

Japanese cloisonné Shippō [“Kugi Kakushi” and “Hiki-te”]

From the Hosomi Museum, Kyoto

THE HOSOMI MUSEUM, with the collection of the Hosomi Foundation at its heart, was granted permission by the Ministry of Culture to operate as a private museum in 1994. It exhibits a significant number of important Japanese works of art and is located in Okazaki Park, Kyoto, where many of the nation's cultural institutions such as the Heian Shrine, the National Museum of Modern Art and the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art are situated.

The Hosomi Collection was established by the industrialist, Ryo Hosomi (1901-1979), who was given the honorific name *Kokoh-an* by the chief priest of the Tenryūji. His skill and determination in collecting Japanese art of the highest quality was continued by his son, Minoru Hosomi, present Chairman of the Hosomi Foundation, and his grandson, Yoshiyuki Hosomi, the current Director of the Museum.

Kamakura (1185-1333) periods and monochrome ink painting from the Muromachi period (1333-1568). Among the decorative arts, *Negoro* lacquerware and a famous tea ceremony kettle collection from the Muromachi era are of note.

There are also more than three hundred pieces of *cloisonné*, ceramics and pottery used in the tea ceremony from the Momoyama period (1568-1600). In particular, from the Edo period (1600-1868), there are the well-known collections of works by masters from the Rinpa school and the paintings of Iō Jakuchū.

The Hosomi Museum holds innovative exhibitions throughout the year, centred around its own collection. Traditional Japanese art is sometimes regarded as difficult to understand and even tedious, so the museum sets out to hold exhibitions which attempt to enlighten and teach with new, but approachable, ideas. It strives to provide a bridge between old cultural assets and values and the concepts of creativity and modernity espoused by contemporary generations.

The present museum building was created by a young and upcoming architect Ōe Tadasu. It was his first building in Kyoto and he admitted to approaching the task with an enormous sense of awe and respect “simply because it is in Kyoto”. Accordingly, the structure and exterior are simple and complementary, well-suited to the environment and character of the old capital. Once inside, however, the visitor finds a surprisingly large amount of space from the two basement floors to the three above. The connecting stairways, the museum shop and the café all face the interior atrium, which is open to the sky. This use of space inspires a feeling of calm, of being lost in an enchanted world of one's own, resonant with the sensation experienced in an old Kyoto house.

The museum also prides itself on being equipped with the technology necessary to preserve and display works of art, such as the important cultural assets that require meticulous maintenance and delicate handling.

It also has its own tea ceremony room, situated on the top floor. Visitors can participate in seasonal events within traditional surroundings and can appreciate the fusion of works of art and the tea room interior. Designed in traditional *Sukiya-tsukuri* style by the famous architect, Nakamura Sotoji, the tea room looks out towards the Higashiyama mountains. The visitor can enjoy green tea and cake, or a lunch box from an old-established restaurant, while gazing at the magnificent view. Special tea ceremonies and parties are also held to celebrate the New Year and traditional events such as the blooming of the cherry blossoms in April, Childrens' Day in May and the full moon in October. At these times, fully trained staff make use of the museum's collec-

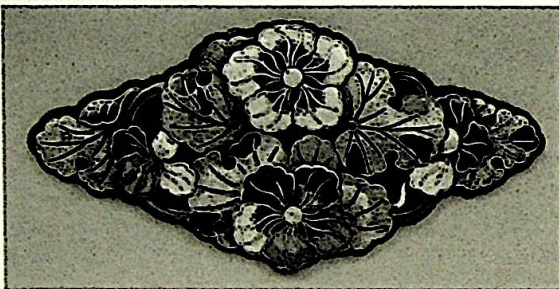


Figure 1. *Kugi-kakushi* (ornamental nail-cover) decorated with moonflowers (bottle gourd), cloisonné, 16th-17th century, 5 x 10½ inches (13 x 26.8 cm).

