

UNESCO City of Crafts and Folk Art — Kanazawa, the City of Handiwork

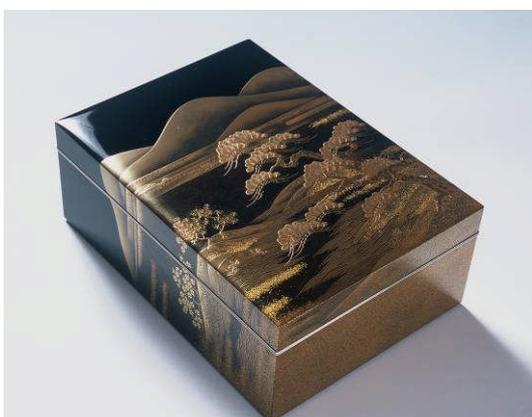
Traditional Crafts in Kanazawa

Traditional crafts in Kanazawa cannot be discussed without mentioning the influence of Lord Maeda of the Kaga clan. The lords of the Maeda Family invited skilled craftspeople from Kyoto and Edo, and the techniques brought in by these artisans combined to integrate the dynamism and elegance of the warrior culture, which in turn defined Kanazawa's unique style.

The city of Kanazawa has remained free of major natural disasters and untouched by war for over 420 years since the reign of the Lords of Maeda. Thanks to the cultural patronage by the Lords, the tea ceremony and traditional chants found their way into citizen's homes, and many local traditional crafts still remain in their daily lives.

Kanazawa gold leaf

Although the history of Kanazawa gold leafing dates back to the Azuchi Momoyama Period (1568~1603), it was the Meiji Period (1868~1912) that saw the rapid rise of Kanazawa's country-wide reputation for gold leafing production due to the superiority of its leafing technology and the excellent quality of Kanazawa's water used in the manufacturing process. Kanazawa now accounts for 99% or more of Japan's gold leaf production, and 100% of silver and brass leafing. The unique characteristics of Kanazawa gold leaf – it never becomes discolored or oxidized – make it indispensable for the production of a wide range of arts and crafts, and in recent years, a variety of new uses have opened up, including interior accessories.



Kanazawa lacquer ware

Kanazawa lacquer ware started when the prestigious maki-e artist Igarashi Doho was invited from Kyoto by the third lord of Kaga, Maeda Toshitsune, and developed into a unique combination of the elegance of aristocratic culture and the strength of the warrior culture. The techniques have been passed down through masters and students of the Kaga clan workshop and townspeople from the Edo Period (1603~1868) until today. Kanazawa lacquer ware is further characterized by the one-by-one production of tea utensils and internal furnishings as artistic handicraft rather than mass-produced goods.



Kaga-yuzen silk dyeing

The origins of Kaga-yuzen silk dyeing can be traced back to the Kaga region's unique Umezome dyeing technique which uses materials from plum trees. In the early 18th century, Miyazaki Yuzensai, a kimono pattern designer, established the foundation of Yuzen silk dyeing. The realistic patterns of grass and flowers which incorporate the style of the Kano school are a stark contrast to the highly designed style of Kyo-yuzen.

Kaga-yuzen established a system in which a single artisan completed every step of production, from design to dyeing, by themselves. Nowadays, the Kaga-yuzen silk dyeing techniques are also being applied to western-style dresses.

Kanazawa Kutani porcelain

The origins of Kanazawa Kutani porcelain can be traced back to 1807, during the rule of the 11th lord of Kaga, Maeda Narinaga, when Aoki Mokubei, a famous potter in Kyoto who had been brought to the clan as a technician, opened the Kasugayama kiln. After Mokubei left Kanazawa, a warrior of the Kaga clan opened the Minzan kiln, and created the first Kutani porcelain.

Kanazawa Kutani is characterized by miniature painting, the use of high-viscosity paint, and its unique red colors. The detailed brushwork required for this works fine characters gives it a sense of elegance and refinement.

Recently, a wide variety of new Kutani products have been created, such as wine glasses with Kutani decoration on their legs and bases.



Kaga embroidery

Kaga embroidery was brought from Kyoto as a decorative technique for cloths and attire for the Buddhist ceremony at the beginning of the Muromachi Period (1336~1573). In the feudal period, Kaga embroidery was used on battle surcoats for clan lords, as well as for the clothing of the wives of lords. Moreover, in conjunction with the development of Yuzen silk dyeing, greater technical sophistication was required to bring out the dyed patterns. Kaga embroidery is characterized by the use of silk, gold, and silver thread to create patterns that look three-dimensional, painstakingly implementing delicate technology stitch by stitch. In recent years, Kaga embroidery has been used on a variety of daily sundries and tapestries.





