

## A Guide to Form and Color

It is said that the celebrated mingei potter, Shōji Hamada (1894–1978), when questioned about his repeated use of the same sugar cane pattern on his pottery, used to answer a little slyly: “Not same, variation on same.”<sup>110</sup>

### VARIATIONS ON SAMENESS

**This wry comment underscores an essential aspect of folk art, a creative and functional expression that is frequently based on repeated shapes and patterns.**

This repetition helps to establish the identity of a form, whether it is a kettle hook or a seed storage jar. Designs based primarily on functionality rather than aesthetics lend themselves to this repetition. When a form works, it is repeated. This is an essential part of its beauty. Yet while certain elements, such as overall shape or basic design motifs, may remain similar, good examples are never truly the same.

When one first begins to look at maneki neko, their seated posture, their invariably raised paw, their general uniformity might also elicit the comment: “They are all the same!” However, when one begins to look at them both individually and as a category of folk art, it is easy to discern the almost infinite variations to be found within this essential sameness. Differences in materials, colors, paw heights, bibs, and other stylistic considerations all work to create individuality for each piece. Hand-decorated forms, whether hand modeled or cast, all bear signs of the individuality of the craftsmen. The porcelain maneki neko of the Seto kiln, for instance, bear a family resemblance, but when placed together in a group, their individual facial features, differences in bib design, paw height, and overall scale speak to something other than sameness.

