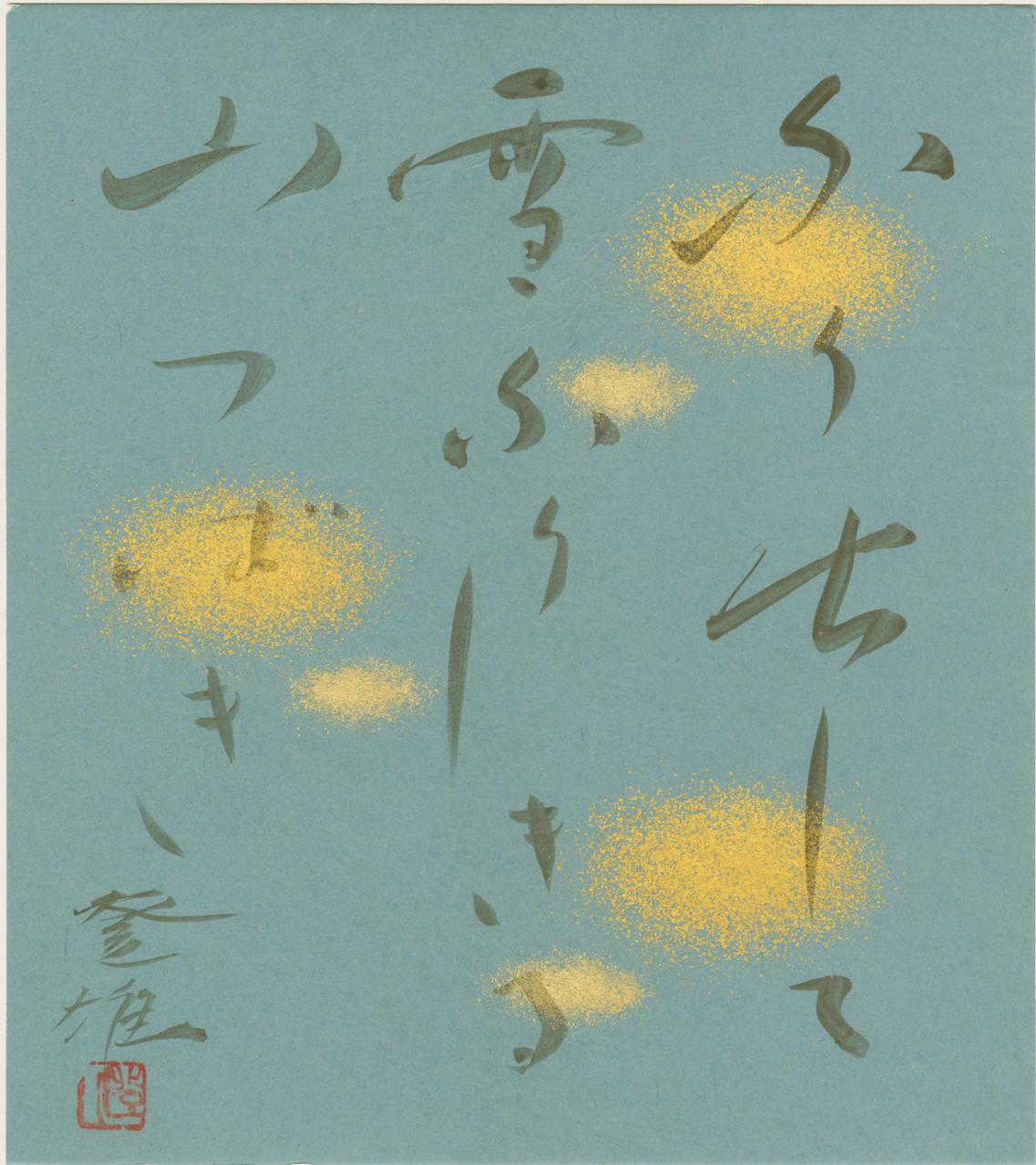
an open mouth
 in the A-bomb picture—mine too
 midwinter

春雨の雲より鹿やみかさ山 皆吉 爽雨
harusame no kumo yori shika ya mikasayama Minayoshi Sōu, 1902–1983

a deer out of the clouds
 of spring rain ...
 Mount Mikasa

月いでて薔薇のたそがれなほつづく 水原 秋櫻子
tsuki idete bara no tasogare nao tsuzuku Mizuhara Shūōshi, 1892–1981

