



Kamakura: Realism and Spirituality in the Sculpture of Japan

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The Kamakura period (1185–1333) is considered a pinnacle of Japanese artistic expression, often described as a renaissance in Buddhist art. This catalogue is the first in over two decades to examine the exquisite sculpture of this period, artwork characterized by an intense corporeal presence, naturalistic proportions, a sense of movement, realistic drapery, and lifelike facial expressions animated by eyes made of inlaid crystal. The sculptures played an important role in the practice of Buddhism during these years, as the vivid representations facilitated an immediate communion between deity and worshipper. The custom of placing sacred relics, texts, and even miniature icons into the sculptures' hollow interiors further enlivened the works and invested them with spiritual significance. Essays by noted scholars explore the sculptures' arresting exteriors and powerful interiors, examining the technical and stylistic innovations that made them possible, and offering new context for their ritual and devotional uses. They demonstrate that the physical beauty and technical brilliance of Kamakura statues are profoundly associated with their spiritual dimension and devotional functions.

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