



Miyamoto Musashi's
Shrike on a Withered Tree

枯木鳴鴉図

Koboku Meigeki Zu

interpreted by

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www.kanochronicles.com

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宮本武蔵

Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645)

- Swordsman, strategist, author and artist
 - Best known for **五輪の書** *Gorin-no Sho* (The Book of Five Rings), a book of 'military strategy' as embodied in single combat. The 'Five Rings' refer to the book's five chapters
 - The Book of Earth
 - The Book of Water
 - The Book of Fire
 - The Book of Wind
 - The Book of the Void
 - NOTE: Despite attempts to assign specific attributes to the chapter names, they are commonly used to name chapters of larger manuscripts and typically have no significance in and of themselves.
- Musashi self portrait at right.





9 Principles of 五輪書 *Gorin no Sho* The Book of Five Rings

- Do not think dishonestly.
- The Way is in training.
- Become acquainted with every art.
- Know the Ways of all professions.
- Distinguish between gain and loss in worldly matters.
- Develop an intuitive judgement and understanding for everything.
- Perceive those things which cannot be seen.
- Pay attention even to trifles.
- Do nothing which is of no use.

Shrike on a Withered Tree

枯木鳴鴉図 *Koboku Meigeki Zu*

- Date unknown
- Musashi painted a number of birds and small animals
- Analysis of the technique by accomplished artist Togami Hiromasa discloses an eclectic style of painting lacking professional technique
- Musashi probably used both hands to paint it, along with a unique split-tip brush technique

砥上裕將 - Togami Hiromasa, Japanese painter, novelist

Critique of Musashi's technique <https://kanmontime.com/blog/tomita/kobokumeigekizu/>

Duplicating the painting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjFfjZ9EeYE&t=277s>



Musashi's split-tip brush technique evident in the other plants at the base of the withered tree

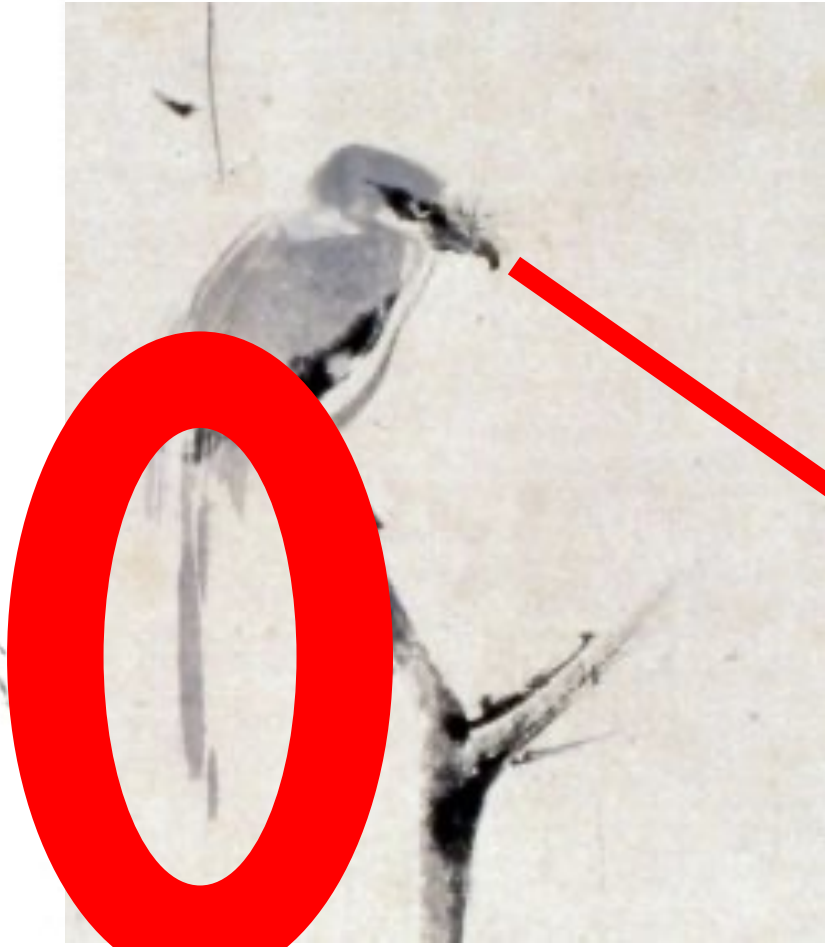




Analyze using Musashi's principles

- Shrike, the 'butcher bird' small raptor
- Withered tree
- Caterpillar
- But what else is seen but not seen?

