

Female Pheasant Incense Burner

This ceramic incense burner in the shape of a female pheasant was crafted in the seventeenth century by master ceramicist Nonomura Ninsei. Like its male counterpart, the female displays Ninsei's skillful shaping and masterful use of overglaze enamel techniques. This piece was designated an Important Cultural Property in 1960.

Ninsei used silver paints that oxidized in the kiln to create the figure's iridescent brown and gray plumage, achieving gradations that mimic a female pheasant's real-life coloring. On the head, Ninsei took some artistic license by adding a touch of color: a red-and-gold wattle and the tiniest slip of blue around the eyelid. Both are applied with an overglaze enamel technique called *iro-e*.

The shaping of the pheasant's body also shows a high degree of skill. The long, straight tail rises at a 45-degree angle, and the neck turns in a smooth arc toward the back, as if the bird is preening. In the kiln, where clay shrinks and warps, producing such exacting shapes takes considerable talent and experience.

Ninsei's elegant ceramics were highly sought after by the nobility and samurai elite for use in *chanoyu*, or tea ceremony. In fact, many surviving examples—including the pheasant incense burners—are tea utensils.