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## Title of Object

Burst-bag-type freshwater jar

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## Photo of Object (optional)



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## Object Information

**Artist:** Unknown

**Culture:** Japanese

**Date of Object:** late 16<sup>th</sup>-early 17<sup>th</sup> century

**Country:** Japan

**Accession Number:** 2015.79.293A,B

**File Created:** 4/4/2016

**Material/Medium:** Iga ware; stoneware with natural ash glaze; lacquer cover

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**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Department:** Japanese and Korean Art

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## Tour Topics

Group 5 tour, Wabi-Sabi, beauty, ceramics, food and drink, nature, ritual/ceremony, symbolism, Buddhism

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## Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

Take a moment and walk around this beautiful object that is displayed so nicely in this area. Look carefully at the details.

What are some of things you notice?

What could it be used for?

How would it feel like if you could touch it?

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## Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

This Burst Bag freshwater jar is an example of Iga Ware which is stoneware with natural ash glaze and has a lacquer cover top. Iga ware carries a rich tradition that can be traced back to the 13th to 14th

centuries when tea ceremonies flourished. These jars featured easy-to-hold shapes prized by tea masters and a natural, almost wild beauty actualized by the unique quality of baked clay. Its beauty is one of a kind – untamed, shining and free. At its best, Iga appears to be born rather than made. Good quality clay, rich in minerals was left behind and this has made Iga yaki extremely resistant to heat, thus it can be fired for over 17 days. As a result the ware react well to repeated firing, giving craftsmen an excellent opportunity to experiment with different firing techniques. Today the Iga Providence in Japan is home to many craftsmen who push the concept to its limits with purposefully deformed shapes.

At its best, Iga appears to be born rather than made. With Iga ware, nothing is hidden. You sense, see and feel the clay; from the motion and actions of the potter to the random and somewhat accidental buildup of transparent ash glazes from multiple firings. This combination of earth, air, fire, and water is a perfect display of Wabi-Sabi.

Water jars, such as this “mizusashi”, play a pivotal aesthetic role during the tea ceremonies, for they are the first and last vessels to be brought into the tearooms. This water jar exhibits an organic, misshapen form, but it has been molded freely into an unconventional rectangular shape. The smooth, lacquered lid introduces yet another conspicuous element of contrast. The hex pull is a “wish granting jewel” per Aaron Rio who is the Assistant Curator of Japanese and Korean Art at MIA. Sculptural yet painterly, decorative but functional, this dynamic water jar continues the tradition even as it breaks from it.

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### **Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)**

Iga, the home of Iga yaki, is a small castle town in the mountains of Mie prefecture, famous as the birthplace of Iga ninja. The origins of Iga ware can be traced back some 1,200 years, when peasants in the area began to fire everyday items with agricultural tools. The quality of their products were highly regarded. It flourished as a producer of tea ceremony wares.

“Iga ware (伊賀焼, Iga yaki) is a style of pottery produced in Iga, Mie, Japan, where local clay is fired at high temperatures causing it to crystallize in a reddish hue, often with brown-grey burn marks caused by log ashes and a melting effect of its vidro (feldspathic glass). Iga ware generally reflects Japanese wabi sabi aesthetics with rustic appearance and purposefully deformed shapes, given extra character by the addition of katamimi handles and intentional gouges and dents. Many pieces are finished with the classic, glass-like bidoro glaze formed by ash.” (Wikipedia)

“Iga ware's origins are believed to date to the second half of the 7th century and 8th century A.D. It has been a popular pottery style since the Tsutsui-Momoyama period of Japan, when it was used as tea ceremony wares under master Sen no Rikkyu and others. Iga ware uses native Iga clay which is extremely resistant to heat, reacts well to repeated firing, and is fired over three days in a kiln dug into the ground.” (Wikipedia)

Iga jars epitomizes the Japanese aesthetic of “Wabi Sabi” with its rustic appearance and irregular forms. Wabi-Sabi is said to represent Japanese aesthetics and a world view centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. The aesthetic is sometimes described as one of beauty that is “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete”. It is a concept derived from the Buddhist teaching of the 3 marks of existence - impermanence, suffering and emptiness or absence of self-nature. It is a state of mind.

The tea ceremony is a spiritual practice invented by Zen monks in the 15th century. The preparation and serving of tea was a ceremony intended to remove the participants from the cares of the world for a

brief time and remind them of the beauty in the simplest of things. The selection of an imperfect tea bowl was to remind the guests that nothing is perfect.

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### **Current Mia Label Information (optional)**

A mizusashi holds the fresh water needed at different times during chanoyu, the ceremonial preparation of powdered green tea. This mizusashi has a relatively regular-shaped upper half and an irregular lower half in the “burst bag” (yaburebukuro) style. This distorted beauty epitomizes the aesthetic spirit of the late 16th century. Firing under extreme heat for about 17 days resulted in cracks, unusual glaze effects, and scorch marks that were unpredictable but welcomed.

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### **Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)**

Water Jar (Mizusashi) with Stylized Waves | 2001.735a,b | Work of Art | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/64110>

Article on the Japanese Tea Ceremony, Met Museum:  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jtea/hd\\_jtea.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jtea/hd_jtea.htm)

Iga Ware, Wikipedia article: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iga\\_ware](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iga_ware) (Also has a great photo of the kilns at Iga and a flower vase.)