

***Maki-e* Bookstand with Wakanoura Scenery**

This seventeenth-century lacquered bookstand was crafted when Kanazawa's distinctive lacquerware style was still in its infancy. The exact provenance of the piece is unknown, but it is attributed to Shimizu Kuhei (?–1688).

Shimizu was born in Edo (now Tokyo) and learned his craft there. In the early seventeenth century, domain lord and influential patron of the arts Maeda Toshitsune (1593–1658) invited Shimizu to practice his art in Kaga domain (now Ishikawa Prefecture). Shimizu worked alongside fellow lacquer artist Igarashi Dōho II (1635–1697), and the two helped to establish Kaga lacquerware as a distinct and flourishing art form. Both men were masters of *maki-e*, a decorative technique in which metallic powders, such as gold dust, are applied to soft lacquer to create images. So renowned was their work that the term *maki-e* soon became synonymous with fine Kaga lacquerware.

The Maeda family that ruled Kaga domain was immensely wealthy—second only to the shogun himself—and they turned their resources to cultural pursuits. Luxury objects, such as this bookstand, were commissioned to display their wealth and prestige and were far more ornate than similar objects intended for daily use.

The bookstand depicts Wakanoura Bay in Wakayama Prefecture, a place of natural beauty that has inspired Japanese poets and authors for more than a millennium. Wakanoura Bay appears many times in the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*, the oldest extant collection of Japanese poems. The bookstand's imagery evokes a *Man'yōshū* tanka poem:

*Wakanoura ni
shio michi kureba
kata wo nami
ashihe wo sashite
tazu naki wataru*

When the tide comes in
at Wakanoura Bay

and the tideland is submerged
the cranes cry out overhead
and wheel toward the reedy shore.

Looking closely at the scene, one can see that some elements stand out in relief, creating a textured, three-dimensional effect. This is achieved with a technique called *shishiai togidashi maki-e*, a combination of *togidashi* (burnished) and *taka* (raised) *maki-e*. In burnished *maki-e*, the design is created by applying gold powder to wet lacquer in low relief. After it dries, the piece is covered with another layer of black or clear lacquer. This layer is polished down with charcoal until the design is revealed, flush with the new surface. In raised *maki-e*, surface designs are built up with layers of lacquer and charcoal or clay dust before the metallic powder layer is added. *Shishiai togidashi* is often used in *maki-e* landscapes to give the composition a sense of depth.

The bookstand also displays other lacquer decoration techniques strongly associated with Ishikawa Prefecture, including gold and silver *kirikane* (the application of cut metal shapes as opposed to powders). The work is so finely done that generations of lacquer artists have studied it to hone their techniques.

As a masterpiece created during the formative period of Kaga *maki-e*, the bookstand was designated an Important Cultural Property in 1998.