

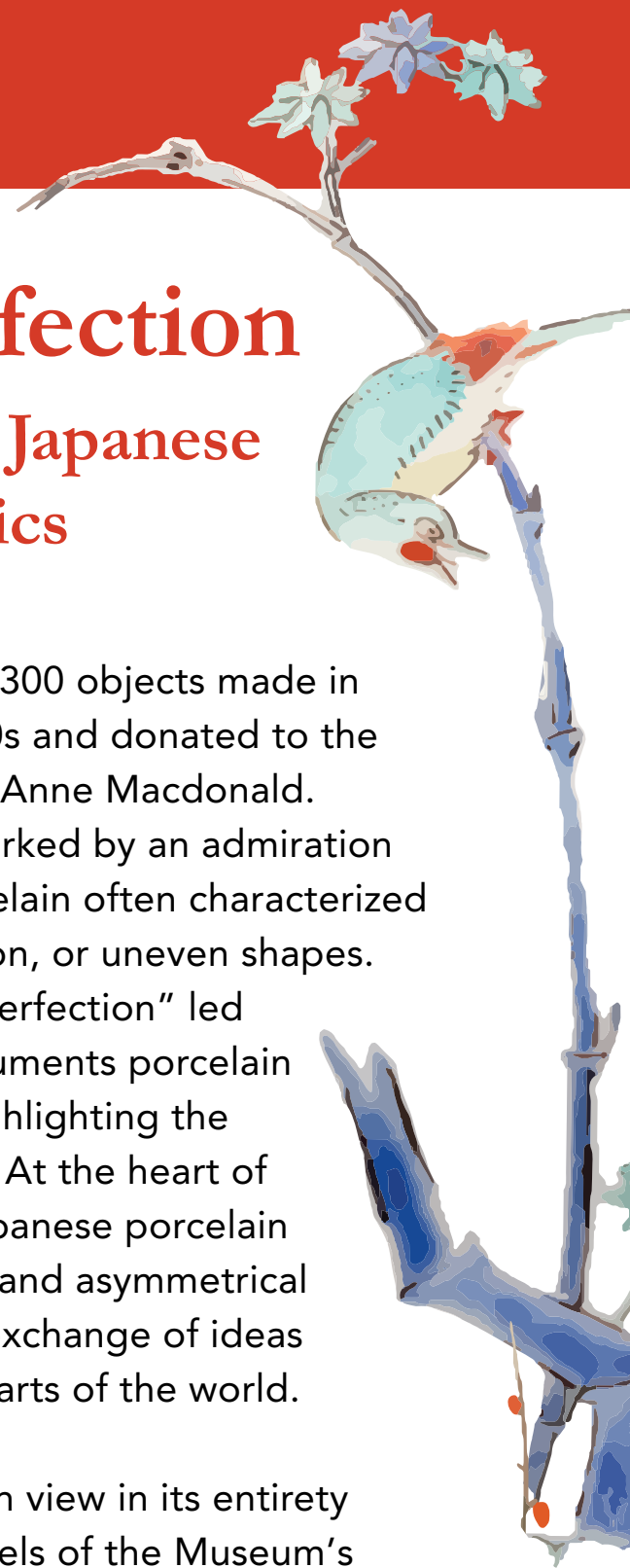


In Search of Imperfection

The Macdonald Collection of Japanese and Japanese-Inspired Ceramics

The Macdonald Collection brings together over 300 objects made in Japan, China, and Europe in the 1600s and 1700s and donated to the Gardiner Museum by William and the late Molly Anne Macdonald. The Macdonalds' collecting journey was first sparked by an admiration for the imperfect beauty of early Japanese porcelain often characterized by a taste for asymmetry, spontaneous decoration, or uneven shapes. What they called an "adventure in search of imperfection" led to the formation of a unique collection that documents porcelain production in the town of Arita, Japan, while highlighting the role of ceramics in fostering global connections. At the heart of their vision was a desire to demonstrate how Japanese porcelain in the Kakiemon style — with its bright enamels and asymmetrical designs — functioned as both a vehicle for the exchange of ideas and a source of inspiration for makers in other parts of the world.

