

***Sometsuke* Blue and White**

Sometsuke is a style of Japanese ceramics decorated solely with blue images on a field of white. The blue color is traditionally produced using asbolite, a cobalt-rich mineral aggregate. Originally, artists brush-painted designs by hand, as seen in the Nemoto examples. However, in the early twentieth century, techniques such as stenciling and copper-plate transfer were introduced to facilitate mass production.

To make stencils, the artist cuts designs into pieces of *washi* paper and then treats them with an astringent dye made from persimmons. This treatment strengthens and waterproofs the stencil for repeated use. (The photograph below shows a treated stencil.) The next step is to place a prepared stencil on the surface of an unglazed work and brush pigment over the top. The bowls below are decorated with stencils of Mt. Fuji (left) and a cherry-blossom shape (right).

Copper-plate transfer utilizes an intaglio, which functions like a stamp. The artist applies pigment to a copper sheet engraved with a design, then wipes off the excess. A thin sheet of absorbent paper is laid atop the prepared plate, which is run through a press, transferring the design to the paper. This print is molded to the surface of a piece of bisqueware using a soap wash and rubbed firmly against the piece to transfer the pigment to the porcelain. Finally, the fragile paper is rinsed away, leaving the colored design behind. This method was used to create the stone lantern, peonies, and motifs from the traditional *karuta* card game on the dishes below.