

## ***Chinkin* Incised Gold Inlay**

*Chinkin* incised gold inlay is a technique used to decorate lacquerware by etching fine grooves into hardened lacquer and filling them with gold powder or foil. It is one of several traditional decorative techniques that contribute to the renown of Ishikawa Prefecture's lacquerware.

The technique originated in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Gold-inlaid pieces were imported to Japan during the Muromachi period (1392–1573), as evidenced by surviving examples in the treasury of Kyoto's Daitokuji Temple. Local artisans studied the pieces and adopted the technique, which eventually spread across the country.

*Chinkin*, which means “sunken gold,” is applied by carving lines or dots into hardened lacquerware with metal chisels called *chinkin-nomi*. Artists make their own chisels, using a whetstone to get the exact shape they want on the cutting edge. Different shapes—rounded, angular, sharply pointed, rough—create different effects, as does the pressure with which the chisel is applied. For example, the tapered shape of a bamboo leaf can be made by using a triangular chisel and pressing more firmly in the middle of the cut than at the beginning and end. The straight lines of a bamboo cane would be carved with a narrow, knifelike blade with a slightly curved edge, while chisels filed to a pinpoint would add fine details and texture. Painstaking care is required as the lacquer does not allow the artist to repair errant scratches or mistakes.

Once the design has been carved, the artist covers it with a thin layer of wet lacquer. Next, the surface is wiped down with traditional handmade paper (*washi*), which absorbs the excess lacquer and leaves just a tiny amount in the grooves. The artist then applies gold foil or gold dust, dabbing it on with a bit of cotton wool. The metal adheres only to the wet lacquer in the grooves, and after a moment, the excess is wiped away with a palm or fingertip, revealing the design now gleaming in sharp contrast to the lacquer background.

To create variations in color, artists use silver, platinum, or other metals. Materials such as carbon powder can be layered on to darken or lighten the tone. There are also variations in which red or black lacquer are used instead of metallic powders to fill the carved design.

*Chinkin* was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955. It has become strongly associated with Ishikawa Prefecture, particularly the city of Wajima, which has produced several Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage: Mae Taihō (1890–1977) in 1955, Mae Fumio (1940–) in 1999, and Yamagishi Kazuo (1954–) in 2018.