



SETO CITY



Seto is a pottery region in Aichi prefecture. Established over 1,000 years ago, it was the first place in Japan to manufacture pottery with a full glaze. The city also has the longest history in the country of being a *manekineko* production hub, as Seto-ware cats have been crafted in the region since the 1800s. There are approximately 400 kilns in Seto and it is also home to the Manekineko Museum, which moved to Seto in 2005 and is the largest of its kind in Japan. The museum displays over 5,000 items, originally amassed by collectors Kanji Bando and Chihiro Arakawa over two decades.

Mika Inoue, Curator, Manekineko Museum

Masanari Suzuki, Director, Manekineko Museum

How did the culture of *manekineko* reach Seto?

MI: A merchant in front of Kyoto's Fushimi Inari Shrine was making folk toys by hand, and he couldn't keep up with demand. Seto had the technology to make items using a mould, and they received an order to make cats in large quantities. Within Japan, Seto was the first place to actually manufacture them on a larger scale.

Opposite

A *manekineko* displayed outside Seto train station by Atsuko Nishida, who designed Pikachu, the main character in the Pokémon franchise. There are 29 works by Nishida around the city.

Above

Seto hosts a huge annual *manekineko* festival that celebrates unashamed cat mania. Crafters and artists from across Japan display and sell cat-themed wares.

Right

On-site make-up artists provide cat whiskers to visitors at the Seto Manekineko Festival, one of the best places to witness Japan's cat obsession.





How were the Seto cats different to the simple folk toys such as those in Fushimi?

MI: Folk toys are things like clay dolls made in regions where fine materials weren't available. The production hubs such as Seto that manufacture *yakimono* [pottery and porcelain] *manekineko* had access to quality materials that are baked at a higher temperature.

Do you feel the 'neconomics' boom here?

MS: Yes, very much so. We have a *manekineko* festival, and it is amazing. In this era, rather than buying things, people want experiences. You can make a *manekineko* of your own here and draw on it.

Cats are a motif that people feel an affinity with, so we want to heighten this craft culture and revitalize Seto with its artisanal history and culture.

Do you think the kilns and factories in ceramics regions will cater more to artists in the future, rather than craftspeople?

MS: The world is going in that direction, and we think that is the only way to survive. Artisans are important, but nowadays the world is focusing on the work of subculture artists. Before now, these artists were told, 'You have no technique and no training,' and were really looked down on, even though they had great ideas. While skills are important, imagination, ideas and design sensibility are even more so. Even if you are doing something with incredible technique, if the consumer doesn't like the design and it doesn't suit their lifestyle, the item doesn't have value.



Above

A display of quirky Fushimi cats from Kyoto, one of the first places where *manekineko* flourished. Folk toys display significant regional differences.

Tea is served in the café at the Manekineko Museum.

Opposite

A display of regional Seto cats at the Manekineko Museum. They are slim, look closer to real cats, and wear bibs with pleats and bells. Owing to the exchange of people and ideas in the region, Seto-ware is characterized by many specific techniques.

What is the future for Seto?

MS: It is difficult for artisans to earn a living nowadays, but the young artists were born in a time of affluence, and they aren't trying to make lots of money on the whole. Instead, they are trying to live a life that fits their values. They want to delve into craft techniques as a medium of self-expression.

There are very few young people who want to produce the same thing for years on end, as traditional artisans do. However, there are people wanting to make their own art, and they will produce other items on the side to earn a living. They aren't like the old-style craftsmen, but they ensure that these traditions don't disappear. The old artisans are about to retire, so we are doing our best to intertwine these traditional craftsmen with new creators. There are many artisans who are willing to teach these skills.

き猫の産地 ～瀬戸～

は焼き物の代名詞にもなっ
て有名な陶産地。瀬戸の招き猫は、
こ近いほっそりとしたスタイルと
らかな肌が特徴です。数センチの
メートル近いものまでさまざまな
が作られました。最近、明治後期の
招き猫の型が出土して話題を
ます。



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YASUMARO OZAWA

While Seto is known for its traditional pottery, several artists have moved into the region to take advantage of the historic craft infrastructure. Known for his cat sculptures, Yasumaro Ozawa is a self-taught ceramicist who works in a Seto atelier. For Ozawa, Seto is an ideal place for his creations, as there are various types of material available and a wide range of techniques are practised in the region. This gives him flexibility and a sense of creative freedom quite unlike many pottery production hubs in Japan.

Opposite

Yasumaro Ozawa's *bakeneko*. For Ozawa, who has made cats for over 20 years, they're a window into one's soul, reflecting the kindness as well as the dark elements that are contained within all people.

Above

According to Ozawa, 'There is a sense of liberty to a cat's movements, which suits the softness of the material. When I am working with clay and when I am petting a cat, I feel a similar sensory experience. If you aren't touching real cats all the time, you can't make things like this; you need to understand their skeletal structure.'

Below

Several of Ozawa's works mid-completion in his vast atelier in Seto. He works alongside his wife and son, who are also potters.





TOKONAME CITY



Tokoname, in central Japan, has around 1,000 years of history as a pottery manufacturing region. Like Seto, it is home to one of Japan's six ancient kilns. It's also the birthplace of the most ubiquitous type of beckoning cat: the Tokoname *manekineko*, characterized by its cartoonish eyes and big ears. The largest *manekineko* atelier in Tokoname, Baigetsu kiln, produces around 80 per cent of the market share of beckoning cats in Japan.

