

Seated Statue of Amida Buddha

The principal icon of the Jōgyōdō (Circumambulatory Hall) is a statue of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. Amida is depicted in a classic meditative posture, with eyes half-closed and hands folded into a mudra gesture that indicates contemplation. In Buddhist imagery, statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas are often depicted with some of the “32 marks of the Buddha,” (*sanjūni-sō*), which signify compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment. These include elongated ears, a cranial bump, and curls of hair. A crystalline stone on the forehead symbolizes a third eye capable of seeing through worldly illusions.

The Amida statue was constructed using a sophisticated method of joinery called *yosegi-zukuri*, in which several pieces of cypress are locked together before carving. Once carved, the sculpture was coated in lacquer and gilded. Textual records confirm that the statue was created in about 1005 by the artist Anchin, a disciple of Shōkū (910–1007), the founding abbot of Engyōji. Both the statue and the Jōgyōdō are Important Cultural Properties.

Amida is represented with a golden halo and rays of light that emanate from behind the deity’s head. The cardinal directions of the halo are adorned with three Sanskrit characters that are the “seed syllables” for Amida and the Bodhisattvas of Compassion and Wisdom, who are often portrayed flanking the deity. A wooden backdrop is painted with the 25 bodhisattvas who travel with Amida when the deity descends from the Pure Land paradise on purple clouds to escort sentient beings to salvation.