

## Cedar Partition Paintings by Tawaraya Sotatsu

One of the most renowned features of Yogen'in is a group of paintings on cedar partitions by Tawaraya Sotatsu (c. 1570–1640). These are divided into three pairs and mounted on panels.

The first pair greets visitors entering Yogen'in and depicts two guardian lions (*shishi*). These mythical creatures originated in China and are often seen at the entrances of temples there. Sotatsu portrays this cavorting duo in pale yellow and white, with flowing tails and manes. On the other side of the panels is another painting, depicting mythical horned creatures called *kirin* that also originate in China. In China, the appearance of *kirin* was thought to herald the birth or death of great rulers or wise men, as well as being an omen of good fortune. They are sacred creatures that will not walk on grass for fear of damaging even a single blade, so they are usually shown amid clouds or on water. In the panels here, Sotatsu has painted a male and a female *kirin* leaping through waves in a dynamic seascape.

At the far end of the hallway are paintings by Sotatsu of two highly stylized but powerful elephants, another animal that was sometimes considered to be a steed of the Buddha. The elephants are painted white to symbolize cleanliness. The *kirin*, the guardian lions and the elephants are placed at either end of the hallway below the ceiling that is stained with the blood of samurai who died in the siege of Fushimi Castle in 1600. The paintings are intended to appease the spirits of these fallen warriors.