The decorator of this jar chose a simple yet elegant scheme that recalls native Japanese painting styles and Japanese kimono design. The upper part of the jar features a dramatic asymmetrical design of a flowering vine with large, blue gourd flowers intertwined with small orange blossoms and bright green leaves. The large amount of empty white space around the bottom of the jar balances the whole picture.

Heavy-bodied jars of this sort, used to store tea leaves, were made in great numbers during the Edo period. By the eighteenth century when this jar was made, tea drinking had become a common custom in both Asia and Europe. Vessels like this were made for both Japanese and foreign markets.

This jar was made in Arita, a town in southern Japan not far from Nagasaki. The history of Arita porcelain began when ceramic artists from Korea arrived there and discovered large deposits of kaolin, a white clay needed to produce fine white porcelain. Korean potters settled in Arita and started producing the first porcelain made in Japan. During the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, Japan isolated itself from all foreigners. The only permitted entry point for foreign ships was in Nagasaki. The potters of nearby Arita had rare access to foreign artistic influences and materials, which they refined and adapted to their own ceramic production. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Dutch trading ships took pots made in Arita to European markets. At the royal courts of France, Germany, and Austria, Arita porcelains were valued above gold and silver for their rarity and the excellence of their design and glazes.

*Glazed porcelain with underglaze and overglaze decoration (Arita type, Kakiemon style)*

Height 17 3/4 inches (45.09 cm)