



## Calligraphy of a Poem

Early 17th century

Hon'ami Kōetsu

(Japanese, 1558–1637)

*Ink on paper with gold and silver,  
mounted as a hanging scroll*

7 1/2 x 6 3/4 inches (19.1 x 17.1 cm)  
(exclusive of mount)

This is one of a number of poem cards that Hon'ami Kōetsu (ho-nah-mee koh-et-tsu) made using verses from the *Wakan rōeishū* (Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing).

The text reads:

<i>Yamadera no</i>	A mountain temple—
<i>Iriai no kane no</i>	Evening and the sunset bell,
<i>Koegotoni</i>	Whose every voicing
<i>Kyō mo kurenudo</i>	Vibrates with a message sad to hear:
<i>Kiku zo kanashiki</i>	“Today too is over, dusk has come.”

Kōetsu brushed the poem onto paper decorated by the painter Tawaraya Sōtatsu with a sparse scene of a silver river under a sky of abstract clouds in gold wash. The image on the paper does not necessarily illustrate the poem. Neither does the poem describe the painting. Instead, Kōetsu thought about the meaning of each word of the poem, and also about the qualities of beauty in the paper, and tried to make his calligraphy harmonize with both.

The card has been mounted on a hanging scroll that depicts another sky and water scene in iridescent gold and silver. Japanese paintings and calligraphy traditionally have been painted on paper and mounted on scrolls as a means of protecting and displaying them. Artists mounted their painting or calligraphy on a heavier material such as silk or thick paper and then attached it to a thin bar on the top for hanging and a dowel (a round wooden rod) at the bottom to weigh down the scroll when displayed vertically and lend support when rolling the scroll for storage. Hanging scrolls were displayed for a limited period of time—a day, a week, or a season.

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