



A Wooden *Niji-giri* Two-tiered Flower Vase

木二重切花瓶

Height: 64.0 cm. (25 1/4 in.)

Width: 26.0 cm. (10 1/4 in.)

Meiji period

Late 19th – early 20th century

Signed: “Rijo Masahiro saku,” (made by Rijo Masahiro). 鯉城政廣

The roughly cylindrical vase was carved from a section of a tree trunk or large branch. The middle, comprising just over a third of the height, was cut out producing a large window-like opening. The sides were left intact, framing the window vertically and providing thick connecting bridges between the lower and upper sections. The *niji-giri*, literally “double cut,” two-tiered vase was formed by excavating deep bowl-like cavities on the top of each tier and fitting each with a copper vessel conforming to the shape of the cavity with the copper lip rim slightly folded over the thick wooden edge to secure the vessel. The front and sides of the vase are decorated with a grape vine comprised of large leaves, each thick leaf modelled with naturalistic scalloped edges, colored dark olive-green with deep red edges, the leaves raised from the surface and issuing from a slender double vine that climbs from the base, curling around the frame on one side and sending out slender curling gold-colored tendrils, the lacquer foundation of the vine and tendrils acting as an adhesive for the gold powder colorant. The amber-colored bees were rendered three-dimensionally and carefully detailed, one alighted on the upper rim and the second in flight among the upper reaches of the vine where the leaves are somewhat diminished in size. “Rijo Masahiro saku,” (made by Rijo Masahiro) is written in red lacquer on a small rectangular black-lacquered plaque applied to the back of the vase. A relatively rough, flattened base allows the vase to stand securely and sturdily upright.

The origin of the *niji-giri* “two-tiered” flower vase is attributed to the tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) when he was sojourning with Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598). Turning from an age-old dominance of Chinese wares for use in tea ceremony activity to the primacy of nature as appropriate for the times, bamboo became a preferred material for producing necessary or desired implements. The natural form of a bamboo stalk, its hollow interior and nodes creating distinct segments, was perfect for making simple cylindrical containers and, more imaginatively, two-tiered ones. It has been said that such a vase

was used at a gathering with Hideyoshi (1536–1598), who is said was invited to create an arrangement for the upper tier. The creator of the wooden vase here would have been inspired by that tradition.

His name, Rijo Masahiro, which is written on the small plaque attached to the vase, does not appear in any of the records we have access to. The name Rijo, “Carp Castle,” is a byname of Hiroshima Castle, home of the Mori *daimyo* who built their fortress at the end of the 16th century (1592–1599) and we therefore assume that this artist was active in that area.