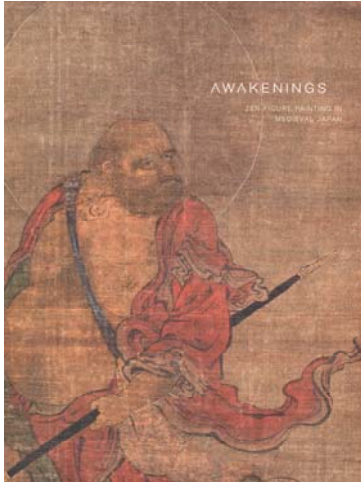


Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan / Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit.—New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, in association with The Japan Society, May 2007.—222 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-0-300-11964-0: \$65.00.



As we have come to expect from both The Japan Society and Yale University Press, this is a beautiful and scholarly book documenting an important exhibition at The Japan Society in its centennial year 2007 and billed as “the first major international exhibition of art of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist tradition in more than three decades.” Exhibition co-curators Levine and Lippit have conceived their project as “a search for new ways to understand Zen communities in medieval Japan as embodied in representations of the Zen ‘pantheon,’” proposing “that figure paintings, often graced with calligraphic inscriptions, played an indispensable role historically in the fashioning of Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen Buddhists to themselves and to the communities that supported (or competed with) them.” Of the 47 featured paintings, 20 are attributed to Chinese artists.

The most striking feature of this catalog is its generously sized illustrations. Hanging scrolls, the largest category here, are most often depicted 11 inches high against a restful beige background—large enough that calligraphic inscriptions are clearly legible. In many cases a full-page, borderless detail of the figure(s) follows. In addition to Levine and Lippit’s introduction, Martin Collcutt writes on Zen and the arts at medieval

Kenchōji in Kamakura, Lippit explores the development of the Zen figural pantheon, and Levine reconsiders “Zen art” in the West (as popularized by Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, and others). Catalog entries by senior exhibition adviser Yoshiaki Shimizu, Barbara Brennan Ford, Eva Havlicova, Sinéad Kehoe, Xiaojin Wu, Ann Yonemura, Lippit, and Levine include descriptive title, attribution, approximate date, format, medium, dimensions, location of work, and endnotes; entries generally describe and analyze the content of images, calligraphy, and (sometimes) seals in their monastic context. Calligraphic inscriptions are almost always translated, and names of subjects are given in their Chinese, Japanese, and (less commonly) Sanskrit variants. A bibliography on Chan/Seon/Zen Buddhism and art precedes kanji/Sanskrit/Chinese/Japanese and kanji/Chinese/Japanese concordances of terms and an index of names.

Beautifully and informatively, *Awakenings* invites comparison of multiple painted versions of medieval Chan/Zen figures including Budai (Hotei) and Guanyin (Kannon). Highly recommended for university, museum, and public libraries supporting research on East Asian religions or arts.

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