



## **JAPANESE**

### **Pair of Wooden Temple Figures, Nio Japan, Muromachi Period**

wood

71 in. high

Est. 1467-1652

1072

#### **PROVENANCE:**

Private Collection, California

Heather James Fine Art

#### **EXHIBITION:**

San Antonio Museum of Art, "Heaven and Hell: Salvation and Retribution in Pure Land Buddhism," May 12, 2017 - September 30, 2017

Ackland Art Museum, "Religion and Ritual," January 3, 2018 - May 18, 2018

The Japanese Nio, or “benevolent kings,” are figures that were placed outside Buddhist temples, on each side of the entrance, to ward off evil spirits, demons, and thieves from the late Muromachi to early Edo periods — or roughly 1467 to 1652.

The Nio are Indian in origin — manifestations of Vajrapani Bodhisattvas. By some accounts, they protected the Buddha when he traveled throughout India.

These figures are approximately 500 years old, according to carbon-14 dating conducted on the objects. They were once installed in a famous home that was photographed for the cover of a Frank Lloyd Wright book.

Each figure is named after a cosmic sound. The closed-mouth figure is Ungyo, who utters “un” or “om,” meaning death. He is also called Nareen Kongo and is said to be a form of the Indian god Vishnu. With his tightly closed mouth and tensed both arms, he represents latent might. The open-mouthed partner is Misshaku Kongo (Agyo), who sounds “ah,” meaning birth. He is equated to the Indian deity Vajrapani, whose name means “thunderbolt holder.” He bares his teeth, raises his fist, and holds a Kongosho, which is a symbol of the power he represents.

The Nio are constructed in the traditional multi-block design. Old works were conventionally repaired bit by bit, over time, as individual blocks shrank at different rates or were damaged by insects. Damaged blocks were removed, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and replaced with exact copies of the piece. It is common to find figures with repairs spanning many years, as is the case with these particular pieces. This pair was originally lacquered. Though none of the lacquer survives, there is evidence of the gesso-like layer on the surface of each figure.

It is interesting to note that this pair — each figure standing 71 inches tall — is a close copy of the Nio guarding the south gate of the Todaiji in Japan. However, the Todaiji pair, completed in 1203, stands 26 feet tall.

In both examples, the classic, fierce and threatening expressions punctuate their

purpose as protectors of the Buddhist temple.

The information and material herein represents Gallery's best efforts and understanding of the current history and scholarship with respect to the provenance of the Work(s) of Art described and is not part of any warranty.

Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps the most famous architect of all time, and certainly the most well known American architect, has been immensely influential in shaping the course of modern architecture, both in the U.S. and throughout the world. In particular, his residential work has been the subject of continuing interest and controversy. In *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Houses*, for the first time, all 291 extant Wright-designed houses are featured in exquisite color photography. Along with Alan Weintraub's stunning photos, lucid principal text by author Alan Hess, and a selection of floor plans and archival images, the book includes text and essays by some of the field's most highly esteemed Wright scholars and architecture historians, including Kenneth Frampton, Thomas S. Hines, Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Kathryn Smith, Margo Stipe, and Eric Lloyd Wright.









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August 18, 2004

Here are the results for the sample I took from your sculpture in June.

A-number	Sample	Conventional Date, years BP	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ , ‰
13431	A	325 ± 45	-24.1

The result is corrected for  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ .

Calibrated date (2-sigma): AD 1467-1652

Description: Japanese temple guardian sculpture, Ni-O, Ungyo, 71" high, on rectangular wooden base. Club, pointing down, in left hand. Right index finger bent, Right foot pointed up; left foot flat to base. Mouth open.

Best wishes!

  
C.J. Eastoe  
Staff Scientist

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# Religion and Ritual



# Heaven and Hell

Salvation and Retribution in Pure Land Buddhism



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