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Heidatsu Lacquer Cabinet by Naka Seitaro (b. 1918)

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Japan, Showa period, circa 1970s

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A rectangular two-door cabinet raised on a low, tapering plinth in olive-green lacquer. The front is executed in the heidatsu technique, its two doors decorated with a vertiginous, optically distorted checkerboard pattern in silvered metal foil and black lacquer, radiating outward from the centre as though the grid itself were expanding under pressure — an effect closely allied to contemporary Op Art, here achieved through inlaid metal sheet under lacquer rather than paint, with small green accents set within isolated squares of the pattern. The rectangular top is finished in a deep, glowing oxblood-red lacquer, contrasting with the black lacquer sides, through which the underlying wood-grain texture remains faintly visible. The left side panel bears a gold-inlaid maker's mark reading □ (Sei), integrated directly into the checkerboard pattern. Opening the left door reveals an interior fitted with three drawers in a warm ochre-yellow lacquer, each with an arched brass handle.

Signed □□ (Sei-saku) in cursive, with red seal reading □ (Naka), on the tomobako, the lid of which is titled □□□□ (Decorative Box in Heidatsu Technique).

Naka Seitaro (b. 1918) was a Kyoto-based lacquer artist working in the postwar and Showa-era craft tradition, specializing in heidatsu — an ancient technique, revived from Nara-period Shosoin precedent, of adhering thin sheets of gold or silver under successive layers of lacquer before polishing back to reveal the metal design. He is recorded among the leading craftspeople active in Kyoto between 1945 and 2000, alongside figures such as Banpu Shogo, Okada Akito, and Domoto Shikken.

Compare: Naka Seitaro, Lacquered Jewelry Box, heidatsu, n.d., Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, acc. no. 1975-00-5043-000.

Measurements: Height 20.5 cm x Width 49 cm x Depth 17.5 cm

Provenance: Ben Janssens Collection, United Kingdom