



Seal and signature

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tokutaro “Kakunen” Tsuruoka (1892-1977) was born in Tokyo, Japan. He was an only child and orphaned at early age. As a teenager, Tokutaro was sent to San Francisco to live with his uncle, an antiques dealer. He became an apprentice learning the antiques trade and eventually went on his own. As an antiques dealer, he made many trips to Eastern Asia including China, Mongolia and Japan. Until WW II, he maintained a good business with prominent collectors as his clients.

Along with thousands of other Japanese-Americans during WWII, Tokutaro, his wife (Dai) a son (Shotaro) and two daughters (Matsuko and Sara) were interned at the Poston camp. There he painted haunting images of the surrounding desert and served as a Red Cross volunteer. Six watercolors are known to survive in Arizona - five held by the Arizona Historical Foundation and one by the Arizona Historical Society.

Kakunen was the artist name he adopted as part of his signature for artwork. He was self-taught. According to family members, Tokutaro possessed a true artist spirit and painted for the love of it. He loved the materials, enjoying the touch of finely made artist paper and found printmaking especially enjoyable. Around the mid-1930's when interest in *shin hanga* (new print movement) was at its peak, he designed four woodblock prints and had them published by Watanabe in Japan. The prints and carving are of very high quality and are usually signed and numbered in English, probably indicating that they were intended for American collectors. A number of copies of these prints can be found on the market today.

Tokutaro relocated after the war to New York City, taking up residence in the Upper West Side. He resided there with his wife Dai until his death. He began a small business manufacturing artificial flowers which he sold retail and to the trade. Tsuruoka continued to paint in a limited way, sometimes to make merchandise for his retail store, "Judy's Arts and Gifts." He was an avid reader, kept up with current events and was particularly interested in the emerging space program. He traveled around the world after retirement. As an artist, he was especially fond of Paris.

Tokutaro Tsuruoka died from congestive heart failure in 1977, complicated by dementia. His ashes were returned to Japan for burial in the family plot.