

Hello...are you looking at me?

You probably never heard my name, or maybe you read my name on a label in a museum and then forgot it.

I am Kikuchi Yosai, I lived in Japan in the nineteenth century, and I was a painter, and -can you imagine?- I have been defined as 'the last of the great Japanese painters'. I came from a very high *samurai* lineage: yes, my family was of noble origins, but not famous for its wealth. I studied with the offspring of the greatest 'schools', or artistic traditions in Japan, the Kano and the Tosa: for many generations artists from these 'schools' have been appointed by the Emperor or the Shogun.

I was famous. If you Google me, you will see that I painted ancient heroes of Japan but also, on occasion, landscapes and bird studies. My works are hanging in museums around the world, from Japan, to the United States, and also the British Museum has my works in its collections. I painted in monochrome, but also in colour. And I loved painting landscapes, visualising on paper but more often on silk how mountains, the moon or the sun slowly disappear from our sight through the atmosphere. It is like if mist or invisible clouds merge with the natural colour of the support.

And look at me now. Andrew painted me in blue or, rather, with the colours of the night, white like the moon, cerulean like the sky on a full moon light, and the dark blue of a night without a moon. My beard is shining, as stars twinkling through the night. I cannot recall now if I ever represented a starry night, but I remember looking at awe at the stars and at the range of colours of the sky. Now this starry night is me.

Michael Bishops