

Kakiemon History and Vision

The Kakiemon kiln history dates back approximately 380 years, beginning in the 1640s when Kisōemon Sakaida (1615–1653) successfully perfected the first technique in Japan for painting colorful overglaze enamels on porcelain. Known as *iro-e* (literally “color painting”), or locally as *aka-e* (literally “red painting”), the technique involved painting vivid red, blue, green, and yellow overglaze enamels onto porcelain that had already been glazed and fired once. Kisōemon was awarded the name Kakiemon, a hereditary title that has passed down to the current Kakiemon XV (b. 1968), and the family’s style of porcelain became known as “Kakiemon style” or simply “Kakiemon.” The name is said to be derived from Kakiemon I’s skill at expressing the color and texture of persimmons, which are called *kaki* in Japanese.

In the late 1650s, the kiln began to produce porcelain for export to Europe. Kakiemon porcelain was expensive and luxurious compared to other styles made in Arita at the time. It was praised for its high quality and beauty and became popular in the palaces and castles of Europe and Japan. Porcelain in the Kakiemon style was made at numerous kilns in Arita until the end of the 1600s. In fact, Kakiemon-style porcelain was even produced by kilns in Europe, including England, Germany, and France. However, the Kakiemon family were the only ones who knew how to make *nigoshide* porcelain. *Nigoshide* refers to the milky white color of the ceramic body, and its production was a closely guarded secret, known only to the Kakiemon family head.

As the 1700s began, the popularity of Kakiemon-style porcelain waned, and Kakiemon kiln switched to making *kinrande* porcelain, a style with colorful overglaze designs accented with gold. The *nigoshide* technique was believed lost until it was revived in the 1950s by Kakiemon XII (1878–1963) and his son Kakiemon XIII (1906–1982). In 1971, *nigoshide* was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Property, and in 2001 Kakiemon XIV (1934–2013) was designated a Living National Treasure. He was succeeded by his son, Kakiemon XV, in 2014.

Kakiemon XV oversees and gives direction to approximately 40 artisans, while creating all of the kiln’s current designs. Although many of his pieces are inspired by antique designs of his predecessors, Kakiemon XV studies the works of other artists to learn new ways to express familiar motifs and see how designs differ in other countries. In preserving a family history that is nearly 400 years old, he must consider how trends may change and steer the kiln in a direction that maintains its traditions while leaving room for creative development.