For the first time, the Macdonald Collection is on view in its entirety throughout the Museum. Spanning the three levels of the Museum's stairwell, the Courtois Gallery features a special display that invites you to discover Japanese porcelain from the early Edo period (1603–1868) and Japanese-inspired ceramics through the themes of nature, leisure, and global trade. Continue your visit in the Macdonald Gallery on the second floor to delve deeper into some of these histories.



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Basement

Symbolic Nature

Nature was a predominant source of inspiration across the arts of the early Edo period (1603–1868). Images of birds with auspicious meanings take flight on this group of objects. Among them, the quail symbolized peace and harmony, while the egret stood for grace and beauty. Figures of animals associated with the twelve signs of the zodiac — such as the dog and rooster — were displayed in homes to welcome the New Year. In the late 1600s, these figurines were also exported to Europe alongside other Kakiemon-style porcelain on which animal and mythical creatures coexist. The dragon and tiger were a frequent pair, symbolizing Heaven and Earth respectively. In addition, the tiger often shared space with the bamboo plant, representing moral integrity. The phoenix, a colourful, imaginary bird with long tail-feathers, signified political authority. The meanings of these motifs were lost on European viewers and the artists who appropriated them onto ceramics.

(LEFT TO RIGHT)

1

Lozenge-shaped dish with peacock

Japan, Arita, ca. 1650

T15.2.53

Saucer dish with nightingale on a cage pattern

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680-1700

G04.18.39

Pair of lozenge-shaped dishes with quails

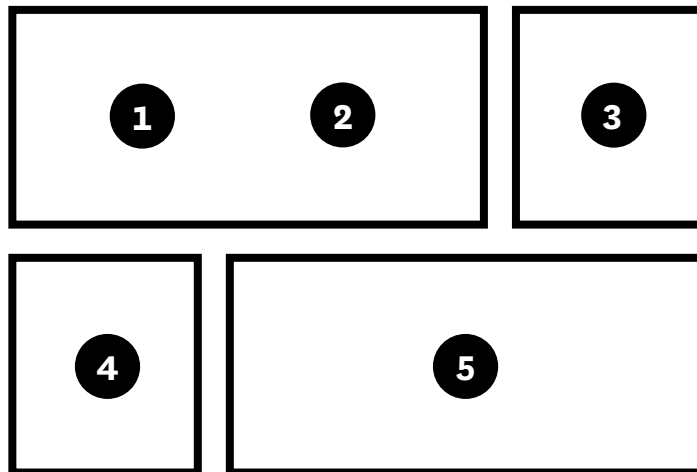
Japan, Arita, ca. 1700

G04.18.47

Dishes with cranes and a tortoise

Japan, Arita, ca. 1735-40

G11.13.4



2

Imari-style plate with landscape

Japan, Arita, ca. 1850

T15.2.1

Dish with landscape

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-1700

G04.18.43

Dish with landscape

Japan, Arita, mid-late 17th century

G24.17.3

3

Figure of a puppy

Japan, Arita, ca. 168-90

L09.12.14

Figure of a cockerel

Japan, Arita, ca. 1700-25

G05.11.16

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4

Dish with egrets

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670
G24.17.2

Bottle with cranes

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660-80
T15.2.63

Incense boxes shaped as a sparrow and a wagtail

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670
G20.9.4

Dish with two phoenixes in a tree

Japan, Arita, ca. 1720-30
L09.15.7

Dish with three tigers

China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1700-20
L09.13.40

Small saucer with dragon and tiger

