



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

KINTSUGI

Kintsugi (金継ぎ gold joinery), also known as kintsukuroi (金繕い gold repair), is a centuries-old Japanese technique of repairing broken pottery. Similar to the technique of maki-e, kintsugi uses a lacquer to repair cracks and defects, which is then dusted with a gold powder, making it look as though the pottery was repaired with gold.

The legendary origins of kintsugi date back to the 15th century, when Japanese shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa broke his favourite tea bowl. He originally sent it back to China to be repaired, but was not pleased with the result. He felt the metal staples, which were the standard for repairs at the time, detracted from the beauty of the bowl. He enlisted a Japanese craftsman, who came up with the kintsugi method of repair. Broken pieces are glued back together using urushi lacquer, from the Chinese lacquer tree. The final layer is brushed with fine gold powder, and then burnished. Modern technology uses state of the art materials which gives kintsugi repairs a longer lifespan than the traditional lacquer method.

Kintsugi is said to be related to two traditional Japanese concepts, wabi-sabi (侘寂) and mottanai (もったいない). Wabi-sabi calls for finding beauty in the flawed or imperfect while mottanai expresses regret when something is wasted. While the art is largely kept alive by Japanese craftsmen, there are also DIY kintsugi kits available if you want to try for yourself!