

Kaga Metal Inlay

Kaga metal inlay, also called *kaga zōgan*, is a decorative metalwork technique from Ishikawa Prefecture, formerly known as Kaga domain. It is one of the *chōkin* chasing techniques collectively designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955.

Kaga zōgan is a flat inlay technique in which softer metals, such as gold and silver, are embedded in a base of harder metal. The artisan cuts into the base metal at an angle so that the bottom of the cavity is wider than the opening. When the inlay metal is hammered in to create a smooth surface, it spreads into this indentation and is secured in place by the overhang in the base metal. *Kaga zōgan* is also known for multilayered inlays and for the use of patinated copper alloys called *irogane* that produce an array of colors.

Kaga zōgan is strongly associated with armor and horse tack produced in Kaga domain during the Edo period (1603–1867). During that time, the rulers of Kaga invested heavily in traditional crafts, including metalwork. They invited famed metalworkers from Kyoto and Edo (present-day Tokyo) to instruct their artisans. The works of beautiful and durable inlay the artisans subsequently produced were gifted to the shogun and to other domain lords in a show of soft power.

Today, *kaga zōgan* endures as an art form in its own right. Its methods are preserved by Ishikawa artisans, who are finding new expressions for this traditional technique in jewelry, art, and home décor. In 2004, Nakagawa Mamoru (1947–) was designated a Holder of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage for his skill in metal chasing.