



7699            A bronze flower vessel of simple ovoid form with a greenish brown patination

Japan 15th/16th century Muromachi/Momoyama period

Dimensions: H. 18cm x W. 16cm x D. 12.5cm (7¼" x 6½" x 5")

Inspired by Chinese prototypes from the Song and Yuan dynasties, bronze flower vessels of simple form such as this one have been prized in Japan since the middle ages.

Initially used in Zen temples these objects soon found favour with the ruling classes of Japan leading to the creation of a special place to show these newly fashionable pieces. This new form of interior design was known as the shoin-zukuri, a raised area which formed part a large alcove and a two-tiered shelf for display within a formal room. This format was later developed into the tokonoma, a feature which can

be found in nearly every Japanese home to this day.

The emergence of the flower arrangement (ikebana) as a new form of art in the Muromachi period (1336-1573) is evident from various records. Some written sources from the period refer to the flower vessels employed rather than to the flowers used, giving us a clue as to the importance of these objects. Bronze in particular was the most popular material for flower vessels and Karamono (Chinese things) were especially favoured by the aristocracy. Many Japanese vessels were made based on ancient Chinese bronze forms and some Japanese bronzes were exported to and much admired in China for their fine casting. According to Kundaikansochoki (a book of secrets about decoration of rooms and appreciation of art) from the Muromachi period, simple form bronzes were more appreciated and highly valued than decorated ones.

With regard to the present vessel, it appears to be based on ancient Chinese bronze forms, the gently swelling body, omitting the upper part and foot as well as any surface decoration, reducing it to as simple form as possible to reflect the aesthetics of the period.

For examples of Chinese bronzes see Tokugawa Art Museum and Nezu Museum eds., Hanaike (Flower Vessels), (Japan, 1982), p.142, 143. For early examples of other vessels of simple form, see *ibid.* no. 72, 73, 75, 77, 81, 83 and Joe Earle, Flower Bronzes of Japan, (London, 1995), no. 10.