The sense of design, with petals and leaves of paired moonflowers clustered together, recalls both Chinese brocades and metallic thread embroidery (*nuihaku*) and effectively conveys the exuberant Momoyama aesthetic. An abundance of techniques are evident in this piece, including wireless cloisonné, in which two pigments are used to show gradation, and the incised “fish-scale” pattern decorating the gold surface of the leaves. The combination of magnificence with technical precision befits its provenance, reportedly from the Jurakudai Palace of Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

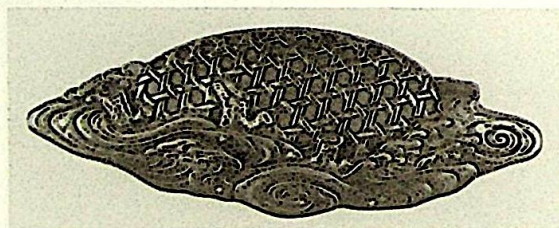


Figure 2. *Kugi-kakushi* (ornamental nail-cover) decorated with a gabion in a rushing stream, cloisonné, 16th-17th century, 4 x 11 inches (10.4 x 28.1 cm).

This object takes as its design a gabion, a woven basket filled with small round stones and placed in a river or stream to regulate water flow or prevent bank erosion. The interwoven basket, with openwork design, is placed directly over another ground. Red, white and light blue are intricately combined with the gilding on the gabion and stake in the water, and with the plated silver and colour used in the water. Compared with the moonflower nail-cover from the Jurakudai, the present piece emphasises a high standard of workmanship, compatible with the Kan'ei era of the early Edo period.

textiles and metal objects, all of which are valued extremely highly by authorities on Japanese art in Japan and overseas. Of very special interest are Buddhist and Shinto art and Yamato-e painting from the Heian (794-1185) and the

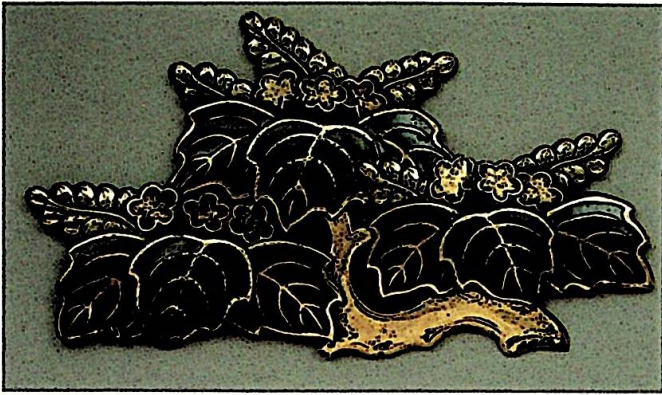


Figure 3. *Kugi-kakushi* (ornamental nail-cover) decorated with plum blossom, cloisonné, 17th century, 1 1/2 x 4 inches (4.3 x 10.1 cm).

The plum branch is cast bronze, with enamelled blossoms. White is the base pigment for the enamelled petals, with red added in a few places to create gradation, employing the technique of wireless *cloisonné*. As a complementary contrast, deep green is applied to the base of the bud. The suggestion of movement to the right helps create an impression of symmetry.

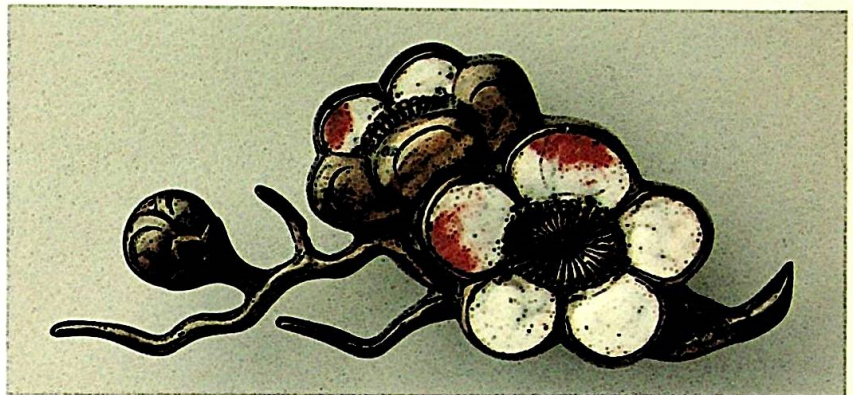


Figure 4. *Kugi-kakushi* (ornamental nail-cover) with paulownia design, cloisonné, 17th century, 2 x 4 inches (5.4 x 10.1 cm).

