

An Evolution in Style: Eccentric Oribe Ware (Early 17th Century)

The distinctive style of Mino ceramics called Oribe ware emerged at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Up to this point, ceramic design in Japan had emulated the symmetry and balance that was common in China and Korea. In contrast, Oribe ware embraced asymmetrical shapes and imbalanced color schemes. Potters intentionally twisted the rims and bodies of their works to create one-of-a-kind pieces. Rich glazing—in particular, a deep copper-green—and nature-inspired motifs were common.

The name “Oribe” comes from tea master Furuta Oribe (1544–1615), disciple of and successor to the influential tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591). Oribe supposedly favored the style of ceramics that would later bear his name, but no records definitively show this connection. Nonetheless, Oribe ware had a strong influence on the evolution of Japanese tea ceremony into the art form as it is known today, which also recognizes beauty in imperfection.

As the influence of tea ceremony spread, so did the popularity of Oribe ware, but the predominance of the style was short-lived. Production lasted only about 30 years until Furuta Oribe died, and the prevailing aesthetic in tea ceremony shifted again soon after. However, some modern potters still create pieces in the style of Oribe ware.

Oribe ware is often divided into loose subcategories by the color of the glaze. This exhibit has pieces representing Ao-oribe (green Oribe), Nezumi-oribe (gray Oribe), Kuro-oribe (black Oribe), Aka-oribe (red Oribe), and Sō-oribe (monochrome Oribe).