

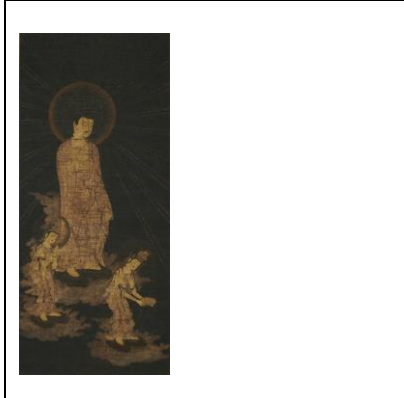
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## Title of Object

Welcoming Descent of the Amida Buddha Triad

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## Photo of Object (optional)



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## Object Information

**Artist:** Unknown

**Culture:** Japanese

**Date of Object:** 13<sup>th</sup> Century

**Country:** Japan

**Accession Number:** 61.16

**File Created:** 4/27/2016

**Material/Medium:** Hanging scroll; gold and color on indigo-dyed silk

**Author of File:** Randall Johnson

**Department:** Japanese and Korean Art

**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Last Updated/Reviewed:** 7/5/2016

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## Tour Topics

Group 5 tour, Wabi Sabi, ancient culture, flowers, funerary/afterlife, gods/goddesses, ritual/ceremony, spirituality/sacred, stories/storytelling, symbolism, Buddhism

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## Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. Describe the emotion of the characters in this piece
  2. How do you think the artist would view this today?
  3. Where would this be displayed?
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## Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

### Amida Buddha.

Buddha" refers to a fully awakened or enlightened being. The Indian sage Shakyamuni came to be known as the Buddha, but with the development of the Mahayanist pantheon, other Buddhas were also

recognized. While each Buddha has a specific iconography, there are certain characteristics that many share. Amitabha (Chinese: A-mi-t'o-p'o; Japanese: Amida), Buddha of "Infinite Light" or "Infinite Life," is one of the five transcendental Buddhas. He is believed to reside over Western Paradise where souls of his followers strive for enlightenment.

### **Bodhisattvas.**

Divine beings that, although enlightened, deny themselves Buddhahood in order to help others along the path to enlightenment. Still tied to the material world in this manner, they are usually represented in sumptuous garments and adorned with jewelry and crowns (a reference to Shakyamuni's earthly existence). Bodhisattvas are usually represented as extremely calm and benevolent beings. Seishi and Kannon are the two represented here. Kannon holds the lotus.

### **Lotus Flower.**

The lotus is one of the most well-known symbols of Buddhism. The lotus flower is one of the "Eight Auspicious Symbols" in the religion, and is one of the most important images in the faith. The roots of a lotus flower extend into the mud and the stem grows up through the water and the flower blossoms above the surface. In Buddhist thought, this pattern of growth signifies the progress of the soul from the primeval mud of materialism, through the waters of experience, and into the bright sunshine of enlightenment. Though there are other water plants that bloom above the water, it is only the lotus which, owing to the strength of its stem, regularly rises eight to twelve inches above the surface.

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## **Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)**

### **Pure Land Buddhism**

Belief in Amitabha (C: A-mi-t'o-p'o; J: Amida), the Buddha of Western Paradise, developed in India as early as the 2nd century and was transmitted to China in the 3rd century. Through faith in the mercy and saving grace of Amitabha, followers believed they would be reborn in a kind of heaven (Pure Land or Western Paradise) where they could continue to strive toward enlightenment free from the difficulties of life on earth. Pure Land teaching became popular in China in the 7th century and in Japan in the 12th century.

An aspect of Amida's boundless compassion is known as raigo, or the "welcoming descent of Amida." This type of imagery stems from Amida's vow to personally appear at the moment of death, in order to insure safe passage and rebirth of the soul in the Pure Land. In this painting, Amida is shown floating downward from the clouds. He is accompanied by his attendant bodhisattvas: Seishi, whose hands are clasped in prayer, and Kannon, who bears a lotus upon which to receive the soul of the dying. Rays of light radiate outward from Amida, whose body has been rendered in gold to emphasize his divinity. His robes, finely painted in thin, even lines, are delicately patterned with cut gold foil, known in Japanese as kirikane. The effect is one of great luxury and ease, foreshadowing the splendors of Western Paradise. Such a painting, hung by the bed, would have provided a focus for the dying person, bringing considerable comfort and hope in their final hours.

So compelling was the concept of Amida coming to welcome a soul at the moment of death, that several other deities also came to be depicted descending from the heavens.

## Wabi Sabi

Pared down to its barest essence, wabi-sabi is the Japanese art of finding beauty in imperfection and profundity in nature, of accepting the natural cycle of growth, decay, and death. It's simple, slow, and uncluttered—and it reveres authenticity above all. Wabi-sabi is flea markets, not warehouse stores; aged wood, not Pergo; rice paper, not glass. It celebrates cracks and crevices and all the other marks that time, weather, and loving use leave behind. It reminds us that we are all but transient beings on this planet—that our bodies as well as the material world around us are in the process of returning to the dust from which we came. Through wabi-sabi, we learn to embrace liver spots, rust, and frayed edges, and the march of time they represent.

A complex aesthetic, it is a combination of rustic simplicity, freshness or quietness (*wabi*), together with the beauty and serenity of age, where an object acquires a patina or repairs due to prolonged use (*sabi*). The principles of *wabi* are linked to those of *shihui* and ideas of refined austerity, all of which aspire to the ideal of creating simple objects free of unnecessary distraction.

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## Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Followers of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism in Japan believe that, at the moment of death, Amida Buddha will descend from his paradise to receive the soul of a faithful follower. This painting depicts Amida floating downward on clouds. He is accompanied by the bodhisattva Seishi, whose hands are clasped in prayer, and Kannon, who holds a lotus upon which to receive the soul of the dying. The extreme refinement of the painting, rendered entirely in gold on indigo-dyed silk, is a hallmark of Buddhist imagery of Japan's Kamakura period (1185-1333).

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## Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

The Art of Asia (Buddhism, Who's Who in Heaven), artsmia: <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/buddhism/buddhism-whos-who.cfm> and Guide to Buddhist sects: <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/buddhism/buddhist-sects.cfm>

Here is a link to an archived video on Japanese Buddhism: <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/buddhism/buddhism-video.cfm>

Information on indigo dye: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigo\\_dye](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigo_dye)

Information on Wabi Sabi: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/japanese-art-and-design-themes/>

Wabi Sabi: The Art of Imperfection, article in Utne Reader: <http://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/wabi-sabi.aspx>

*The Wabi-Sabi House: The Japanese Art of Imperfect Beauty*, by Robyn Griggs Lawrence.