Inro, netsuke and ojime

Place of origin: Japan (made)
Date: ca. 1850-1900 (made)
Credit Line: Pfungst Gift
Museum number: W.158:1 to 3-1922
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

The inro is a container made up of tiers. Japanese men used them because the traditional Japanese garment, the kimono, had no pockets. From the late 1500s onwards, Japanese men wore the inro suspended from their sash by a silk cord and a netsuke (toggle). They originally used it to hold their seal and ink or a supply of medicines. However, it rapidly became a costly fashion accessory of little or no practical use. Most inro are rectangular with gently curving sides.

Lacquer was most commonly used in the manufacture of inro since it was highly suitable for storing medicines. Lacquer is the sap from the tree Rhus verniciflua that grows mainly in East Asia. After processing, it is applied in many thin layers to a base material. The craft of lacquering, as well as making inro bodies, is highly complex, time-consuming and expensive. On this example, the gold lacquer is inlaid with fishes in shell, horn and stained ivory in a style typical of the late 1800s.

From the 1700s onwards, many artists signed the inro they made. This example is signed Kakosai, who is known to have worked in the late 1800s.

Descriptive line

Inro, netsuke and ojime, the inro depicting fishes in water in gold hiramakie and takamakie, inlaid with pearl-shell, horn and stained ivory, signed Kakosai, ca. 1850-1900

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URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O120938/inro-netsuke-and/