

## **Nio Guardian Figures**

Two muscular red figures, each over three meters tall, stand in bays on either side of the Niomon Gate to protect the main hall of Menuma Shodenzan Temple. These are the Nio, wrathful deities and guardians of Buddhism. Nio figures typically come in pairs. The figure on the right with the open mouth is called Agyo, and “ah,” is the first sound associated with birth. On the left, with the closed mouth is Ungyo, who utters “un,” which represents the last sound before death. Together, they are meant to symbolize the cycle of life.

The Nio figures were carved in 1658 by a master craftsman in the Kamakura area in Kanagawa Prefecture. They are Tangible Cultural Properties of Kumagaya City.