

Unknown Japanese

Nobleman's Meal Table (Kakeban),

ca. 14th-15th century

Red and black lacquer on wood (Negoro ware)

Yale University Art Gallery; Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.,

Class of 1913, Fund

2002.88.1

This table exemplifies a style of red and black lacquers called Negoro-ware, named after the Japanese temple Negoro-ji near Osaka, where the style initially developed in the 13th century. The undecorated surfaces and simple, elegant forms of Negoro wares reflect their original utilitarian function in temple settings. Tray-tables like this were also used in banquets and daily dining among noble and samurai households in medieval Japan, with individual bowls and plates – often also of lacquer – placed on top of a table before each diner.

Unknown Japanese

Gold Lacquer Writing Box with Cranes,

early 19th century

Edo Period (1615-1868)

Maki-e gold and lacquer on wood

Fairfield University Art Museum; Partial Gift of Erik

Thomsen Gallery and 2016 Museum

Patron's Circle Purchase (2016.23.1)

The lid of this writing box displays a large pair of cranes in gold low relief, using the raised sprinkled picture (*takamaki-e*) technique. Symbolic of longevity, good fortune, and marital fidelity, cranes were particularly appropriate for New Year's or wedding gifts. While cranes do not have a strong seasonal association, the rest of the box features decidedly autumnal motifs: the interior of the lid echoes the diagonal composition of the front, showing autumn grasses, flowers, and bell crickets (*suzumushi*) - an insect appreciated for its autumn song. This box is a recent acquisition by the Fairfield University Art Museum.

Hasegawa Gyokujun 長谷川玉純 (1863-1921)

The Eight Views of Ōmi, ca. 1910

Meiji era (1868-1912)

Eight-panel folding screen

Ink, ink wash, and light color on silk

Private Collection, courtesy of Erik Thomsen

Composed of eight individual paintings mounted on a screen, the codified “Eight Views of Ōmi” depicted from right to left are: Sunset Glow at Seta, Clearing Weather at Awazu, Autumn Moon at Ishiyama, Returning Sails at Yabase, Evening Bell at Mii Temple, Night Rain at Karasaki, Descending Geese at Katada, and Evening Snow on Mount Hira.

In its monochrome ink medium and compositional strategies, this early 20th century painting echoes landscapes in the Chinese tradition, while incorporating elements of Western perspective and atmospheric ink washes of the Kyoto-based painting school whose techniques the artist, Hasegawa Gyokujun, inherited.

Unknown Japanese

Writing Box with Genji Scene, 18th century

Edo period (1615-1868)

Maki-e gold lacquer on wood

Private Collection, courtesy of Erik Thomsen

These two writing boxes depict canonical themes from classical Japanese literature and poetry.

The *Writing Box with Genji Scene* shows a group of courtiers on a pine-covered shore, with a shrine gate, bridge, and a boat carrying two women in the background; similar compositions appear in many painted albums of the *Tale of Genji* in the Edo period. In the chapter of the tale referenced here, Prince Genji makes a pilgrimage to the Sumiyoshi Shrine to give thanks to the gods for his recent success and promotion at court. Coincidentally, his former lover is also on pilgrimage - shown in the boat at the rear - but she dares not approach Genji's grand party due to their difference in social status. When he later learns of her presence in the area, they exchange poems. The artist of this box uses rich, warm pear-skin (*nashiji*) ground, with figures and landscape elements rendered mainly in gold.

Storage of Lacquer Boxes

Many lacquerwares are themselves containers for tea, papers, or writing utensils, but they also come accompanied by their own containers for storage. These tea caddies, for example, are fitted with silk brocade bags, which protect the lacquer finish and decoration, and wooden boxes (*tomobako*) with silk cords. One also has a plain black lacquer outermost box.

Although artists sometimes signed the lacquer objects themselves, more commonly, inscriptions (including signatures, titles, attributions, and other descriptive information) appear on the wooden *tomobako*. These outer boxes are integral to the art object and are themselves objects of aesthetic and connoisseurial attention; after a tea ceremony, for example, guests may examine the bag, the box with its calligraphy, along with the caddy. In the early days of Westerners collecting Japanese arts, however, these “accessories” were frequently discarded.