

Kusunoki Masashige Statue

This striking, solid bronze statue depicts Kusunoki Masashige (1294–1336), who is remembered for his commitment to the samurai code of conduct (*bushido*). Kusunoki ultimately sacrificed his life to demonstrate his loyalty to the emperor. His strategic brilliance had helped Emperor Go-Daigo (1288–1339) overthrow the shogunate and briefly restore power to the Court. Go-Daigo was betrayed by a treasonous general and ordered Kusunoki into battle against a much larger army. Kusunoki urged him to reconsider, predicting he would lose. The battle was a tactical disaster. Rather than be captured, Kusunoki performed seppuku, a ritual suicide committed by samurai to die with honor.

The statue was made and presented to the Imperial Household Agency in 1900. It was created by Takamura Koun and Goto Sadayuki, who also created the iconic statue in Ueno of Saigo Takamori, a famous samurai who helped lead the Meiji Restoration, a defining event in the modernization of Japan. Unlike most such statues, it is pure bronze, making it extraordinarily heavy. It is likely that this feature kept it from harm during the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

The statue depicts Kusunoki awaiting the return of Emperor Go-Daigo from the Oki Islands, in the Sea of Japan. The emperor was exiled to the islands when his first attempt to destroy the Kamakura shogunate failed in 1331, but he escaped in 1333 and planned to recapture power.