

Mino Ceramics to the World

After more than two centuries of self-imposed isolation under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867), Japan entered a period of rapid industrialization and Westernization following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As part of a broad policy of reengagement with the world, the Meiji government began taking part in international expositions to promote Japanese goods and study foreign technologies. The first of these was the Vienna World's Fair in 1873. Ceramics were positioned as a major Japanese export; they were in great demand as Europe embraced the Japonisme art movement, which celebrated Japanese aesthetics and imagery. By 1888, Japanese ceramic exports had nearly tripled. Five years later, at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, 271 of the 290 art pieces on display were Japanese, including numerous ceramic works.

Many artworks from Mino were featured in these international exhibitions. Some local artists, like porcelain makers Katō Gosuke (1837–1915) and Nishiura Enji V (1856–1914), began incorporating Western forms into their work to appeal to the foreign market. The tea sets displayed here are examples of this fusion. Enji's son found a way to apply his father's underglaze technique to mass production, and he firmly established the Nishiura brand by opening a successful factory in Nagoya that distributed its products abroad. A few years later, ceramics industrialist Katō Sukesaburō (1856–1908) established outlets for Mino ceramics in China, India, the United States, and South Africa, and he founded Japan's first ceramics trade newspaper.