

VAN PRUISSEN ASIAN ART



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Japan, Heisei period (1989-2019)
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In 1973, at a solo exhibition at Nihombashi Takashimaya, Kyohei Fujita presented a small glass box that would redefine the possibilities of his medium. He called it 'kazaribako' - literally, decorative box - but the West would come to know these jewel-like forms by another name: dream boxes. It was the title his overseas admirers gave them after Fujita, asked what one ought to keep inside, answered simply that they should be filled with dreams.

This example, worked in a vivid, almost chartreuse green, belongs to that lineage. Fujita developed the kazaribako technique by suspending metal leaf between layers of hand-blown colored glass, a method with no direct precedent in either Japanese or Venetian glasswork — the two traditions he spent a lifetime reconciling. Here he combines gold and silver leaf within a single field, the two metals fractured and drifting across the surface in irregular, overlapping passages that read almost as foliage caught mid-fall — a deliberate echo of the autumn and seasonal-change motifs that recur throughout his mature work. Trained first as a metal engraver at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Fujita brought a craftsman's discipline in precious materials to a medium then still considered, in Japan, primarily utilitarian. The rounded square form he returned to throughout his career — its lid gently domed, its corners softened rather than crisp — owes as much to the proportions of lacquer document boxes and incense containers as to any glass tradition, an act of translation rendering a language of Rinpa-era ornament in an entirely new material.

The leaf, never simply gilded onto the surface but folded into the body of the glass itself during the hand-blowing process, produces an effect that shifts with the light: at rest, the gold and silver read as a quiet interior mottling, silver cooling the green where it surfaces, gold warming it elsewhere; held to raking light, the leaf fractures further into a field of individual metallic fragments suspended mid-gesture. No two boxes achieve quite the same distribution, a consequence of a process too physically demanding to fully control — a fact Fujita treated not as a limitation but as the work's essential honesty.

Fujita's achievement was to be recognized internationally before he was fully absorbed into Japan's own canon of craft masters — a rare sequence in Japanese art of the twentieth century. His invitation to the 1975 World Glass Now exhibition in Copenhagen introduced the kazaribako series to a European studio-glass audience already primed by Chihuly and the Murano revival, and the comparison did him no harm: Fujita's boxes were acquired for the permanent collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in the Louvre and the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin well before his 2002 appointment as the first glass artist to receive Japan's Order of Culture. He remains, to date, the only glass artist ever so honored.

For collectors assembling a serious survey of postwar Japanese craft, the kazaribako occupies a position analogous to the great lacquer boxes of an earlier era: an object made to be closed, and admired precisely for what it withholds. This example comes with its original tomobako, inscribed and sealed by the artist's hand.

Measurements: 16 cm x 16 cm x 15 cm

Provenance: Private Japanese collection