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680
L09.15.11

5

Bowl with a dragon

Japan, Arita, early 1700s
G07.18.12

Decagonal dish with tiger and bamboo

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90
G10.3.23

Dish with phoenixes

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680-1700
G07.18.11

Lobed dish with phoenix

England, Chelsea, ca. 1752-55
L09.13.45

Foliated dish with phoenixes

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90
G05.12.19

Octagonal dish with double phoenix design

England, Chelsea, ca. 1750-52
G10.3.3

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Second Floor

Porcelain at Home

Most of the objects assembled here were used by Japanese consumers during the early Edo period (1603–1868), an era characterized by political stability and economic growth. This context encouraged leisure activities and the demand for fashionable ceramics. For instance, the kaiseki, the multi-course meal that followed the ritual of the tea ceremony, was presented using a variety of small-size dishes together on a tray. The smaller plates decorated in blue and white (sometsuke) and the brightly coloured Ko-Kutani wares likely served this function. Incense burning, known as the “way of incense,” was another popular pastime that called for refined utensils. The appreciation of nature and gardens finds expression through the vast range of floral motifs encountered on the objects, as well as vases used in the creation of seasonal displays of flowers.

(LEFT TO RIGHT)

1

Flask

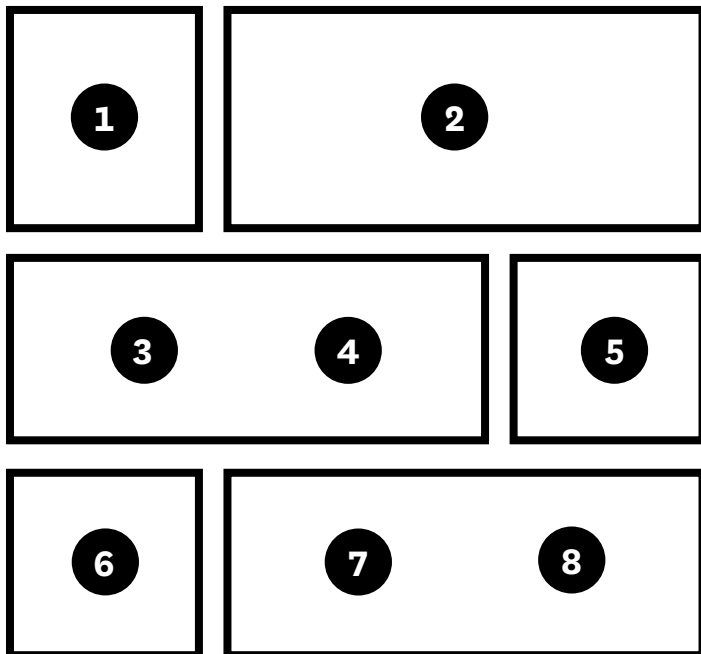
Japan, Arita, ca. 1650-60
G11.13.8

Covered jar

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660-80
G08.6.12

Covered jar with birds and flowers

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90
L09.12.20



2

Dish with landscape

Japan, Hizen, mid-late 17th century
G23.12.1

Blue turnip plate

Japan, Hizen, ca. 1650
G23.12.2

Dish with landscape

Japan, Arita, ca. 1620-40
G20.9.1

Dish with stylized circle motif

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660-80
L09.13.13

Dish with butterfly and flower

Japan, Arita, ca. 1620-40
G20.14.2

Dish with waves

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-80
G20.9.5

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Dish with two geese

Japan, Arita, ca. 1630-50

T15.2.8

Blue leaf-shaped plate

Japan, Arita, ca. 1650

L13.1.4

Shoki-Imari plate with foliage

Japan, Arita, ca. 1630-40

T15.2.6

3

Pair of vases with pomegranate and bat

Japan, Arita, ca. 1650-60

G20.14.1

Water-dropper with Bijin and puppy

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680

T15.2.77

4

Nabeshima dish with hydrangea

Japan, Arita, late 1600s

G23.13.1

Nabeshima dish with woven bamboo design

Japan, Arita, late 1600s-early 1700s

G23.12.4

Dish with three leaves (Ko-Kutani style)

