

Anonymous

The Descent of Jizō

Japan, Kamakura period (1185-1333), 14th century

Hanging scroll, ink, colors, and gold on silk

Gift of John Gregg Allerton, 1952

(1695.1)

Jizō (Sanskrit: Ksitigarbha) is one of the most popular bodhisattvas in Japanese Buddhism, widely worshipped since the Heian period as a savior from suffering in hell. He vowed to save all sentient beings trapped in the Six Realms of Transmigratory Rebirth (*rokudō*). Depicted here descending from heaven on a cloud, Jizō appears in the guise of a monk with shaved head and is dressed in a monk's robe (*kesa*). In his left hand he holds a wish-granting jewel (Sk. *chintāmani*), and in his right he grasps a gold priest's staff (*shakujō*) with six dangling rings, which represent the six realms.

Anonymous

The Descent of Amida (Amida Raigō)

Japan, Kamakura period (1185-1333), ca. 1300

Hanging scroll, ink, colors, and gold on silk

Gift of Yamanaka Jiro, 1961

(2904.1)

Images of Amida's (Sanskrit: Amitābha) descent, or *raigō*, became popular in Japan during the eleventh century with the spread of the Pure Land Buddhist teachings. These images were placed before the deathbed of devotees who would hold golden threads attached to the figure of Amida as they prayed for rebirth in the Pure Land.

In this painting, Amida is shown with his attending bodhisattvas Kannon (Avalokiteshvara) and Seishi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta), descending from heaven to welcome the souls of the faithful to his paradise. The three figures stand on lotus flowers that float on swirling white clouds. Amida raises his right hand in the *mudrā* (symbolic hand gesture) of welcome (*semui-in*, Sk. *abhayamudrā*). To the left, Seishi clasps his hands in prayer, while to the right Kannon leans forward, holding in his hands a lotus-shaped throne on which believers will be reborn in Amida's Pure Land.

Anonymous
Amida

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868)
Gilded wood, metal

Gift of Lucille S. Lin, 2008
(13,904.1a-c)

Anonymous

Nyoirin Kannon Seated on a Lotus Throne

Japan, Muromachi period (1392-1573), 15th-16th century

Hanging scroll, ink, colors, and gold on silk

Gift of Milton Cades, 1986

(5493.1)

Nyoirin Kannon is an esoteric form of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kannon. The Sanskrit name of this deity (Chintāmanichakra Avalokiteshvara) means “Jewel Holding, Wheel Turning Avalokiteshvara.” The sacred jewel enables Nyoirin Kannon to grant the wishes of those who invoke the deity, while the chakra is the wheel of the Dharma, or Buddhist Law, through the action of which sentient beings can attain Enlightenment.

The six arms of this deity symbolize Nyoirin Kannon's ability to save beings in all six realms of existence (*rokudō*). In this painting, the bodhisattva is seated in the pose known as “royal ease” and holds a lotus flower, a group of three flaming jewels resting on a lotus, a rosary, and an incense burner. His elaborate crown bears at the center a small image of the seated Buddha Amida, of whom Kannon is a manifestation.

Anonymous
Sugawara no Michizane

Japan, Muromachi period (1392-1573), 15th-16th century

Wood with traces of pigment

Gift of Mrs. Kuni Uramoto, 1980

(4865.1)

Anonymous
Portrait of Sugwara no Michizane

Japan, Muromachi period (1392-1573), 15th century
Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1928
(150.1)

Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) was a high-ranking official, scholar, and poet during the early Heian period. He eventually fell out of favor with the court, and, through the machinations of the powerful Fujiwara family, was exiled to a minor post in distant Kyushu, where he died.

After his death, mysterious illnesses and deaths began to plague the court. Believing that these were caused by his vengeful spirit, the Emperor restored his titles and office posthumously, and built the shrine of Kitano Tenmangū in Kyoto, where Michizane's spirit was enshrined as Tenjin. Worship of Tenjin spread widely as he became known as a patron deity of learning and scholarship, and students still offer prayers to him before examinations today.

Anonymous

Kasuga Mandala

Japan, Nanbokuchō period (1336-1392)

Hanging scroll, ink, colors, and gold on silk

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip E. Spalding, 1953

(1695.1)

Japanese paintings depicting the Kasuga Shrine in Nara are significant as illustrations of the *honji-suijaku* theory, in which native Shinto deities, or *kami*, were seen as manifestations (*suijaku*) of Buddhist deities (*honji*). In this painting, the entrance of the shrine is marked at the bottom by a tall red Shinto gate (*torii*). Four main shrines are visible at the upper left, built in traditional Shinto method, with thatched roofs and crossed ornaments over the ridge beams.

In the courtyard in front are the Buddhist deities Shaka (Shākyamuni), Miroku (Maitreya), Yakushi (Bhaishajyaguru), Jizō (Ksitigarbha) and Jūichimen Kannon (Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara). The primary Shinto deity of the Kasuga Shrine, Kasuga Myōjin, was believed to manifest as the historical Buddha Shaka, and also in the form of deer, shown here wandering about the shrine precincts.

Anonymous

Shinto Deity

Japan, Heian period (794-1185), 12th century

Wood with traces of pigment

Gift of Robert Gregg Allerton, 1946

(387.1)

The rectangular hole where this sculpture's hands join together indicates that it originally would have held a tablet, symbolic of a court audience. Combined with the official cap on its head, this suggests that the sculpture may depict the high-ranking official of the Heian court Sugawara no Michizane. Deified as Tenjin, Michizane was a prominent poet and scholar, and is widely worshipped in Shinto shrines throughout Japan as a deity of learning.

Shinto sculptures from this early period are exceptionally rare, and most are still kept in shrines in Japan, where they are seldom if ever shown to the public. The Academy is fortunate to have one of the finest collections of Shinto sculpture outside Japan, of which this is a remarkable example.