The shrike is prepared to strike



- Tail down posture means it is prepared to strike
- At rest normally its tail is extended, straight
- Overlooks the caterpillar; apparently observing something outside the frame

What is the shrike's prey?

- Although the shrike overlooks the caterpillar, perhaps for larger prey, it would eat it.
- The shrike also preys on small animals including voles, mice, and other animals that prey on insects.

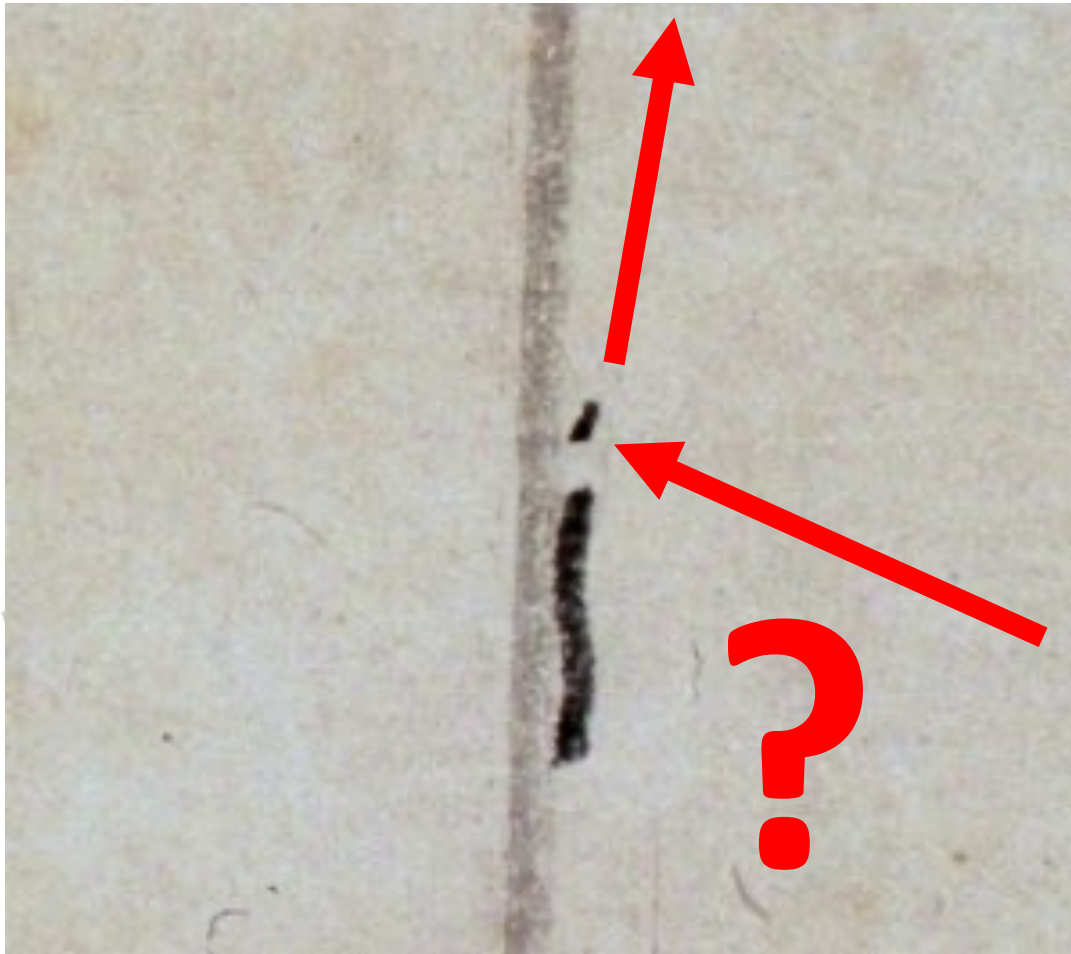
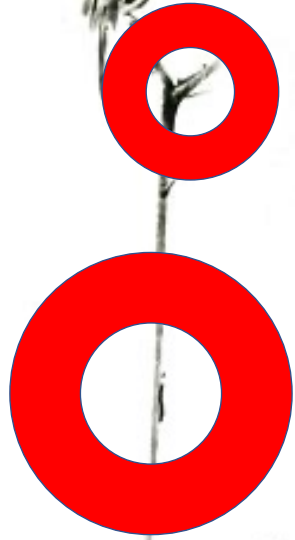




