



ENTERTAINMENTS OF THE FOUR SEASONS

Japan • Hand scroll, ink on paper

Maruyama Okyo, 1733–95, Edo Period (1615–1868) • 1983.21

# ENTERTAINMENTS OF THE FOUR SEASONS

JAPAN

HAND SCROLL

INK ON PAPER

MARUYAMA OKYO, 1733–95, EDO PERIOD (1615–1868)

1983.21



Japanese picture scrolls unroll to tell a story about events in history, literature, or everyday life. Picture scrolls originally came from China and developed into a unique genre in Japan, often emphasizing human activities in addition to landscapes and nature scenes. Subjects reflecting Japanese sensibilities and love of one's homeland—favorite travel sites, activities during the twelve months, or scenes of the four seasons—became the specialties of Japanese-style painting.

The scroll *Entertainments of the Four Seasons* by the master of the realist school of painting Maruyama Okyo, shows the activities of seasonal celebrations: the cherry blossoms of springtime invite spectators to picnic and enjoy the clouds of flowers drifting among the trees; on summer nights the smoky aroma of grilled foods tempts passersby along the riverfront; early fall brings the lighting of lanterns and the delightful performance of dances to honor ancestors; and winter finds families in preparation for the New Year—hanging pine branches over doorways to bring good fortune, beating sleeping mats to clean them, and purchasing special ingredients for holiday meals.

Each seasonal image is preceded by a narrative text composed by the calligrapher Takahashi Munenao (1701–85). The vivid descriptions of seasonal sights, such as this one, lead viewers from one season into the next as the painting is slowly unrolled:

Pretty little boys and girls...young brides...mothers with babies strapped on their backs...how delightful to see them waving their arms to the rhythmic stamping of their feet.... In every street and block of the city it goes on—dancing everywhere.

## Notes:

Japan traditionally adopted the writing system of China, and scholars wrote using Chinese characters known as *kanji*. After the closing of diplomatic ties with China in the ninth century, Japanese writers began to explore their own language and used a newly developed phonetic script known as *kana*. Both scripts are used in the narrative passages in this hand scroll.