Cloisonné enamels are applied to a bronze base cast in the form of a paulownia branch. The curving branch and large leaves, applied with blue, green and red enamels, are highlighted with gilding to create a jewel-like effect. The representation of the bark is understated, the minute detail comparable to that in figure 2, indicating that it was possibly made around the same time.

tion of tea ceremony utensils.

In parallel with the exhibitions, the museum also offers very special seminars where the works of art are removed from their glass cases, so bringing them spiritually as well as physically closer to the students, who can touch the objects and share their feelings and opinions with the lecturers.

The loan exhibition at this year's International Asian Art Fair features a group of 12 *shippō* enamel pieces, from the Hosomi Museum's holding of some four hundred *shippō* works from the Momoyama period (1568-1600) to the early

Figure 5. *Hiki-te* (ornamental sliding door pull) decorated with maple leaves, cloisonné, 17th century, 4 1/4 inches (12 cm) high.

Glazed enamels, applied to a bronze base cast in the form of a maple leaf, create a tapestry of colour. Another pull of the same shape exists, but with leaves pointing in the opposite direction. This example includes the finely conceived detail of different types of small leaves on the perimeter of a central leaf.



Figure 6. *Kugi-kakushi* (ornamental nail-cover) decorated with paulownia, cloisonné, 17th century, 2 1/2 x 4 inches (6.1 x 10 cm).

Enamels are applied in sections, within the delicate contours of leaves bearing drops of dew and that have been nibbled by insects. The outlines and veins of the leaves are clearly delineated with wire, while the whitened edges of the blue leaves show the use of the wireless *cloisonné* technique.



years of the Edo era (1600-1868). This vast collection comprises a majority of all *shippō* works in Japan and includes numerous early pieces of the inlaid *champlevé* type.

Among these *shippō* enamels are two large *kugi-kakushi* (figures 1 & 2). *Kugi-kakushi* or *kui-kakushi* are ornamental coverings for nailheads or pegs, usually used where posts and beams meet in traditional Japanese architecture, especially castles, temples, palaces and other aristocratic residences. Often made of metals such as bronze, nail-covers add an element of elegance to interiors.

These highly important objects are regarded as exemplifying the splendour of a dazzling artistic era. They are

