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## Gifts of Gold: The Art of Japanese Lacquer Boxes Timeline Rewall Panel

Fairfield University Art Museum

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# Timeline of Japanese Historical Periods and Lacquer Arts

## 10,000-300 BCE Jomon period

- First known use of lacquer in Japan as a coating on objects made of pottery, wood, and bamboo

## 300 BCE-538 CE Yayoi and Kofun periods

### 538-710 CE Asuka period

- Lacquer manufacturing techniques develop as a result of increased contact with China and Korea

### 710-794 Nara period

- *Maki-e* lacquer decoration techniques of sprinkled metal powders first appear; dry lacquer (*kanshitsu*) techniques used for Buddhist sculpture
- The Taihō Code of 710 establishes a lacquer department under the Ministry of Finance

### 794-1185 Heian period

- The capital is moved to present-day Kyoto, which becomes—and remains—a center of *maki-e* lacquer decoration
- Court nobles patronize lacquer production and decoration, such as altar furnishings, containers for sacred texts, boxes for personal possessions, dining utensils and architectural elements
- Murasaki Shikibu, a lady in waiting to the empress, writes *The Tale of Genji* in circa 1000 CE

### 1185-1333 Kamakura period

- Civil wars during the late 12th century lead to the establishment of the first shogunate; members of the warrior class become important new patrons of lacquerwares
- Earliest examples of black and red Negoro ware lacquers made

### 1333-1568 Muromachi period

- Shoguns and elite warriors commission fine works of *maki-e* from family-based lacquer workshops in Kyoto, as literary culture flourishes
- The ruling Ashikaga family of shoguns enthusiastically collects Chinese arts, including carved lacquer. Chinese styles and themes, such as the “eight views” are adapted by Japanese poets and painters, and incorporated in lacquer designs

### 1568-1600 Momoyama period

- A prolonged period of armed conflicts between rival warlords from the late 15th through 16th centuries
- Masters of the tea ceremony develop a taste for rustic Japanese wares over imported Chinese objects; they also begin to use Japanese lacquer tea caddies
- Japanese lacquer is exported during trade with Portuguese and Dutch merchants in the 16th and early 17th centuries, including specially-produced export lacquer featuring European shapes and iconography
- The popular Kōdaiji style of lacquers develops, named after warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s mortuary temple

### 1615-1868 Edo period

- The Tokugawa shogunate rules over feudal domains led by loyal warlords, for almost three centuries of peace. Japan pursues an official “closed door” policy toward foreign trade and contact
- Lacquer workshops meet the demands of elite warrior families for elaborate bridal trousseaus, furniture, boxes, and architectural decoration
- Commerce and merchant classes flourish in urban centers like Edo (modern Tokyo), resulting in new lacquer patrons and production systems
- Lacquer artists frequently collaborate on designs with artists of other media, exemplified by Rinpa-school artist like Hon’ami Kōetsu and Ogata Kōrin

### 1868-1912 Meiji period

- Traditional systems of lacquer patronage and production are severely disrupted after the “opening” of Japan to foreign trade in 1854 and the subsequent overthrow of the shogunate
- The new Meiji government pursues rapid industrialization and modernization, following Western models
- Later in the period, the lacquer industry revives as part of a broader program of revaluing native Japanese crafts, in part due to international acclaim at world’s fairs and expositions

### 1912-1926 Taisho era

- In addition to the traditional family-based apprentice system, new formal art schools provide training in multiple disciplines for lacquer artists
- Modernism contributes to new and individualistic designs, and greater social mobility encourages more diverse patronage of lacquerwares
- Increasing nationalism fuels continued pride in and patronage of native arts

### 1926-1989 Showa era

- The lacquer industry is interrupted by increased militarism and World War II; raw materials are difficult to obtain, and the government restricts the production and sale of luxury articles
- Post-war laws for the protection of cultural properties revives traditional lacquer techniques and designs, including the designation of lacquer artists as “Living National Treasures”

### 1989-2019 Heisei era

- Continuing post-war developments, contemporary artists create individualistic, expressive designs and innovative forms in lacquer; traditional workshops sustain and adapt designs and forms inherited from the long history of lacquer art in Japan

### 2019-present Reiwa era