

Kaga *Maki-e*

Kaga *maki-e* is a style of lacquerware produced during the Edo period (1603–1867) in Kaga domain (present-day Ishikawa and Toyama Prefectures). The style is distinguished by ornate decoration using a technique called *maki-e*, in which metallic powders, such as gold dust, are applied to soft lacquer to create images and designs.

Kaga domain was governed by the Maeda family. The domain's bountiful production of rice—the basis of the Edo-period economy—made the Maedas immensely wealthy. They invested their resources in cultural development, often recruiting the country's finest artisans and outfitting them with whatever they required. In the early seventeenth century, Lord Maeda Toshitsune (1593–1658) invited two masters of *maki-e* to ply their craft near Kanazawa Castle. Shimizu Kuhei (?–1688) came from Edo (present-day Tokyo), while Igarashi Dōho I (?–1678) came from Kyoto. The two men created some of the most celebrated works of Kaga *maki-e* and trained their successors in its techniques, laying the foundation for Kanazawa lacquerware's current renown.

Lacquerware is coated in the viscous sap of lacquer trees. The sap must be applied in multiple layers and given sufficient time between each to harden. In addition, lacquerware decorated using the *maki-e* technique requires precious metals. Together, these time-consuming and expensive aspects of producing Kaga *maki-e* meant that only the wealthy could afford it. As a result, the objects that Kaga artisans produced usually reflected the tastes and interests of the ruling elite. Items decorated with Kaga *maki-e* include armaments like saddles, stirrups, and scabbards, as well as household items such as writing boxes and tea ceremony implements. These decorations were often ornate and intricate, depicting scenes from nature that evoked famous poems or auspicious images from folklore.

Kaga *maki-e* compositions often combine several techniques to create three-dimensional scenes with texture and depth. The *shishiai togidashi* technique, for example, combines *togidashi* (burnished) and *taka* (raised) *maki-e*. In burnished *maki-e*, the lacquer and powder design is made in low relief and dried, and the piece is then covered with another layer of black or clear lacquer. This layer is polished down with charcoal until the design is revealed, flush with the new surface. With raised *maki-e*, surface designs are built up with layers of lacquer and charcoal or clay dust before the metallic powder

layer is added. Other decorative techniques, such as crushed eggshell and mother-of-pearl inlay, were often used in tandem with *maki-e* to broaden a design's color palette.

Examples of Kaga *maki-e* in the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art collection include a lavish seventeenth-century bookstand attributed to Shimizu Kuhei and a writing box by Igarashi Dōho I that uses *maki-e* and mother-of-pearl inlay to depict a moonlit autumn field.