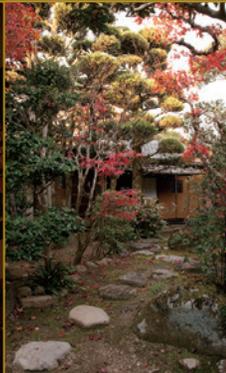


Naoya Shiga (1883-1971), a man of letters in Modern Japan



志賀 野矢

Naoya Shiga



Biography



Born in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, Shiga received his primary and secondary education at Gakushuin Peer's School and then went on to study English literature at Tokyo Imperial University.

He was associated with the "Shirakaba" [White Birch] Society and is renowned for his unembellished yet eloquent literary style of "subjective realism".

The only full-length novel by Shiga, *A Dark Night's Passing* [Anya Koro], is a masterpiece of modern Japanese literature.

In recognition of his literary contributions, he was awarded the Order of Cultural Merit in 1949 [Showa 24] by the Japanese Government.

Later in life, he moved to Shibuya, Tokiwamatsu, Tokyo and died at the age of 88 in 1971 [Showa 46].

The former residence of Naoya Shiga (Takabatake, Nara city)

Built in Sukiya-style architecture with some occidental influence, the residence had a very practical, progressive design for its time.

In 1925 he moved to Saiwai-cho from Yamashina Ward, Kyoto City. He then lived there for 4 years with his family until 1929 when he built this residence in Takabatake in accordance with his own design. He employed Matsunosuke Shimojima, a skilled Sukiya-style carpenter, recommended by his friend, an oil painter named Shigemitsu Hamada. As Shiga wrote, "For something to be truly interesting, it has to be created out of necessity. If something is unnecessary, it cannot be interesting, no matter how elaborately made it may be." Such "creations out of necessity" can be found scattered throughout this residence.

In 1978 [Showa 53], the Ministry of Health and Welfare (the current Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) turned his residence over to our institution, Nara Gakuen. Since 2000 [Heisei 12], having become a registered Tangible Cultural Property (No.29-34~36), this residence is open to the public.

During his journey of self-discovery, beginning in the first year of the Taisho period (1912), Shiga became acquainted with classical East Asian arts and compiled the photographed art book, *Zauhou*, in 1927 [Taisho 15].

Shiga moved to this Takabatake residence in 1929 [Showa 4]. Situated adjacent to Nara Park, this residence has an excellent view, blending in with the serene, scenic beauty of the mountains Mikasa, Kasuga, Wakakusa, and Takamado. This is where he completed his aforementioned *A Dark Night's Passing* [Anya Koro] in 1937 [Showa 12]. The residence is conveniently located near the ancient temples and historic shrines, and is an ideal place for the study of antiques.

"Simply stated, Nara is a beautiful place. Nara is full of natural beauty and the architecture that remains is also beautiful. These two elements blend together to create something totally unique, a harmony that cannot be found anywhere else. Today's Nara is no longer the ancient city it once was; nevertheless, it is still beautiful like a masterpiece that has lost a portion of its beauty. Frost does not paint the leaves of Mt. Mikasa red in the same way each year. In some years they are very beautiful, all being painted red in one stroke. I shall always treasure my memories of Nara – the wisteria in May, a cloud that appeared in the trees on Mt. Kasuga after summer rain." These were Shiga's last words in his essay "Nara."

The thirteen years he spent in Nara played an irreplaceable role in his life.

(~ Translated by Johan Alsdorf December 2014)