



Title	文学と絵画：子規の写生
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Citation	文芸学研究. 2002, 6, p. 103-122
Version Type	
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/50920
rights	
Note	

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Literature and Painting: Shiki's Shasei

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Literature and Painting have a common function of depicting stories or things. They share a way to produce works; drawing from nature, that is to say, imitating nature, which is called "shasei" in Japanese. In the Meiji period, it was introduced from painting into literature and was refined as a new effective method of haiku by Shiki Masaoka, a poet who was trying to modernize this literary genre. Ever since, both haiku poets and scholars in this field have studied and discussed this new method while art historians have given little consideration to what painters are drawing from nature. In this article, I will survey Shiki's theory and practice of shasei both in literature and painting to make clear its essence. Shiki loved painting and had been an amateur painter. In his essays and diaries, he also wrote a lot about painting, especially about importance of "shasei" for it.