

Eastern Golden Hall
Twelve Divine Generals
National Treasures

These highly realistic, powerful sculptures were carved from joined blocks of Japanese cypress, by the *yosegi-zukuri* technique, around 1207. They depict the Twelve Divine Generals, who are the retainers of Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Healing. The generals are Buddhist guardians and are charged with protecting the faithful from illness and harm. Their armor, weapons, and fierce facial expressions are intended to intimidate the foes of Buddhism, and encourage sentient beings to forsake unwholesome actions. As a group, they symbolize the 12 great vows of Yakushi, meaning that they are wrathful emanations of the Buddha himself. Each general wears headgear decorated with one of the 12 creatures of the Chinese zodiac.

Although the sculptor's identity is uncertain, it is likely they were made by members of the workshop of Jokei. Since each of the 12 sculptures differs somewhat from the others in terms of style and technique, a different artist may have carved each one. The vigorous and dramatic sense of movement expressed by this set of images makes them fine examples of Buddhist sculpture from the Kamakura period (1185–1333).