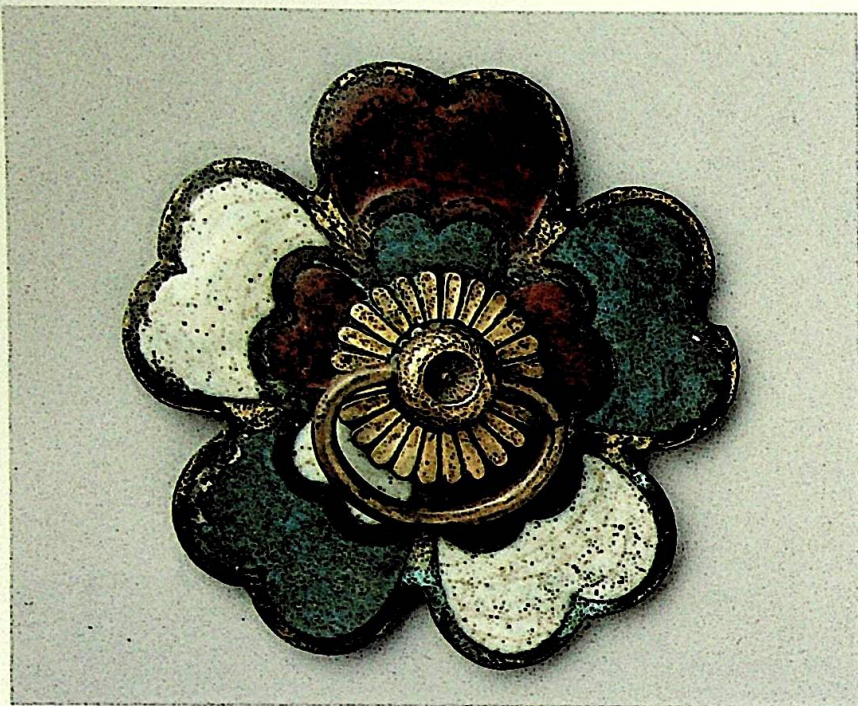


Figure 7. (Above) Hiki-te (ornamental sliding door pull) with a cherry blossom design, cloisonné, 17th century, 3¼ x 3¼ inches (7.9 x 7.9 cm).

This pull has a very thick, 1 inch (2.5 cm) high base, cast in the shape of a cherry blossom. The petals of the cherry blossom are decorated in enamel in three colours, red, white and blue. A loop handle hangs from a central knob designed as a chrysanthemum flower. The underside of the pull has a concave centre, with a trace of lacquer-like adhesive around it, indicating that it was pasted onto the wooden frame of a sliding door.



Figure 8. (Above right) Hiki-te (ornamental sliding door pull) with bird-head helmet design, cloisonné, 17th century, 2¼ x 3¼ inches (7.2 x 8.2 cm).

The design of this pull is based on a helmet worn in *Bugaku* dancing. The helmet portion was cast and then nailed to a copper plate, ¼ inch (2 cm) thick. It is decorated with a slightly transparent green enamel glaze. The minute fish-scale ground pattern and the incised lines in the leaves of the arabesque motif below are characteristic of metalwork from the Kanbun period (1661-1673).



Figure 9. (left) Hiki-te (ornamental sliding door pull) with a cherry branch in a bucket design, cloisonné, 17th century, 8 x 2¼ inches (20.4 x 8.7 cm)

The pull is designed as a bucket with a branch of cherry blossom in it. The bucket and cherry blossom were cast separately. The bucket served as the handle to the *fusuma* door. There is a green enamel glaze on the leaves of the cherry branch. This pull seems to be based on one of the motifs used in a pull made for the cedar doors of a room added to the Katsura Palace in Kanbun 3 (1663), which was decorated with buckets of flowers representing the four seasons. The design of this pull shows a more subdued sensibility than that of the Katsura Palace.

thought to have been used in the Jurakudai, the magnificent palace built by the powerful warlord and military ruler of Japan, Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1536-1598), and typify Momoyama art and architecture.

The Jurakudai palace (the "Palace of Assembled Treasures") was built in 1587 in the centre of Kyoto. It served as a stage for grand demonstrations of Hideyoshi's political and cultural hegemony, such as the official visit of the Emperor Go Yozei in 1588, which lasted for several days. The palace was dismantled in 1595, barely a decade after it was built and various parts of it were moved elsewhere, such as to Fushimi Castle and the Nishi Honganji temple.

Recent excavations at the Jurakudai site have yielded gilded roof tiles, attesting to the grandeur and luxury of the edifice. In the decoration of the palace Hideyoshi made extensive use of gold and bright colours and encouraged artists to decorate the interiors with colourful birds and flowers. Ryo Hosomi, who established the Foundation, had enormous respect for Hideyoshi, a man of humble origins whose determination and resourcefulness made him a powerful ruler.

Shippō (which literally translates as "seven treasures") enamel work was typical of Momoyama splendour and, if the technique of inlaid enamel was introduced from Europe, it can also be said that it returned there much later to exert an important influence on *Japonism* and artistic design.

There are two principal techniques in applying enamel to metal: inlaid or *champlevé*, which involves pouring enamel into grooves engraved on the surface of a metal object and *cloisonné*, where the enamel is poured into compartments created by a web of metal bands on the surface of an object.