Japan, Arita, mid-1600s, possibly modern

G20.9.6

Dish with fish motif (Ko-Kutani style)

Japan, Arita, late 1660s

G07.18.14

5

Picnic coaster

Japan, Arita, ca. 1700

G08.6.11

Dish with prunus and bamboo

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680-1710

G05.12.21

Flower basket with European mounts

Japan, Arita, ca. 1690-1710

G10.3.35

6

Double leaf-form dish (Ko-Kutani style)

Japan, Arita, mid-1600s

T15.2.44

Square dish with paulownia crests (Ko-Kutani style)

Japan, Arita, 1653

G24.20.5

Nabeshima dish with gourd

Japan, Arita, mid-1600s

G11.13.6

Nabeshima dish with impressed pattern

Japan, Arita, ca. 1650

G20.9.7

Lozenge shaped dish (Ko-Kutani style)

Japan, Arita, mid-1600s

L09.15.3

Dish with maple leaf (Ko-Kutani style)

Japan, Arita, ca. 1650-60

G24.17.4

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7

Incense burner and cover

Japan, Arita, ca. 1700

G05.11.14

Incense burner (cover missing)

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660

G10.3.26

Incense burner with *shishi* dog finial

Japan, Arita, ca. 1700-20

G05.12.23

Dish with flowers and fans

Japan, Arita, ca. 1650-60

T15.2.5

Pair of *Bijin* (beauties)

Japan, Arita, ca. 1690-1710

G05.12.25

8

Pair of covered jars with peony and pomegranate

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660

G04.18.34

Kakiemon-style dish with flowers

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90

G07.18.16

Kakiemon-style bowl with "Three Friends of the Winter"

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680-1700

G08.6.9

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Third Floor

Trade and the Craze for Kakiemon

Kakiemon-style porcelain was made in Arita, Japan, from the 1670s to the 1690s. This type of ceramic is characterized by a creamy-white porcelain body, sparse and asymmetrical decoration, and a bright palette of coloured enamels, including a rich orange inspired by the colour of persimmons (kaki in Japanese). Made primarily for export, Kakiemon wares reached Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe alongside other luxury commodities traded by the Dutch East India Company and Chinese merchants. In Europe, the style caused a sensation. In the 1700s, consumer demand prompted makers to imitate and transform its shapes and decorative language dominated by flora, animals, and mythical creatures. Primarily made in Europe for dining and the consumption of hot drinks, the objects on display reflect the fashion and craze for Kakiemon.