emerging moon—
 twilight lingers
 in the roses

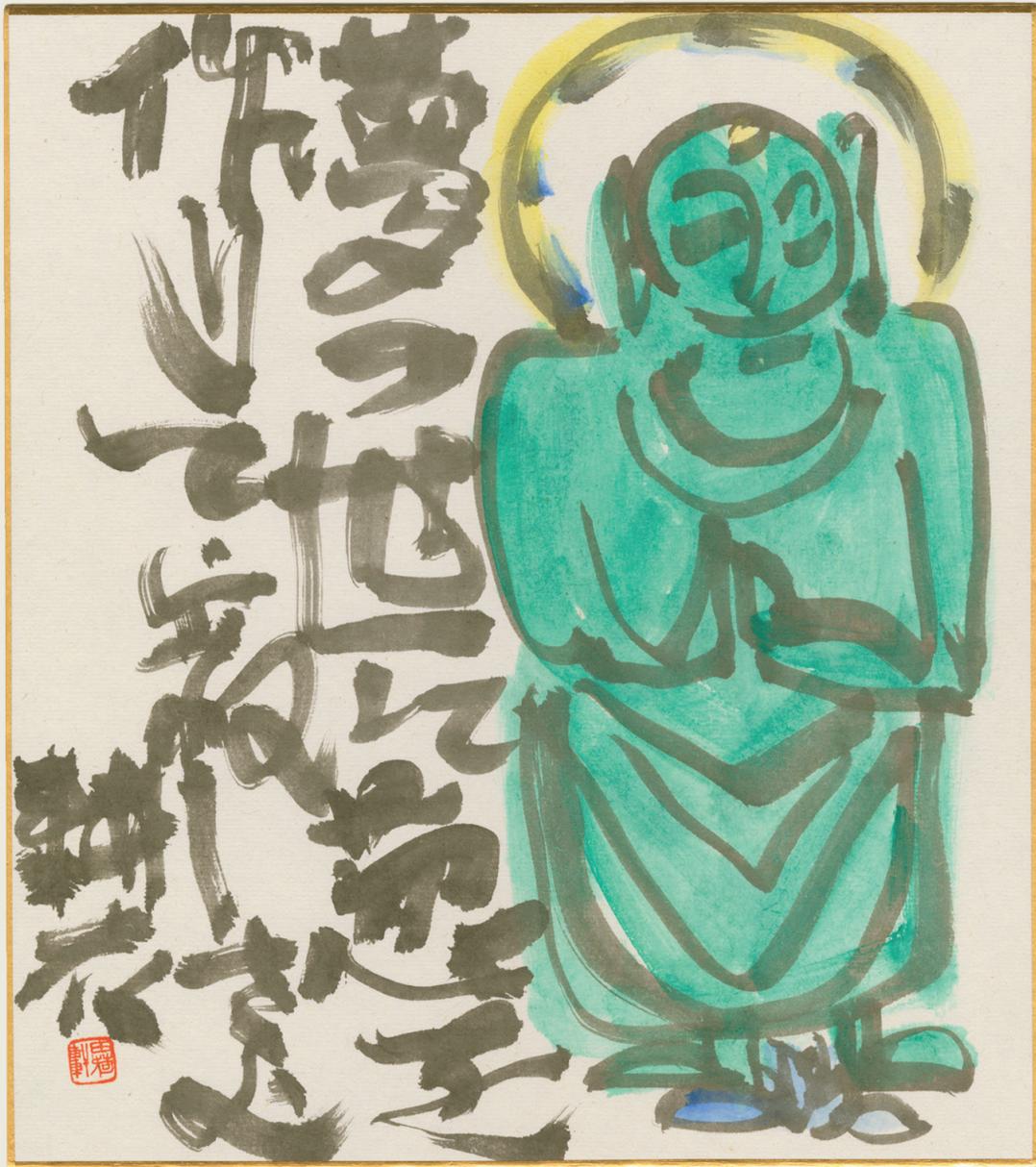


ふり出して雪ふりしきる山つばき
furidashi te yuki furishikiru yamatsubaki

snow falling
and still falling
mountain camellia

森 澄雄

Mori Sumio, 1919–2010

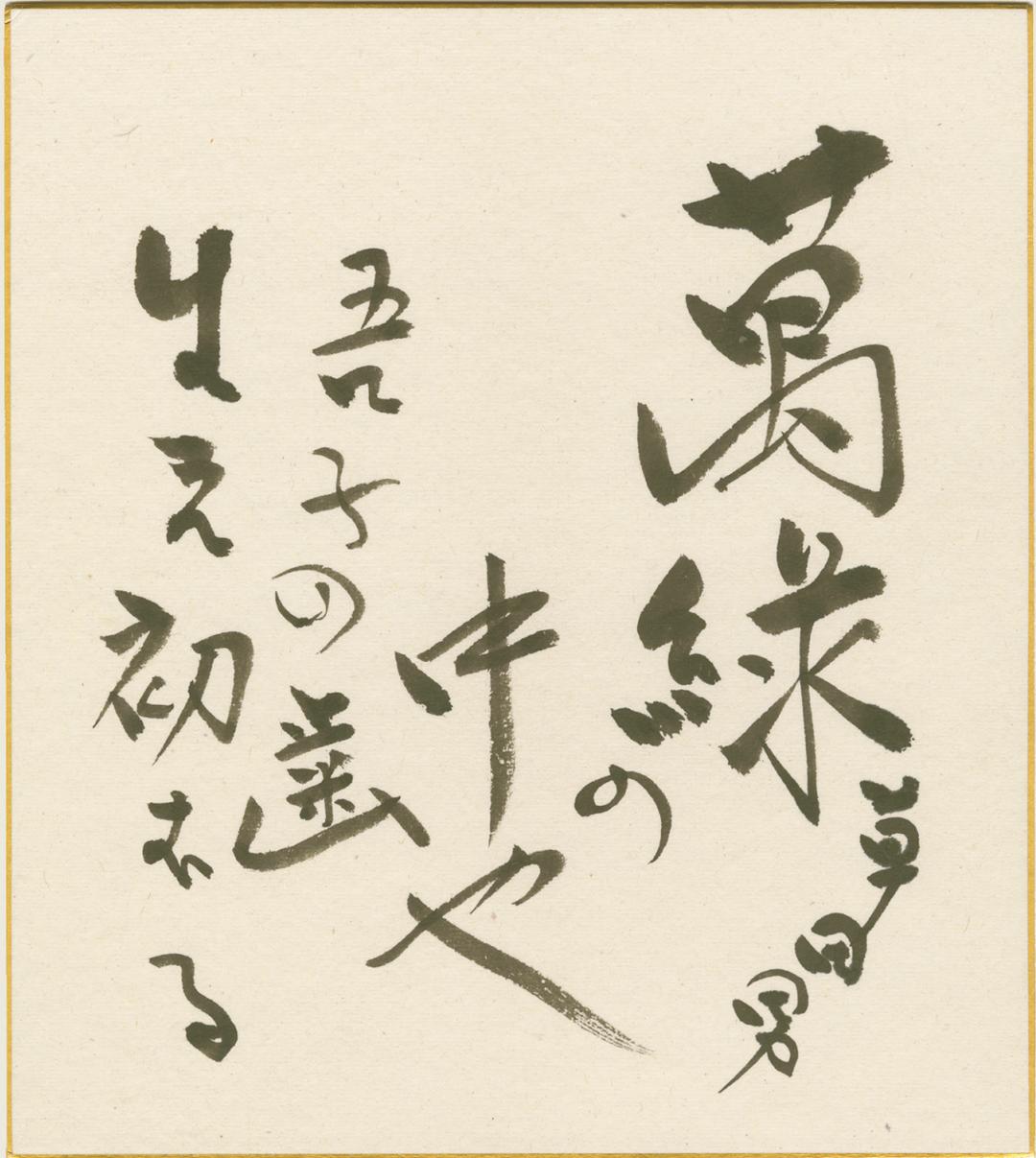


夢の世に葱を作りて寂しさよ
yume no yo ni negi wo tsukurite sabishisa yo

永田 耕衣

Nagata Kōi, 1900–1997

in this world of dreams
I grow leeks —
such loneliness



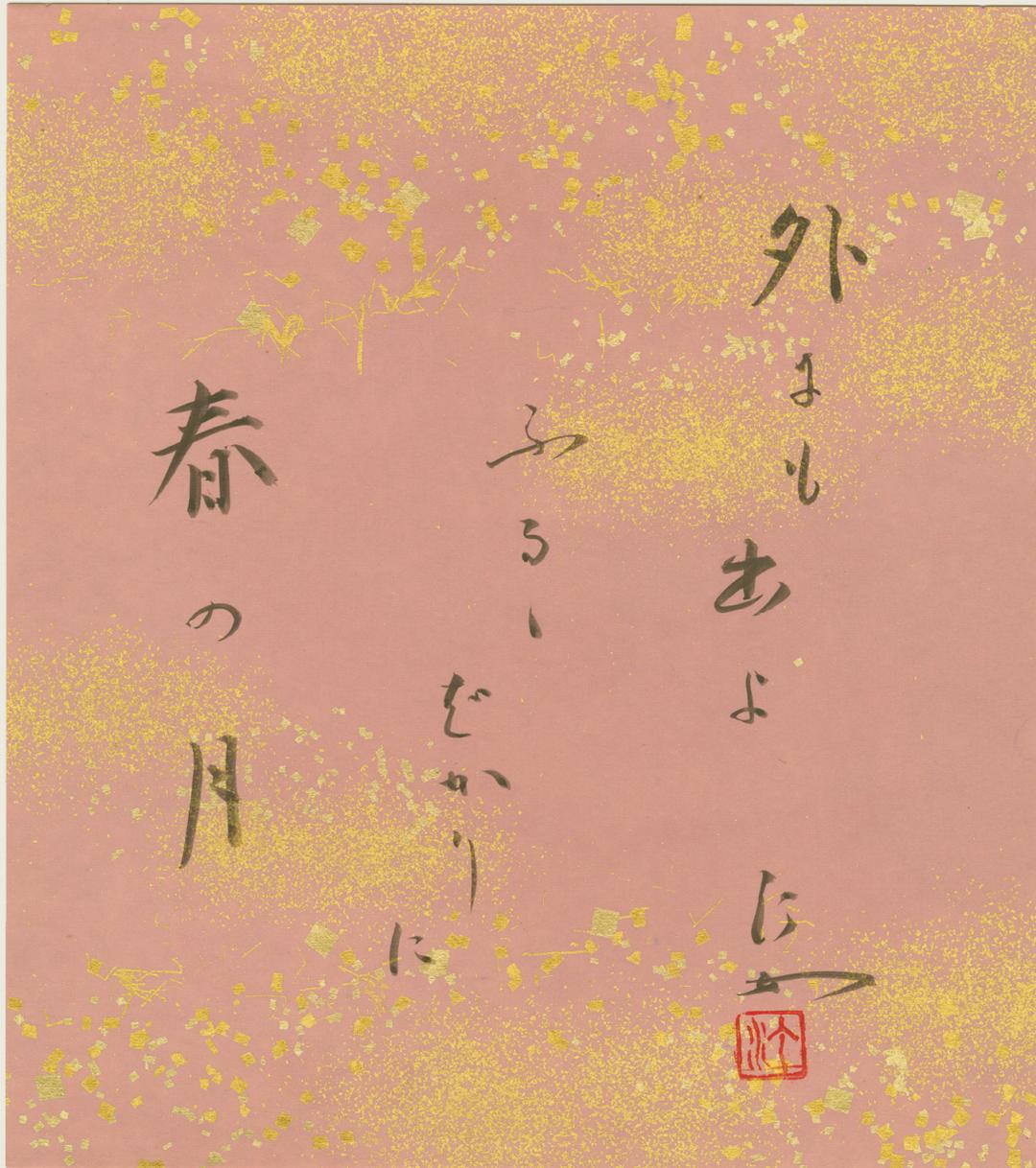
万緑の中や吾子の歯生えそむる

banryoku no naka ya ako no ha haesomuru

中村 草田男

Nakamura Kusatao, 1901-1983

leaves all green —
my baby's first tooth
begins to cut



外にも出よ触るゝばかりに春の月

to nimo de yo fururubakari ni haru no tsuki

