

Guardian Lion Paintings by Kano Sanraku

On either side of the Buddhist altar in the Main Hall are works by painter Kano Sanraku (1559–1635). The three originals measure 45 cm by 198 cm. Each depicts a pair of guardian lions (*shishi*), which are often represented in statue form at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan. In Kano's paintings, they are rendered in vivid colors and dynamic poses, manes and tails waving, against a background of gold leaf.

After learning from his master Kano Eitoku (1543–1590), Sanraku rose to become head of the Kano school, founded by painter Kano Masanobu (1434–1530). Sanraku produced works for both the Toyotomi and the Tokugawa clans. These paintings are characterized by bold colors, dynamic movement, and naturalism. They helped redefine Japanese fine art during a period of transition from upheaval and civil war to peace under the Tokugawa shogunate.