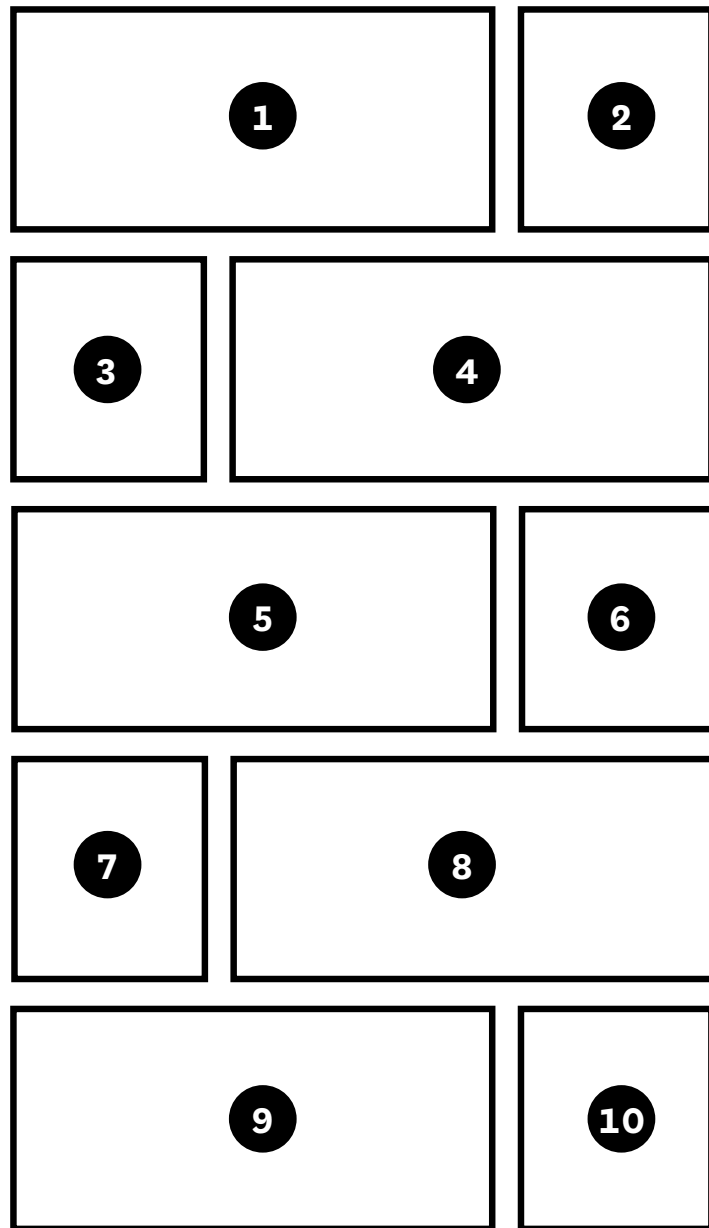
(LEFT TO RIGHT)

1

Milk-glass vase with quail pattern
England, Staffordshire, ca. 1755
G05.12.7

Pair of vases with Japanese style designs
Germany, Frankenthal, ca. 1756-59
G10.3.21

Pair of jars after Japanese originals
England, Chelsea, ca. 1752-55
G05.12.6



Globular bottles with Buddhistic beasts
China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1700-20; decorated in the Netherlands ca. 1730
G23.13.5

Pair of hexagonal flasks
Japan, Arita, ca. 1720
G07.18.15

Pair of bottles
France, Samson, Edmé and Cie, ca. 1850-1900
G11.13.7

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Vase with crane

China, Jingdezhen, c.1700; decorated in
Netherlands, ca. 1720
T15.2.51

Vase with quail design

Japan, Arita, ca. 1990
G10.3.24

2

Square bottle

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40
G07.18.7

Small vase with banded hedge

England, Bow, ca. 1750-55
G10.3.6

Vase with phoenix

England, Bow, ca. 1755
G08.6.1

Cylindrical jar

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660-80
G08.6.8

3

Dish with flowers

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90
G04.18.42

Dish with birds

Japan, Arita, ca. 1690-1700
L09.13.17

Dish with phoenix

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670
G05.12.16

Dish with flowering plant

Japan, Arita, early 1700s
G04.18.45

4

(TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT)

Dish with bamboo and prunus

De Dubbelde Schenkkann, The Netherlands,
ca. 1700-30
G04.18.32

Dish with bird in a tree

Japan, Arita, ca. 1750-80
T15.2.30

Dish with crane

China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1700-20; decorated in
the Netherlands, ca. 1710-20
G04.18.1

Dish with quail pattern

England, Flight Barr & Barr, ca. 1800
L09.13.65

Dish with perched birds

China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1720; decorated in the
Netherlands
L09.13.36

Scalloped dish with quail

England, Bow, ca. 1755-60
G04.18.27

(BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT)

Platter with quail pattern

England, Bow, ca. 1755
L09.13.29

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Leaf-shaped dish with bird and banded hedges

England, Worcester, ca. 1755-58
G04.18.28

Dish with perched bird and landscapes

China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1725; decorated in the Netherlands
L09.13.35

