

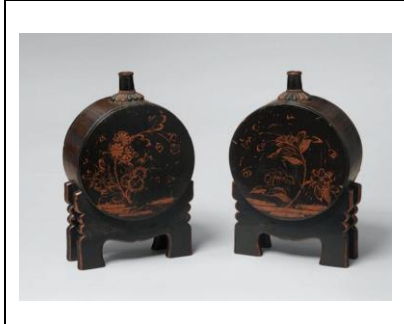
---

## Title of Object

Sake Cask in the Shape of a Drum

---

## Photo of Object (optional)



---

## Object Information

**Artist:** Unknown

**Culture:** Japanese (early Edo Period)

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

**Country:** Japan

**Accession Number:** 2015.79.416.1

**File Created:** 6/1/2016

**Material/Medium:** Negoro ware; wood, black lacquer with red lacquer decoration

**Author of File:** Kristen McDougall

**Department:** Japanese and Korean Art

**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Last Updated/Reviewed:** 7/5/2016

---

## Tour Topics

Group 5 tour, Wabi Sabi, celebration, entertainment/music, food and drink, nature/flowers, ritual/ceremony, symbolism, Buddhism

---

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

1. Take a moment to look closely at these objects. How do you think they were used and by whom?
  2. How would you describe the aesthetic?
  3. Can you compare any celebration today to the cherry blossom viewing parties?
  4. Do have any ritual objects on display that hold a special place in your homes today?
- 

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

Black lacquer sake casks, drum shaped on decorative stands with chrysanthemum spouts (probably had chrysanthemum stoppers at one time). Face decorated with chrysanthemum flowers and grasses executed in red lacquer—the only element that makes these asymmetrical. These casks are from a time

when chrysanthemum cultivation reached its height, and new varieties were introduced for potted plants and popular in arrangements. Very vogue.

These are from a family of lacquer wares called Negoro. It originated in the 14th century under the creativity of resident monks at a temple complex in Negoro, Wakayama prefecture (Hone Soo Island). Characteristics of Negoro ware are: Clean stark lines, severity and stability of shape, a palette of red and black, limited adornment, and an aura of reserve, restraint, and resilience. Negoro was all at once utilitarian, stoic, and deeply attractive.

Utilitarianism was paramount. Beauty may have been an afterthought at the time, however it is at the core of our appreciation of the ware today. The severe, stark, simple lines and surfaces are perfectly modern in their minimalist nature. Besides the painted flowers and grasses, the only decorative flourishes on these casks are the scroll shape of the stand and of the mouths (pouring spouts) at the tops on the vessels, which are typically stylized chrysanthemum flowers. Understated elegance.

Negoro has a tendency to suffer from use, the upper layers of red worn down to the black below. Rather than being considered damage, the effect is like patina on an ancient bronze. In the case of the lacquer, one sees in the wear and tear the history of a useful and well-appreciated life.

---

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

Sake is an important part of Japanese culture. Many centuries ago the Japanese began blending their staple food, rice, with pure water and koi, something like yeast to make sake, taking advantage of nature and local environmental conditions to create a distinctive brew. Sake became Japan's traditional alcoholic beverage, and so pervasive that in Japanese, the word for alcohol is simply "sake." Today some 1600 breweries in every region of the country are engaged in the production of the national beverage, producing more than 10,000 brands of sake.

For centuries sake has been shared by family members and friends and has played a big role in religious festivities, agricultural rites, and many different ceremonial events, from marriages to funerals. During WWII, kamikaze pilots even drank sake prior to carrying out their missions.

Hanami, or cherry blossom viewing, is an important festivity that is many centuries old. It was originally used to give thanks for that year's harvest as well as kick off the rice planting season. People believed spirits resided inside the Sakura, or cherry trees and they made offerings to them. Afterwards, they partook of the offering with sake and feasts underneath the blossoming boughs. Sometimes poems would be written praising the delicate flowers, which were seen as a metaphor for life itself, luminous and beautiful yet fleeting and ephemeral (in the spirit of wabi-sabi).

Today, people are more interested in the food and drinks accompanying a hanami party than actually viewing the flowers themselves! Even so, sake is more than a drink taken to enjoy a tipsy time—it also serves a vital social purpose at the defining moments in life.

Wabi-sabi represents Japanese aesthetics and a Japanese 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 impermanence, suffering, and emptiness or absence of self-nature. Characteristics of the wabi-sabi aesthetic include asymmetry, asperity, simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, intimacy, and appreciation of the integrity of natural objects and processes. The modern study of Japanese aesthetics only started a little over two

hundred years ago in the West. These ideals, and others, underpin much of Japanese cultural and aesthetic norms on what is considered tasteful or beautiful. Thus, while seen as a philosophy in Western societies, the concept of aesthetics in Japan is seen as an integral part of daily life. These casks embody the aesthetic of wabi-sabi with their clean lines, simplicity, and patina that exhibits a useful and well-appreciated life.

---

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

Click here to enter text.

---

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

Wikipedia article on sake: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sake>

Wikipedia article on Hanami: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanami>

Mia label (not yet online, as of 7/5/16)

Article on Negoro Ware, by curator Wayne Crothers, from an exhibition at the NGV (National Gallery of Victoria): <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/negoro-lacquer-the-refined-beauty-and-rustic-ambience-of-medieval-japan/>