Mino Ware and Tea Ceremony

Mino ware and tea ceremony both rose to prominence in the tumultuous years of the Warring States period (1467–1568). The surge in popularity was largely due to the influence of warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582). Nobunaga brought much of Honshu under his control through military conquest, and he is known as one of the "great unifiers of Japan." Beginning in 1567, Nobunaga made nearby Gifu Castle his primary residence and base of operations. Nobunaga was an avid practitioner of tea ceremony, as was his successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598). At the time, tea ceremony played an important role in political negotiations: leaders like Nobunaga awarded valuable tea implements to their favored lieutenants and used the ceremony as an opportunity to meet and broker power.

Nobunaga studied tea ceremony under the tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591), whose teachings form the basis of most modern schools of tea ceremony. From his influential position, Rikyū validated the artistic merit of irregular, earthy Japanese pottery, including Mino ware such as Oribe, Kizeto, Seto-guro, and Shino wares. The rustic simplicity of Mino ware thus became a mark of sophistication in tearooms across Nobunaga's territory.

In this exhibit, the important intersection of Mino ware and tea ceremony is evidenced by the many tea implements on display. The exhibit contains tea bowls (in which the tea is whisked), *cha-ire* (tea caddies for powdered tea), *mizusashi* (jars containing fresh water to replenish the kettle and clean the whisk), and *suichū* (ewers used to refill the *mizusashi* at the close of the ceremony).