

Water Jar (*Mizusashi*) with Plum Blossoms

This water jar was made by Nonomura Ninsei, a master of Kyō ware ceramics. A skillful and archetypal work of seventeenth-century tea ware, it was designated an Important Cultural Property in 1950.

Ninsei was active in Kyoto in the mid- to late seventeenth century. After studying in the pottery centers of Arita (Saga Prefecture) and Seto (Gifu Prefecture), he set up his own kiln in Kyoto under the patronage of Kanamori Sōwa (1584–1656), founder of the Sōwa school of tea ceremony (*chanoyu*). Ninsei subsequently became known in court circles for producing tea utensils, such as this water jar. During a tea gathering, such vessels hold the fresh water that is used to fill the kettle and rinse the tea bowls.

The plum tree design was made using *iro-e*, an overglaze enamel technique in which the artist paints colored glazes over the surface of a previously glazed and fired piece. The item is then fired again at a lower temperature to fuse the two layers of glaze.

Ninsei often used thick layers of the slightly yellowish-white glaze seen here as a base for his colorful designs. On this piece, the plum tree and its blossoms are rendered in red, black, and green glazes, with gold paint to add definition. Note how Ninsei skillfully evokes the lichen-covered bark of an older tree with lightly shaded green on the trunk and branches. Silver paint, which oxidizes with time, is used on some of the flowers to achieve the slightly shiny gray color.