The charming town has hundreds of ateliers in wooden buildings, alongside brick kilns. There are large beckoning cat statues and a *manekineko* street with the works of 39 artists embedded in the walls.

Opposite

A *manekineko* at the nearby Aeon shopping mall. The identity of Tokoname is intertwined with *manekineko*; cat motifs can be found across the region.

Above

A giant *manekineko* looming over a road in Tokoname.

Right

Tokoname has a charming pottery village, with wooden buildings, kilns and many shops.



Coca-Cola



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警告

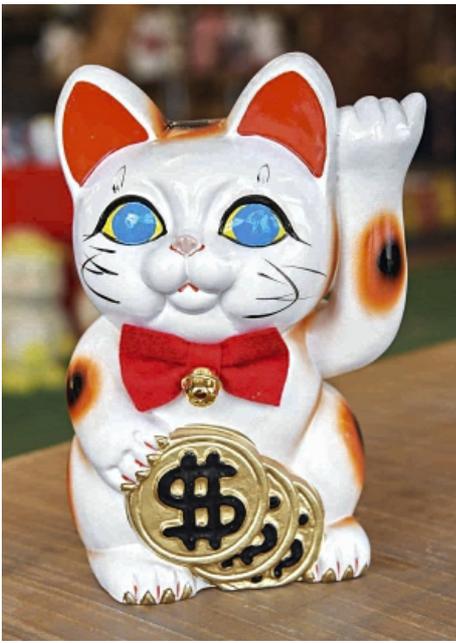
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Yamatane is a shop that sells approximately 300 kinds of Tokoname cat and is one of the best places in the region to browse various types of *manekineko*.

Yoshitaka Ina, President, Yamatane

Can you explain the history of Tokoname?

It was established at the end of the Heian period, initially for the production of pots. The region faces the Bay of Ise, so goods were placed on ships and went to Edo and Osaka. When you bake the clay that is available in this region, it takes on a reddish dark-brown, as the clay contains iron. In recent years, Tokoname has produced pipes, gardening pots and planters, as well as pots for pickled plum production. It is also a manufacturing hub for *manekineko* and the zodiac animal items.

You can engrave Tokoname clay, so you can inscribe letters and insert *sumi* [ink] inside the engravings to decorate it. In other regions, the ceramics are decorated by being painted on the surface.

How many ateliers are there?

Only two kilns, Baigetsu and Misono, produce *manekineko*, but there are 200 studios in total. In the past, there were twice as many studios. In the Showa era [1926–89], the region was booming, but then cheaper mass-produced goods entered from abroad and the ateliers couldn't compete.

There are only 10 artisans at Baigetsu and Misono kilns who make *manekineko*. However, at Baigetsu kiln, they make 30,000 or more cats a year. The faces and overall designs of the two companies are slightly different.



Opposite

Even the vending machines in Tokoname beckon luck.

Above

Tokoname *manekineko* are a popular souvenir with international tourists. This cat has a dollar instead of a *koban* [coin].

Yamatane, a shop that sells hundreds of types of Tokoname cats.

What are the characteristics of Tokoname *manekineko*?

It is the style that you see frequently, characterized by red ears and tricolour cat patterns. The *manekineko* is holding a *koban* [coin]. Baigetsu Tomimoto from the Baigetsu kiln created the design and it spread from there. Even though this style had existed before, it proliferated in the post-war era.

The eyes are the most important element, so artisans place importance on making them cute. They are painted in by seasoned artisans, not by the general staff. If you draw the pupils too small the face looks a bit harsh.

What do *manekineko* symbolize to the people of Tokoname?

They are part of our identity. They are not machine-made, industrial items; they are handmade with love. Also, pottery is Japan's oldest craft, dating back to the Jomon era [around 10,500–300 BC], so I think many people feel an affinity with it.



ISHIKAWA

Opposite

Kutani cats are typified by overglaze enamel and often feature flowery, psychedelic patterns and relaxed poses.

Below

Yoneda Yusandou in Nomi has an incredible selection of *manekineko* made from *kutani*-ware.

Characterized by a distinct, somewhat psychedelic aesthetic, *kutani*-ware *manekineko* are considered to be one of the top styles, and were popularized in the 1920s. *Kutani*-ware was established around 1655 and is produced in Ishikawa prefecture, namely Kanazawa, Komatsu, Kaga and Nomi. It is characterized by the use of overglaze enamel and often features intense, vibrant patterns.

The history of *kutani* ceramics started when the first Lord of Daishoji, Maeda Toshiharu, sent craftsman Goto Saijiro to study ceramic techniques in Arita. In the early 1700s, the *kutani* kilns suddenly disappeared, but the craft was revived around 80 years later. Gradually, many studios flourished with their own styles. *Kutani*-ware was exported and presented at world expos. As such, *kutani manekineko* were sometimes fashioned into Western decor items, like lampstands, and placed in homes overseas.

While most of the souvenir stores in Kanazawa sell *manekineko*, Nomi city's Kutani Ceramic Art Village has numerous museums that showcase *kutani*-ware, including the Asakura Isokichi Art Museum and the Nomi Kutani Ceramics Museum. Over 20 shops in the village sell ceramics, but the best for cat lovers is Yoneda Yusandou, with its impressive showcase of hundreds of *kutani manekineko*.



PREFECTURE