中村 汀女

Nakamura Teijo, 1900-1988

come outside!
we can almost touch
the spring moon

春昼の指とどまれば琴もやむ

shunchū no yubi todomare ba koto mo yamu

野沢 節子

Nozawa Setsuko, 1920–1995

spring afternoon —
when my fingers stop
the koto, too, dies away

眠りても旅の花火の胸にひらく

nemuri temo tabi no hanabi no mune ni hiraku

大野 林火

Ōno Rinka, 1904–1982

even while I dream
fireworks from my travels
burst in my chest

塔ふたつ鶏頭枯れて佇つごとし

tō futatsu keitō karete tatsu gotoshi

沢木 欣一

Sawaki Kin'ichi, 1919–2001

like cockscombs
withering and standing still
two towers

摩天楼より新緑がパセリほど

matenrō yori shinryoku ga paseri hodo

鷹羽 狩行

Takaha Shugyō, 1930–

from a skyscraper
fresh green trees
look like parsley

沖に父あり日に一度沖に日は落ち

oki ni chichi ari hi ni ichido oki ni hi wa ochi

高柳 重信

Takayanagi Shigenobu, 1923–1983

father at sea —
once a day the sun sets
into the sea

初富士の大きかりける汀かな 富安 風生
hatsufuji no ōkikarikeru migiwa kana Tomiyasu Fūsei, 1885–1979

Fuji viewed at New Year
 from the water's edge
 so grand

海に出て木枯帰るところなし 山口 誓子
umi ni dete kogarashi kaeru tokoro nashi Yamaguchi Seishi, 1901–1994

gone out to sea
 autumn's withering wind
 has nowhere to return

雛の唇紅ぬるるまま幾世経し 山口 青邨
hina no kuchi beni nururu mama ikuyo heshi Yamaguchi Seison, 1892–1988

lips of the empress doll
 glisten with rouge
 through how many generations?