

***Chinkin* Incised Gold Inlay**

Chinkin incised gold inlay is a decorative technique used in lacquerware in which designs are etched into hardened lacquer and filled with gold powder or foil to create a design. It was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955.

The technique, which means “sunken gold,” originated in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Gold-inlaid pieces were imported to Japan during the Muromachi period (1392–1573), which allowed local artisans to study and recreate the process.

Chinkin is created by carving lines or dots into hardened lacquerware with metal chisels called *chinkin-nomi*. Artists make their own chisels, using a whetstone to form the exact shape they need on the cutting edge. Different shapes—rounded, angular, sharply pointed, rough—are used to create different effects, as is the pressure with which the chisel is applied. Artists can create bold, sweeping rays, or details as delicate and subtle as a kitten’s fur.

After carving the design, the artist covers it with a thin layer of wet lacquer. The surface is then wiped down with traditional handmade paper (*washi*), which absorbs the excess and leaves just a tiny amount in the grooves. Gold dust or gold foil is softly dabbed onto the design with a bit of cotton wool. The gold adheres only to the wet lacquer. After a moment, the excess metal is wiped away, revealing the design now gleaming in sharp contrast to the lacquer background.

In modern times, *chinkin* inlay is particularly associated with lacquerware from Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture, which has produced multiple Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage.