

Temporary Hall

For three years, Dazaifu Tenmangū Shrine's main sanctuary will undergo renovations. During this time, the enshrined deity Tenjin will reside in a temporary hall, known as the *kariden*. Tenjin is the deification of Sugawara Michizane (845–903), who was a leading scholar, poet, and politician of the Heian period (794–1185).

Major shrine restorations necessitate a *kariden* to give the deity a proper dwelling during repair work to the main sanctuary. Accordingly, many Shinto shrines erect temporary halls, but they are often simple and plainly constructed. Dazaifu Tenmangū's stunning, modern *kariden* is thus a rare sight.

The *kariden*'s designer, award-winning architect Sou Fujimoto, is known for using unorthodox shapes and structures in his work. To create the *kariden*, he took inspiration from a poignant tale linked to Michizane's exile. According to this tale, when the emperor banished Michizane to Dazaifu for a crime he did not commit, the scholar's beloved plum tree missed him so much that it uprooted itself and flew all the way from Kyoto to Dazaifu. It became known as the *tobi ume*, or "flying plum tree." In honor of this legend, Fujimoto designed the *kariden* with a "floating forest" on its roof. Sixty types of plants sprout from it, including plum trees that were selected from the almost 6,000 growing on the shrine grounds. Trees such as plum, cherry, maple, and camphor bloom or change colors throughout the year, creating a forest in constant transformation. Fujimoto also incorporated architectural features of the main sanctuary, such as a curved roof that seems to merge with the surrounding mountains.

While the interior furnishings and fixtures of the main sanctuary are undergoing restoration, the *kariden* needs new screens, curtains, and other decorative trappings. The shrine brought in fashion designer Maiko Kurogouchi, a frequent participant in Paris Fashion Week, to design some of them. Kurogouchi created a *mitobari* (the long curtain that demarcates the deity's sacred space) and two *kichō* (silk partitions used as decorative furnishings). Kurogouchi decorated her *mitobari* with a plum blossom pattern, a symbol of Dazaifu Tenmangū. For the *kichō*, she wove modern synthetic fibers together with traditionally dyed silk threads. The dyeing technique takes its color from plum blossoms and camphor branches collected on the shrine grounds.

These designs, which blend antiquity with the ultra-modern, embody the renowned

creative spirit of Michizane—a man famed not only for his poetic prowess but also his forward-thinking administrative policies. The choice of leading designers like Fujimoto and Kurogouchi is, therefore, a tribute both to Tenjin's role as patron of the arts and to his progressive spirit.

Finished in May 2023, the *kariden* will stand at its current site for three years until restoration work on the main sanctuary is complete. At that point, the temporary hall will be dismantled, and the trees and greenery adorning it will be transplanted to the shrine grounds to live on into the future.