

Fuji Hokuroku Pilgrimage Mandala

The Fuji Hokuroku Pilgrimage Mandala was commissioned from Yamaguchi Akira, an artist known for using traditional techniques to create intricately painted compositions of modern themes and imagery.

Pilgrimage mandalas (*sankei mandara*) were panoramic, stylized representations of sacred sites produced across Japan from the sixteenth century. They conveyed the spiritual importance of the site they depicted to believers and served as travel guides for pilgrims.

Yamaguchi's mandala shows Mt. Fuji as seen from the north (Fuji Hokuroku means "northern foot of Fuji"). The surrounding landscape is depicted in detail, including the towns of Kawaguchi and Yoshida, where pilgrims rested before their climb, and the Eight Lakes, where they performed additional religious rituals. The Yoshida Ascending Route stretches from Yoshida to the summit, outlined by the flickering lanterns of mountain cabins and stone huts along the trail where Shinto and Buddhist deities were worshiped. The points of light above the cloud-wreathed peak symbolize the nine Buddhist deities said to reside there. Note that Yamaguchi chose to depict the scene at night, when the veil between our world and the divine is at its thinnest.

Like other pilgrimage mandalas and paintings in the Japanese "bird's-eye view" genre in general, the work is relatively "flat," without a fixed perspective. The painter's eye roamed freely, depicting each subject from the angle and distance that suits it best. (Yamaguchi even painted Mii-chan, a cat he befriended while visiting the area.) The result is a meticulous collage of past and present vignettes, unified by a central, eternal Mt. Fuji.