

Gassho Village: Enku Gallery

The itinerant Buddhist monk Enku (1632–1695) dedicated his life to carving wooden Buddha statues. He was born in what is now Gifu Prefecture but traveled throughout the country, and during his lifetime he is estimated to have carved 120,000 statues. Of these, more than 5,300 are known to survive today and have been discovered mainly in central Japan, but also as far as Hokkaido in the north and Nara in the south. Their wide dispersion is said to be due to Enku's way of carving statues for those who helped him on his travels. The Enku Gallery in Gassho Village preserves about 35 of these statues. Enku used scrap wood, simple untrimmed logs, and various pieces of timber that he found, and his subjects are depicted with peaceful expressions, a feature that endeared them to many people.