

## Unknown Japanese

*Inkstone Box (Suzuribako) with Eight Views of Ōmi (Ōmi-hakkei)*

Mid-to-late Edo period (1615-1868)

Wood coated with lacquer and gold, with silk covering  
Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center; Purchase, Pratt  
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This luxurious writing box displays the poetic landscape theme of the “Eight Views of Ōmi Province” in a unified composition across the cover and insides of the box. The “eight views” as a theme in poetry and painting originally developed in 12<sup>th</sup>-century China, referring to famous scenic spots around the Xiao and Xiang rivers. By the 16th century, it had been poetically transposed onto the Japanese landscape around Lake Biwa, east of Kyoto, for a codified set of eight new, native “views” depicted in poetry, painting, prints, and lacquers.

The zig-zag movement on the top cover echoes landscape paintings, leading us from the “Sunset Glow at Seta River” in the lower right, to “Autumn Moon at Ishiyama Temple” in the center left, “Clearing Weather at Awazu” in the center right, and “Evening Bell at Mii Temple” in the upper right. The inside of the lid echoes the top cover, repeating the Seta bridge in the lower left, before proceeding through the remaining four views: “Returning Sails at Yabase,” “Night Rain at Karasaki,” “Descending Geese at Katada,” and “Evening Snow on Mt. Hira.”

The prominence of the Ishiyama Temple on the front cover recalls the act of literary composition itself: according to legend, the sight of the full moon reflected on the lake inspired Murasaki Shikibu, the author of the *Tale of Genji*, to begin writing the novel while on pilgrimage to the temple. Leaving the ground predominantly black, with misty clouds of sparsely sprinkled metals, this lacquer artist evokes the evening mood of many of the “eight views.”