

ITALIAN CERAMICS

Masterpieces Italian Ceramics
From the Castello Sforzesco Collection, Milan

A PROJECT OF 24 ORE CULTURA
CURATE BY RAFFAELLA AUENDA



ITALIAN CERAMICS – ABSTRACT

The fascinating history of Italian artistic culture over the past five centuries has been shaped by a remarkable dialogue between new artistic ideas, fostered by the successive princely courts of Italy, and the refined, creative craftsmanship of master ceramicists.

The technical expertise of ceramic artists progressively evolved, becoming increasingly sophisticated while interpreting the stylistic principles of a new cultural elegance and giving rise to objects of extraordinary beauty. Many of these ceramics have become true icons of Italian art history.

Highly sought after by cultivated European travellers in the 19th century, numerous works now enrich the collections of the world's leading museums. Yet Italy's own museum heritage – and in particular the collection of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan – preserves an exceptional range of masterpieces.

This exhibition offers the opportunity to follow an ideal artistic journey through authentic masterpieces and the extraordinary stylistic diversity found throughout the history of Italian ceramics. The exhibition brings together remarkable examples of incised ceramics, maiolica, earthenware and porcelain, produced in centres whose names have become synonymous with this art: Faenza, Castelli, Savona, Urbino, Cafaggiolo, Capodimonte, Doccia and, as visitors will discover, many others.

ITALIAN CERAMICS – EXHIBITION PATH

The exhibition brings together around twenty masterpieces from the prestigious collection of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan. The selection has been conceived to achieve its full impact even in exhibition spaces of limited size. In consultation with the host institution, the exhibition can be flexibly expanded.

Through the selected masterpieces, visitors embark on a journey through the history of Italian ceramics from the 15th to the 20th century, following the major centres that shaped its artistic and technical development.

From Ferrara to Palermo, from Savona to Naples, each stage reveals the interplay between inventiveness, craftsmanship and the aesthetic sensibilities of its time. Together, the works illustrate the extraordinary diversity of techniques, forms and decorative languages developed in Italian workshops.

Let us discover together the most renowned centres of Italian ceramic art.....



FERRARA – *Ceramica graffita*

In Italy, during the Middle Ages, the production of new ceramics aesthetically inspired by Byzantine models acquired increasing importance. The decoration is made by covering the ceramic terracotta body with a layer of lighter clay, called engobe, in which the graphic decorative motifs are engraved, colored with a play of green and brown spots. A light glassy layer, called glazing, will protect it.

This pottery will be called "Graffita". In the fourteenth century, the decorative motifs were refined, from the initially ornate geometrics, sometimes inspired by natural elements, such as stars, flowers and leaves, growing asleep with the Gothic artistic language of the Italian courts with figures, with the profile of Beauties and Heroes, or episodes of noble life, playing in a sort of luxurious paradise on earth.

Thus in the fifteenth century we meet, especially in the eastern Po Valley, on a flowery meadow or in princely pavilions with raised tents, young nobles in elegant robes, or symbolic animals, such as the sweet kneeling fawn that inhabits our cup. Ferrara is still considered the probable capital of this rare and elegant graffiti ceramic, exhibited in the showcases of the best museums in the world.



Piatto terracotta ingobbiata invetriata graffita e dipinta,
ultimo quarto del XV secolo

FAENZA — Renaissance-Maiolica

In the fifteenth century, among the Emilian cities that churned out beautiful ceramics, the distinctive quality of Faenza grew. Here the Manfredi Lordship nourished Renaissance culture. Since the end of the fifteenth century, enameled plates or plaques have been decorated with ornaments or scenes decorated by extraordinary majolica painters.

The palette of the four "high-fire" colors is dominated, that is, painted on raw enamel, they are able to withstand the firing temperature of the object, between 800° and 900°. Blue remains the most loved because it is the color of the East: the only one of the adored and precious Chinese porcelain. Thus fine floral motifs "porcelain" flank new Renaissance ornaments "with trophies" or "grotesques" in masterpiece pieces, sometimes marked by the best Faenza workshops, such as Ca' Pirota or that of the brothers Piero and Paolo Bergantini.

Some decorators, such as the elegant Baldassarre Manara, enhance a pictorial style similar to that of the Bolognese artistic workshops, going so far as to sign their masterpieces. Other Faenza "masters" sign with monograms, such as "B.T." or "C.I." and several are now known with nicknames given by great scholars, such as the "Master of the Resurrection" and the "Master of the Death of the Virgin". The culture of the "istoriato", as this style is called, is nourished by the use of the engravings of great European artists as sources. Other Italian cities adopt the same ceramic formula with great elegance.



Fiasco da pellegrino in maiolica con lo stemma del Vescovo Ottaviano Maria Sforza Visconti decorato coi motivi "a trofei" e "alla porcellana", 1520 ca.

FAENZA — The *Bianchi*

In Faenza, after having richly exploited the classical pictorial decorations in strong polychromy, in the forties of the sixteenth century Virgilio Calamelli, inspired by prints and glass decorations, modified the decorative formula of the finest artistic majolica by enhancing the richness of the white enamel, which becomes creamy, and limits its palette: with thin brushes and light watercolor *chiaroscuro* he sets the figurative scenes in blue monochrome, outlining them with a thin red thread and then highlighting them with a few quick touches of yellow.