The “withered tree”

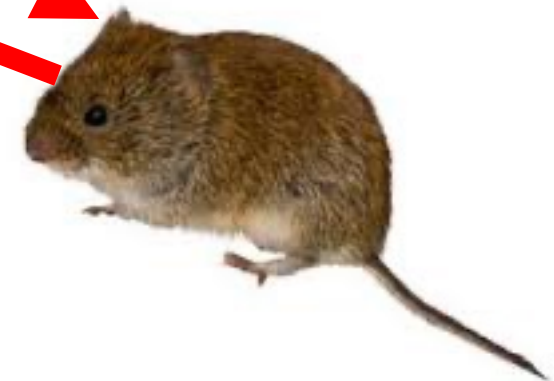
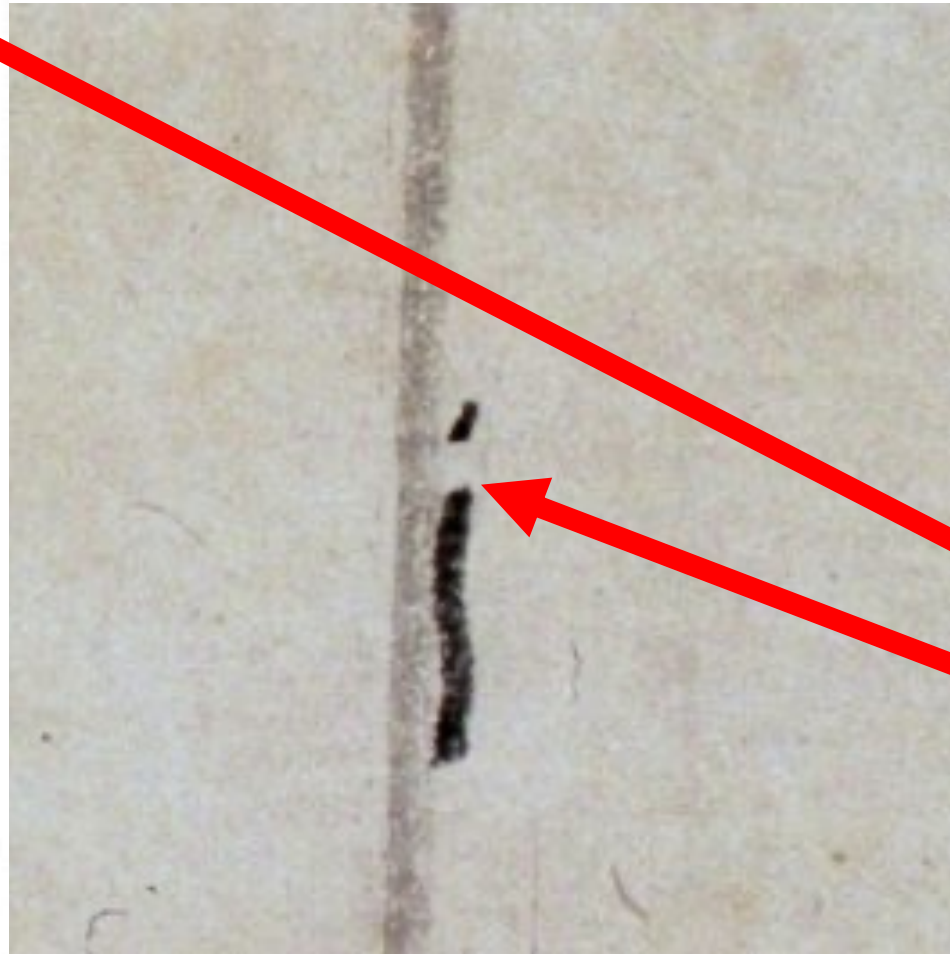
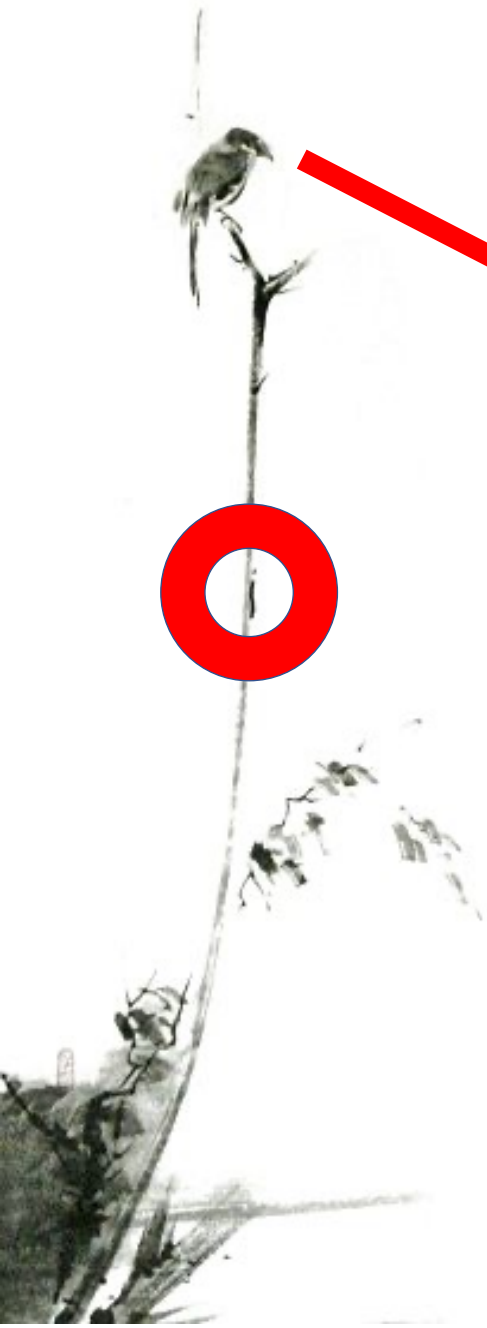
- The tree is on the edge of death, with only a single branch, with a single budding leaf, perhaps its last chance for survival.
- All other foliage at its base is from other plants.

