Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1768)

Life and Career
Zen Master Hakuin

- Born in 1686 to a commoner family near Mt Fuji
- Accomplished artist and calligrapher
- Prolific author
- Caustic, but also known for his compassion
Hakuin

- Critical of “Silent Illumination”
- Obsessed with issues of birth and death, especially hell
- Practiced intensive meditation
- Achieved “enlightenment”
Hakuin’s Teacher

- Shōju Hakuin’s main teacher
- Shōju was a harsh teacher
- Constantly abused Hakuin
- Named Hakuin “Old Zen-down-a-hole”
Hakuin’s Art

- Tradition of Japanese ink painting starts in 15th century
- Landscape paintings include great detail and open space
- Painted in elegant, skillful, and lofty style
Hakuin’s Art cont.

- 17th century Zen painting used simple composition
- Usually a single figure on a bare background
- Few motifs
- Very little writing
Hakuin’s Art cont.

- Hakuin’s art burst out of traditional Zen Painting
- Uses a fresh, common style
- Subjects are diverse, humane, and earthy
Hakuin’s Art cont.

- Hakuin’s art did not point to infinite space
- Concentrates on the form of each figure
- Brush strokes are bolder and coarser
- Used diverse and popular styles
Mt. Fuji

My dear Fuji,
Would you like to take
off
Your garment of haze?
I want to see
Your snowy
complexion.
Mortar

Pleasure is
A pillar to lean on,
Sake in front of me,
Comfortable company,
And the sound of mortar
and pestle.
Monkey

The monkey is reaching for the moon in the water,
Until death overtakes him he'll never give up.
If he'd let go the branch and disappear in the deep pool,
The whole world would shine with dazzling pureness.
Hamamatsu of Enshū
Is a tea-growing district.
I want to marry off
My daughter there,
To pick fine tea leaves.
Hakuin’s Humor

Art and Words
Kannon in Seclusion

She enjoys her spare moments when there is no connection to human beings.

Who says her vow to awaken sentient beings is deep?
Hanshan

If you have Hanshan’s poem in your house,
It is better for reading than scriptures.
Write it on a screen
And take a glance at it now and then.
Bodhidharma

It may not look like it,
But they say this is
great master
Bodhidharma
Facing the wall.
Zazen

“What a surprise, monk. You have come for zazen today!”

“Yeah.”
Self-Portrait

Loathed by a thousand buddhas in the realm of a thousand buddhas,

Hated by demons among the troop of demons

This foul smelling blind bald-head

Appears again on someone’s piece of paper.

Damn!
too busy to meditate?
try The Buddha Patch!

I'm achieving enlightenment... while I clean my toilet!

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