

**PRESSBOOK**

Takashi MURAKAMI

*Culture Kiosque*

*March 2016*

Travel Tip: Art and Archaeology in Japan  
Takashi Murakami: The 500 Arhats



Takashi Murakami, the "Fire" panel in Arhat (detail)

Takashi Murakami: The 500 Arhats ★★★★★

JAPAN  
TOKYO • MORI ART  
MUSEUM • UNTIL 6 MARCH 2016

Takashi Murakami, inspired by a series of dialogues with art historian Tsuji Nobuo for *The Geijutsu Shincho* art journal, and by paintings of the *Five Hundred Arhats* by Kano Kazunobu (1816-1863) and Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754-1799), enlisted over 200 students from Japanese art colleges to carry out the arduous task of completing, in a very short period of time, his 100-meter-long magnum opus painting. The work consists of four sections bearing the names of the legendary Chinese guardians of the four celestial directions (blue dragon - east, white tiger - west, red bird - south, and black tortoise - north). Addressing themes of religion and art, human mortality and limitations, this new monumental work breaks new ground in Murakami's creativity. His *The 500 Arhats* was unveiled overseas, making the forthcoming exhibition in Japan a 'homecoming.'

The 500 arhats are thought of as enlightened disciples of Buddha who spread his teachings and give ordinary people salvation from worldly desires. The faith of the arhats was conveyed to Japan during the Heian period (8th-12th century) and flourished throughout the country from the Edo period (17th-19th century) on in the forms of paintings and sculptures. Kano Kazunobu's *Five Hundred Arhat's* (housed at Zojoji Temple in Shiba, Tokyo), a 100-scroll series of paintings, was exhibited in Japan in its entirety for the first time at the Edo Tokyo Museum immediately following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, and at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, a Smithsonian museum in Washington, D.C. in 2012.

Paintings by Nagasawa Rosetsu and Kano Kazunobu that greatly inspired Takashi Murakami's *The 500 Arhats* will be on view at the Mori Art Museum. Nagasawa Rosetsu's recently re-discovered microscopic painting depicts the 500 arhats and animal figures on a 3-centimeter square area. In contrast, Kano Kazunobu's *Five Hundred Arhats* is a voluminous series, consisting of 100 copiously painted scrolls produced over a period of 10 years. It depicts the training of the arhats and their acts of salvation. Kazunobu's dense colors and obsessive depictions overwhelm the viewers. Displaying the paintings of Nagasawa Rosetsu and Kano Kazunobu in conjunction with Takashi Murakami's *The 500 Arhats* allows a dialogue between the Edo artists and the artist of our time.

The exhibition will also feature Murakami's large-scale sculptures such as *The Birth Cry of a Universe*, still in production after nearly 10 years, and *Flame of Desire - Gold* (2013); new paintings created especially for this exhibition from his signature series including "727" and "Tan Tan Bo"; as well as "Ensō" (circle) paintings and silver and gold "Karajishi" Chinese lion paintings, all of which will be shown for the first time in Japan.

Mori Art Museum Website

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