

### ***Ita* (Trays) and *Menoko-ita* (Cutting Board)**

*Ita* are hand-carved wooden trays used in the home to carry objects or serve food. Each tray is made from a single piece of wood, which is left to dry for two or three years before being carved. As it dries, the wood slowly warps. Working with wood that has already dried out and warped ensures that the intricate patterns and designs carved into it do not distort over the years. The designs are chosen to enhance the natural appearance of each piece of wood, and also carry spiritual significance. Patterns might be based on plants, water, animals, or other aspects of the natural world. Some designs are based on religious motifs to ward off evil spirits.

There are many types of *ita*, including the large *menoko-ita*. The flat, undecorated area functions as a cutting board for preparing or serving a meal. The more elaborate, hollowed-out section can be used as a serving bowl.