

Maki-e

Maki-e is a decorative technique used in lacquerware in which metallic powders, such as gold dust, are added to soft, freshly applied lacquer. It was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955.

Maki-e was used as far back as the eighth century, mainly for members of the social and religious elite. Techniques and designs diversified and evolved as lacquerware became available to a wider customer base, particularly during the commercial boom of the eighteenth century and the increased international exchange of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Maki-e, which means “sprinkled picture,” is applied to a hardened lacquer surface by first brushing on shapes in wet lacquer, then sprinkling them with metallic powders. The powder adheres to the fresh lacquer, creating an image or design. *Maki-e* decoration can be embedded in the base lacquer, made flush with the surface, or done in high relief, depending on the technique used.

Maki-e artists have developed many ways to diversify their art. Along with gold and silver, they may use other metals and alloys to produce different colors. Powders with variously sized grains create a range of textures and lusters. Artists can also combine *maki-e* with related techniques, like *rankaku* (decoration with crushed eggshell) and *raden* (mother-of-pearl inlay), to add pure white or iridescent glimmers to their designs. Many lacquerware pieces at the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art display a combination of these techniques.