The caterpillar



- It stalks the tree's sole remaining leaf; if eaten, will the tree die?
- But is the insect being stalked, too?

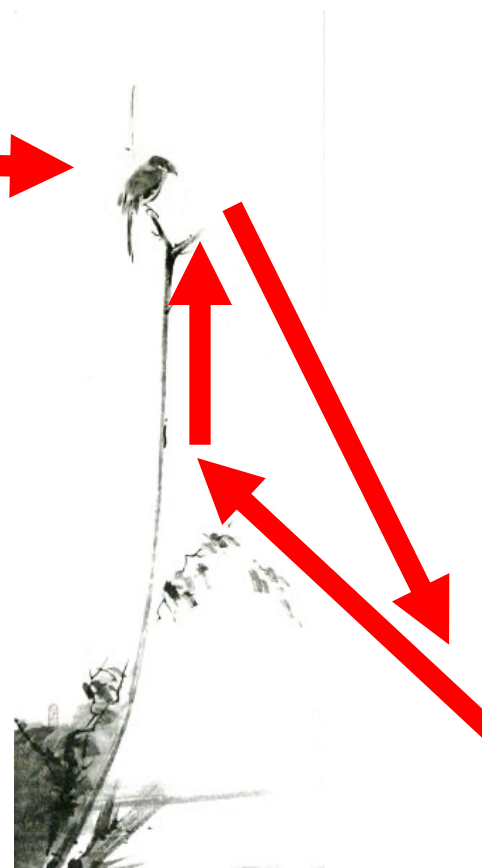
Is the shrike's prey stalking the caterpillar?



That begs the question – is the shrike being stalked by another, larger unseen predator?



- Japanese 鳶 *tonbi*
black kite raptor





Musashi's principles enlighten his *Shrike on a Withered Tree*

- Become acquainted with every art.
- Know the Ways of all professions.
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枯木鳴鴟圖 *Koboku Meigeki Zu*

- Rather than a simple, peaceful nature scene, Musashi's drawing is a moment of a world at war, in an eternal, complex struggle for survival, on the knife edge of life and death.
- That is Musashi's world.
A warrior's world.
A different world for the observant.



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