Kanazawa Buddhist home altars

In Kanazawa, the Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism grew in influence over the lives of the common people, resulting in demand for home altars much higher than other regions in Japan. Artisans who had been summoned to the workshop of the clan responded to this demand.

The production of Buddhist altars fully utilizes a variety of craft techniques by wood workers, painters, lacquerers, engravers, fitting workers. In addition, as Kanazawa was also home to the production of gold leafing, an abundance of gold leafing was also used. The stately and elegant appearance of Buddhist altars in Kanazawa is achieved through the careful integration of various traditional crafts.

Kaga Inlaying

Kaga inlaying is a metal decoration method used for sword accoutrements, etc. and is a skill vital to warrior clans. Owing to the promotion by the second lord of Kaga, Maeda Toshinaga, the inlay technology became highly developed in Kanazawa.

In particular, saddle stirrups decorated with Kaga inlaying that coupled a technique to prevent peeling regardless of the strength of impact, with an ingenious and elegant design, garnered incomparable distinction.

Kaga inlaying is valued as an artistic handicraft not only inside Japan but also worldwide, and excellent pieces can be found in museums around the world.



Ohi ware

Ohi ware began as a type of Raku potteries that originated with the master potter Chozaemon, the highest pupil of 4th master of the Raku Clan, Ichinyu, who accompanied Sen Soshitsu Senso, the fourth generation Urasenke tea master, when he was summoned from Kyoto by the fifth lord of Kaga, Maeda Tsunanori.

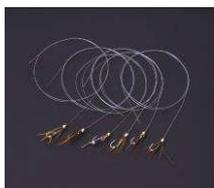
Ohi ware is characterized by the unique style of production in which the shape is formed by hand without using a potter's wheel. After the firing stage, the piece is quickly taken out of the kiln while the glaze is still melting. The amber-colored glaze makes the vibrant green of tea stand out, unlike the black or red firing of the Kyoto Raku style.



Other Traditional Crafts

Kaga fishing flies

Flies for fishing sweet fish were made by warriors of the Kaga clan in the feudal age. Gold leaf is applied to the feathers of wild geese..



Tea kettles

Miyazaki Yoshikazu, the son of Miyazaki Hikokuro who was a follower of the fifth Lord of Kaga, was the first to produce this type of kettle for the tea ceremony. The kettles feature a distinctive rough surface and were produced using an integrated production system.



Gongs

The production method for gongs was first developed by gong maker Uozumi Iraku, a Living National Treasure, whose techniques have been handed down for generations.



Futamata Japanese paper

Futamata paper was produced for public documents and developed under the protection of the Kaga clan. High quality paper called Kaga housho has been made since ancient times.



Kanazawa Japanese-style umbrellas

This type of umbrella was produced in the Edo, Meiji and Taisho periods (1603~1926) and is made of durable Japanese paper.



Sangen 3-stringed musical instrument

Sangen was performed as background music for plays and in entertainment districts. In the Higashi, Nishi and Kazue-machi chaya tea districts, the tone of *sangen* attracted people for entertainment.



Kaga mizuhiki ceremonial package strings

Mizuhiki, which is made of strings of paper, was used as an ornamental article on celebratory occasions. The technique of making artistic works using *mizuhiki* is still being practiced and developed.



Bamboo crafts

The origin of bamboo crafts dates back to the founding of a bamboo workshop by a lord in the Edo period. Techniques for making artistic bamboo works developed alongside the tea ceremony and flower arrangement.



Kaga lanterns

Kaga paper lanterns were produced as a replacement for torches. Their frames made of rings of bamboo string make them much more resistant to the elements.



Kanazawa paulownia craftwork

Artistic works are produced by skillful wood-turners using high quality paulownia. Patterns based on traditional Kaga *makie* lacquer ware designs are burned into the surface of the wood.



Local folk toys

The history of the dolls dates back to the Edo period when the third lord of Kaga, Maeda Toshitsune commissioned work by doll creators. Warriors made dolls as a side job, and the technique of making dolls was handed down for generations.



Kaga poles

Kaga fishing rods, which are lacquer-coating and decorated, are regarded as the height of sophistication for their elegant appearance and solidity.



Koto harp

Some *koto* instruments are decorated with *makie* or *raden* technique for lacquer ware using gold leafing and seashells. They are beautiful artistic works in their own right.



Kanazawa mounting

The refined techniques of scroll mounters have been documented since the Edo period and are now used to renovate important cultural assets.

