



**Negoro-ware saké flask**

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Negoro-ware saké flask

**Object Type:** Flask

**Materials:** Lacquer, Wood

**Measurements:** h. 305 x w. 305 x d. 80 mm

**Accession Number:** 999

**Historic Period:** Muromachi period (AD 1333-1568)

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

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The word 'China' stands for both the country and porcelain. In a similar way, but less well known, the word 'Japan' is used for the country and also as a generic label for *urushi*, or lacquer-ware. Negoro-ware takes its name from the Zen Buddhist temple, Negoro-ji, where the technique of making this specific style of lacquerware was developed in the medieval period. For a connoisseur of Japanese art in the Western world, a typical lacquerware piece would be a highly decorative object with a glossy black or red surface covered with gold powder or mother-of-pearl inlay. One of the highlights of a formal Japanese *kaiseki* dinner is a clear soup with seasonal produce served in one of these beautiful *urushi* bowls with a lid.

What we see here is a matt surface with only two colours, red and black, and no ornamentation at all. Even the two-tone contrast was not originally meant to appear. It is the result of the base coat of iron black rising up due to the top vermilion layer wearing off. The style is also minimalistic, with straight and unpretentious lines.

Negoro-ware was made for daily use by Zen Buddhist priests and warlords. Items were mass-produced without the process of polishing the surface, which renders the glossy shine we normally associate with them. Standing in front of this object, we can visualise samurai warriors gathered in a dim, cold, candlelit room in a medieval castle, enjoying sake from this flask. A brief moment of joy in their simple and austere life.

There are several other beautiful Negoro-ware pieces in the Sainsbury collection. I wonder if I am alone in seeing a resemblance with these simple forms in works by Lucie Rie and Hans Coper elsewhere in the collection.

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Mami Mizutori, Former Executive Director, Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Art and Culture

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