

Katō Hajime (1900–1968)

Ceramicist Katō Hajime is known for recreating lost *iroe* techniques from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Iroe* (literally, “polychrome decorated”) refers to a style of overglazing where colored patterns are painted onto previously glazed and high-fired pottery. The pottery is then refired at a lower temperature to fuse the two layers of glaze together.

Katō, who was born in nearby Seto, spent 15 years working at a ceramics research institute in Tajimi, where he studied antique pottery and learned a wide range of techniques related to ceramic production. While carrying out his research, he was also producing his own ceramic works, and he took a grand prize at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris.

In 1940, Katō founded his own kiln in Yokohama, where he began researching Ming overglaze enamels. He succeeded in recreating several key *iroe* techniques, including *moegi kinrande* (gold leaf applied over a pale-green glaze) and *ōjikosai* (patterned red overglaze over a yellow base). His preservation of these techniques was recognized in 1961, when he was designated a Living National Treasure.

The bowl on display is an excellent example of Hajime’s *moegi kinrande* technique. He achieved the bright coloration by delicately applying gold leaf over a light-green glaze. Using gold leaf rather than gold powder requires meticulous skill; if the melting points of the underglaze and overglaze are too close, the gold leaf will sink into the underglaze and be obscured.