

## ***Ko-kutani Ware***

Kutani ware porcelain is distinguished by its colorful overglaze enamel decorations. Its history comprises two distinct periods. *Ko-kutani*, or “old Kutani,” refers to the earliest pieces produced in the latter half of the seventeenth century. After that, production ceased for about 100 years. The style was revived at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and later pieces are thus known as *saikō-kutani*, or “revival Kutani.”

Kutani ware production began in the mid-seventeenth century with the discovery of porcelain stone, a rare and necessary ingredient for porcelain, in the village of Kutani (in what is now southern Ishikawa Prefecture). The area was part of Daishōji domain, which was governed by a branch of the Maeda family. At the time, Arita, on the southern island of Kyushu, was the only place in Japan that produced true porcelain, and imports from China had diminished due to political unrest. The Maedas thus saw an opportunity to build a local porcelain industry.

A kiln was established in Kutani sometime around 1640. The pieces it produced were strongly influenced by pottery from Arita, where potters had begun crafting overglaze enamel pieces in red, yellow, green, blue, and black in the 1630s. Similarly, the overglaze designs of *ko-kutani* are distinguished by a palette of green, yellow, purple, navy blue, and red, now referred to as the *kutani gosai* (literally “five colors of Kutani”). The designs were generally outlined in black and the glaze applied in thick layers to achieve deep, bold coloration.

*Ko-kutani* designs are now loosely divided into two groups. The “colored” (*iro-e*) style uses all five colors, which is why it is sometimes also referred to as the “five-color style” (*gosai*). *Iro-e* designs leave some of the white field of the base porcelain visible. In contrast, the “blue style” (*aote*) excludes red and uses just two or three of the other colors in designs that often completely cover the surface of the porcelain. Intricately patterned yellow backgrounds are common in *aote* designs.

Production seemingly ceased around 1700, ending the *ko-kutani* period. Because of the kiln’s limited scale and period of production, there are relatively few remaining examples of true *ko-kutani*. However, later potters have recreated and expanded on its styles, so the coloration and motifs of *ko-kutani* ware remain a vital part of modern

Ishikawa ceramics.