
Title of Object

Wash basin with legs

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Culture: Japanese

Date of Object: 1353 or 1413

Country: Japan

Accession Number: 2015.79.410

File Created: 5/8/2016

Material/Medium: Negoro ware; red and black lacquer with exposed zelkova (keyaki) wood

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Tour Topics

Group 5 tour, Wabi Sabi, ancient culture, nature, ritual/ceremony, symbolism, Shinto, Buddhism

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

- 1) Describe the appearance of the wash basin.
 - 2) Discuss the principles of wabi and sabi. How do the characteristics in the appearance of the wash basin demonstrate wabi and sabi?
 - 3) In the U.S., what do we treasure as wabi and sabi?
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Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

Ceremonial wash basin (tarai) made of a carved wood core, coated with layers of black and red lacquer and an exposed band of natural keyaki wood, exhibiting a beautiful wood grain. The underside of the basin is inscribed with the location of use and a date of either 1353 or 1413 dependent on which calendar is used. Either date makes the wash basin one of the oldest of its kind in existence.

Negoro ware refers to simple and elegant lacquer objects that were produced in the area of a Buddhist temple at Negoro-ji, south of Osaka. Red objects were regarded as auspicious and suitable to accompany a monk's everyday existence.

Since Neolithic times the sap of the lacquer tree (Japanese Sumac) has been used as a protective water proof coating and an adhesive. The edges of the objects are strengthened with cloth and the surface is coated and smoothed with many coats of base lacquer. Then three coats of black lacquer and finally one coat of red cinnabar pigmented lacquer is applied with a spatula to leave distinctive lines that trace the movements of the maker's hand.

Cinnabar--mercuric sulfide, the principle ore of mercury.

Keyaki wood—The tree is a member of the elm family and is native to Japan, China, and Korea. It is a large shade tree and is resistant to Dutch elm disease.

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

Basins of this type were containers for water used for rinsing the hands or catching the water poured over the hands of monks in a ritual of purification.

Purification rituals lie at the core of Shinto beliefs, and were also adopted in Buddhist rituals, as seen by the existence of this wash basin. In Shinto, before entering a temple or shrine, a person needs to be cleansed of the unnatural world to keep the shrine and atmosphere pure. This begins the journey of experiencing the various phases of the ceremonies and aids in the process of distancing the mind from the concerns of daily life and symbolizes becoming one with the natural world.

Shinto--from the Chinese words for "sacred way" or "way of the gods". The religion encouraged the development of apparently simple and rustic, but deceptively complex, art forms and rituals.

In reference to another Negoro ware wash basin in Mia's collections (2002.146.1): "The Negoro-ware basin originally held water for rinsing hands in preparation for a Buddhist ritual ceremony of repentance performed on the fifteenth day of each month. The term negoro refers to simple but elegant objects covered with base coats of black lacquer over which red lacquer was applied. Through repeated use, the red wears away, revealing the black lacquer beneath. This sense of age and loving use greatly appealed to tea masters who collected old negoro pieces for use in their tea ceremonies."

The true essence of Negoro ware is found in its age and the generations of affectionate, respectful use that imbues the object with the spirit of wabi and sabi. Wabi is the aesthetic of beauty found in imperfection and sabi is an affection for the old and faded. With regular use the wearing and reduction of the outer red lacquer gradually reveals the black lacquer beneath, creating an ever changing beauty that can only result from continual use and the passage of time. Cracks, wear, damage, splits, texturing, and irregularities enhance the harmonious appearance of the object's surface. This natural evolution of use enhances the object's appearance and status.

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

[Click here to enter text.](#)

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

National Gallery of Victoria article on Negoro Lacquer by Wayne Crothers, Curator of Asian Art:
<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/negoro-lacquer/>

Exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum of Negoro Ware:
http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=346&lang=en

Wikipedia article on Wabi-sabi: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabi-sabi>

Bridge of Dreams, Mary Griggs Burke collection handbook, Met Museum (full content in PDF):
<http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15324coll10/id/153737>

Article on *Shinto Purification Rituals* by James W. Boyd and Ron G. Williams, Professors of Philosophy at Colorado State University: <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/ReIn275/Shinto-purification-rituals.htm>

Article on Wabi-sabi by Robyn Griggs Lawrence in the Utne Reader: <http://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/wabi-sabi.aspx>

Japanese Lacquer Ware (book) in Docent Library

Japanese Exhibition Catalogue in Docent Library