Historical records show that objects decorated with enamels were brought to Japan from overseas in the late Muromachi period (1333-1568). The evolution of domestic enamel ware is open to debate because objects surviving



Figure 10. *Hiki-te* (ornamental sliding door pull) with daffodil design, cloisonné, 17th-18th century, 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{16}$ inches (2.9 x 12.8 cm).

The sensitivity characteristic of the cloisonné technique is evident in the use of copper wire to show the detail of the stamen and veins of the daffodil. The increased translucency of the enamel glaze indicates technical sophistication, with white used for the flowers, blue for the leaves and yellow-green glaze on the tips of the leaves and the calyces. There is a precedent for daffodil motif cloisonné in Kanbun 3 (1663) in a design for an ornamental nail-cover in the new building at the Katsura Palace, although this design is completely different.

from the early years of the period are of inlaid type. It does not seem very likely that China, Japan's main source of cultural influences, was the source of the *champlevé* technique since the Chinese only made the *cloisonné* type. It is possible, however, that Europeans who were in Japan prior to the exclusion of westerners, taught the Japanese about the *champlevé* technique, from which the Japanese were able to develop their own *shippō* style of enamel.

Cloisonné is a general term for objects made by combining a metal base or core with applied glazed enamels. Its origins can be traced back to ancient China. In Japan it emerged as an independent art form in the Muromachi period and was known from then on as *shippo* enamel.

The basic *cloisonné* technique involves applying enamels to a metal base, core or surface. These enamels must be glazed onto the metal base of the kiln, a process not unlike the final enamel glazing of porcelain. Unlike with ceramics, *cloisonné* must be fired at a lower temperature to avoid melting the metal base. The enamels used in the process are made by pulverizing and mixing silicates, potassium nitrate, borax and lead, after which they are applied to the metal base, fired at about 1000 degrees and later polished after cooling. The enamels are of varying clarity, sometimes clear, cloudy, or completely opaque. Different colours are created by adding different oxidising agents, such as iron oxide or leaden gold for red, or copper oxide for blue to the original mixture.

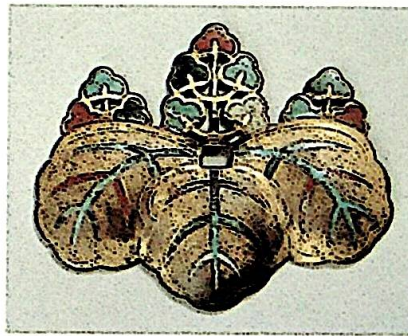


Figure 11. (Above left) *Hiki-te* (ornamental sliding door pull) with paulownia design, cloisonné, 17th century, 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 2 $\frac{1}{16}$ inches (8.5 x 6.7 cm).

This pull is designed as a paulownia motif family crest. This paulownia motif family crest is called *go san kiri* ("five and three paulownia") because of the number of nuts at the centre (five) and the edges (three). These are glazed in red, blue and white enamel while, in the lower portion of the pull, fishscale pattern covers the concave bronze base, with red, blue and white enamel glaze indicating the leaf veins.



Figure 12. (Above right) Butterfly design cloisonné, 18th century, 3 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (9.4 x 8.2 cm).

The butterfly is designed as an arabesque-like motif. The overlapping wings of the butterfly are suggested by the alternating of the bronze surface decorated with fishscale pattern and by the areas glazed with red, yellow, blue and green enamel. The butterfly was considered a divine messenger in ancient Japan, and was also regarded as a vehicle for the deceased's spirit; so this object may have decorated a sacred place.

Although the majority of the *shippō* enamel items in the exhibition are *kugi-kakushi*, there is/are also an example of a metal pull or *Hiki-te* (figures 5, 7-11). *Hiki-te* were punched into the paper surface of sliding panel partitions, called *fusuma*, and like *kugi-kakushi* also allowed for subtle expressions of style in largely unadorned traditional Japanese architecture. Usually simple round shapes, especially in Edo period interiors (when they were normally found in castles, palaces and temples) they were also made in other shapes, thus added an element of playfulness or the imaginative to their otherwise austere surroundings.