Peach-shaped dish

England, Chelsea, ca. 1750-52
G04.18.18

Lobed dish with flowering plants

England, Chelsea, ca. 1752-55
G04.18.22

Bowl with flowering plants

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1765
G04.18.8

5

Sauceboat with quail

China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1730-40; decorated in England ca. 1740-1750
G07.18.1

Sauceboat with quail and foliage design

England, Philip Christian and Co., ca. 1757
T15.2.14

Two-handled sauceboat with bird and flowering plants

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730-40
G05.12.13

Creamer with quail pattern

England, Chelsea, ca. 1752-53
G04.18.23

Kakiemon-style tureen

England, Bow, ca. 1755-60
G07.18.4

Bowl with a bird on branch

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1725; decorated in The Netherlands, ca. 1725-50
G11.13.3

Octagonal bowl with "Three Friends of Winter"

Japan, Arita, ca. 1690-1710
G04.18.41

Fluted dish with phoenix and "Three Friends of Winter"

England, Chelsea, ca. 1752-55
G05.12.5

Pair of cache pots with squirrel and vines

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40
G04.18.13

Octagonal bowl with "Three Friends of Winter"

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660-80
G05.12.20

6

Pair of butter tubs

The Netherlands, Delft, ca. 1740
G05.11.2

Dish with bird and tree

The Netherlands, Delft, ca. 1725

Pair of tea canisters

China, Jingdezhen, ca. 1725; decorated in The Netherlands, ca. 1730
G24.17.5

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7

Teapot with grapes and squirrels

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40

G04.18.10

Teapot with tiger and "Three Friends of Winter"

England, Staffordshire, ca. 1745-55

T15.2.36

Magnolia-shaped teapot

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730-40

G04.18.6

Hexagonal teapot with quail design

England, Bow, ca. 1755-60

G10.3.7

Teapot with bird and flowers

The Netherlands, Delft, ca. 1740

G10.3.1

8

Cup and saucer, after a Japanese original

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730

G05.12.11

Teacup and saucer with landscapes

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40

G07.18.6

Two handled cup with quail pattern

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730

G05.12.12

Teabowl with quail pattern

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1775

L09.13.58

Teacup with quail pattern

Scotland, West Pans, ca. 1760

L09.12.15

Peach-shaped cup and saucer with pomegranates and grapes

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40

G05.12.8

Small teabowl with tiger

China, Jingdezhen, 1700s

L09.15.12

Pair of teabowls and saucers with pheonixes

Japan, Arita, ca. 1660-80

G04.18.38

Teabowl and saucer with dragons

England, Chelsea, ca. 1750-52

G04.18.16

Teabowl and saucer with pomegranate and flower sprigs

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730

G04.18.3

Böttger teabowl and saucer

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1720; decorated in the Netherlands ca. 1725-35

G05.11.3

Teabowl and saucer with Chinese men

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730

G04.18.4

Octagonal teabowl and saucer with landscape

England, Worcester, ca. 1753

G10.3.5

Scalloped teabowl and saucer with Chinese boys

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1730

G10.3.16

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Teabowl and saucer with perched bird

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1720-25
L09.13.53

9

Ewer and cover

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1735-40
G07.18.8

Moulded dish

England, Chelsea, ca. 1755
G05.11.12

Canister

Germany, Meissen, ca. 1735
Lid: France, Chantilly
T15.2.15

Pomade pot

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40
G04.18.12

Pair of bough pots

France, Chantilly, ca. 1735-40
G20.9.9

Pickle dish with quail

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-40
G04.18.11

Glass cooler

France, Chantilly, ca. 1735-40
G20.9.11

Bowl, perhaps a wine bottle cooler

France, Chantilly, ca. 1730-51
G05.11.7

10

Wine or sake pot

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90
G08.6.7

Ewer

Japan, Arita, ca. 1670-90
G05.12.18

Pair of wine cups

Japan, Arita, 1670-90
G10.3.27

Hexagonal flask

Japan, Arita, ca. 1680-90
G07.18.15