**Male Pheasant Incense Burner**

This incense burner in the shape of a male pheasant is one of the museum’s most remarkable pieces. It was crafted in the seventeenth century by ceramic artist Nonomura Ninsei, a revered master of Kyō ware. The pheasant is considered exceptional even among Ninsei’s many renowned works, and in 1951 it was designated a National Treasure.

Several aspects demonstrate Ninsei’s mastery of his craft. For example, the long tail—this horizontal angle is remarkably difficult to achieve, as clay tends to droop under its own weight or fracture during firing. On the underside of the tail are two small marks showing where Ninsei placed supports to maintain its position in the kiln. The finished pose gives the pheasant an alert, vibrant appearance.

The colorful feathers and lifelike eyes are fine examples of *iro-e*, an overglaze enamel technique. *Iro-e* artists paint colored glazes over the surface of a previously glazed and fired piece, then fire it again to fuse the glazes. Each of the pheasant’s feathers has been colored in green, blue, or brown, partially filled in with black, and finally outlined in gold.

While some decorative masterworks are purely ornamental, the Male Pheasant Incense Burner shows signs of past use. On the underside of the lid, the area around the vent holes shows discoloration from the smoke of burning incense.