His friend and colleague Don Pino Bettisi adopted the new formal code which would have increasing success. Among the most famous "White" served is the one, of which about a hundred pieces are still known today, baked for Albert V Duke of Bavaria, by Don Pino in 1576.

Many "white" pieces, however, bear only a winged putto or the noble coat of arms of the patron. Throughout Italy, itinerant Faenza "majolica makers" exported the production technique, so much so that at the end of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ceramics called "*faïence*", from the name of the Emilian city, became part of the trousseau of all European courts.



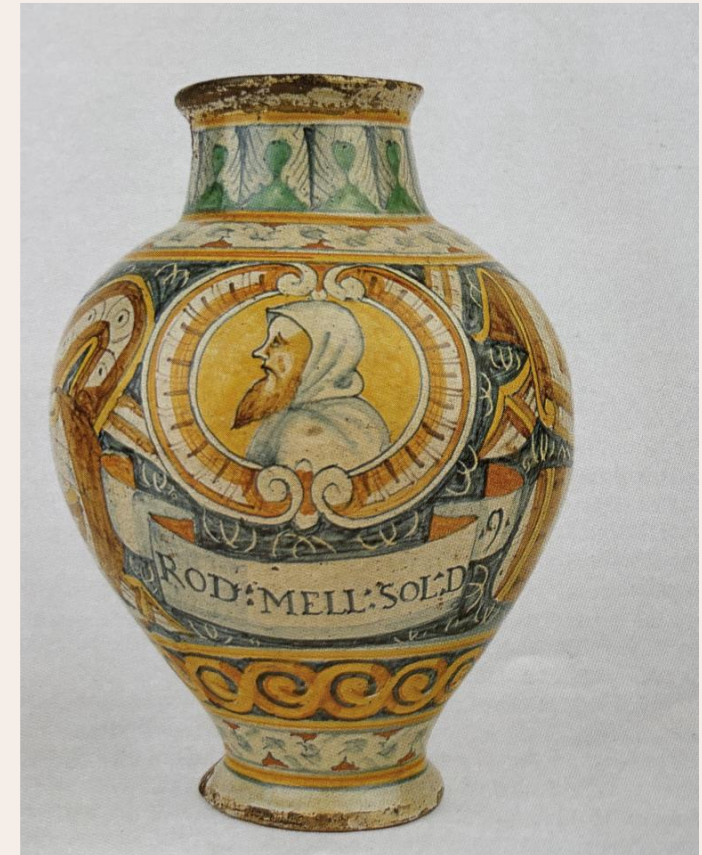
Grande bacile in maiolica con decoro "a grottesche"
compendiario su fondo bianco, inizio Seicento

SICILY – Sicilian maiolica

Throughout the 16th century, Sicily represented an important market for the extensive commissions placed by Italy's leading merchants. The pharmacies of Messina were equipped with maiolica from Urbino and Venice, while workshops in Montelupo, Casteldurante and Faenza also supplied hundreds of pieces to the island. It was only towards the end of the 16th century that Palermo itself emerged as a centre of high-quality maiolica production, notably through the workshop of Geronimo Lazzaro.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, maiolica tiles and vessels were also produced in other Sicilian cities. These workshops developed decorative vessels inspired by Faentine and Venetian models, reinterpreting them through a distinctive, freely calligraphic language and a bold use of colour.

Fortunately, some of the most innovative Sicilian decorative painters signed and dated their vessels. In the 20th century, these works became fundamental documentary evidence for reconstructing the history of Sicilian maiolica, which had remained largely forgotten for centuries.



Bottega di Andrea Pantaleo, Vaso da farmacia in maiolica decorato con busto di frate cappuccino e motivo a trofei, firmato e datato, 1610

NOVE and PARLEMO – Terraglia “for English use”

In Great Britain, in 1763, a cultured ceramist Josiah Wedgwood perfected a local ceramic material, making it the first industrial ceramic material: creamware, which was to be extraordinarily successful throughout Europe; In Italy it will be called "earthenware of England".

The Enlightenment culture wanted all the "well-to-do people" of Italy to have "English crockery". In the Italian cities of ceramics, from Trieste to Palermo, fine majolica factories either converted to the new modern material or were destined for closure. The best cream-colored baking clay will be supplied by the Tretto quarry in the Vicenza area.

In Bologna it was Count Carlo Filippo Aldrovandi in 1794 who founded a factory of refined earthenware with cultured Bolognese artists in his home, frequented by the young, great neoclassical artist Pelagio Palagi. On the other hand, in Nove, in the Vicenza area, the historic Antonibon factory, rented, from 1802 to 1820, to Giovanni Baroni, a cultured owner of the quarries in Tretto, who with the best local painter, Giovanni Marcon, produced neoclassical vases of extraordinary workmanship both in porcelain and earthenware.

And in Palermo, invaded by English earthenware, a Sicilian baron, Giuseppe Malvica, obtained the right from Ferdinand of Bourbon in 1799, to produce English-style earthenware by calling skilled Neapolitan ceramists to work.



Manifattura Antonibon, Versatoio, 1796-1813

SAVONA – Ligurian maiolica

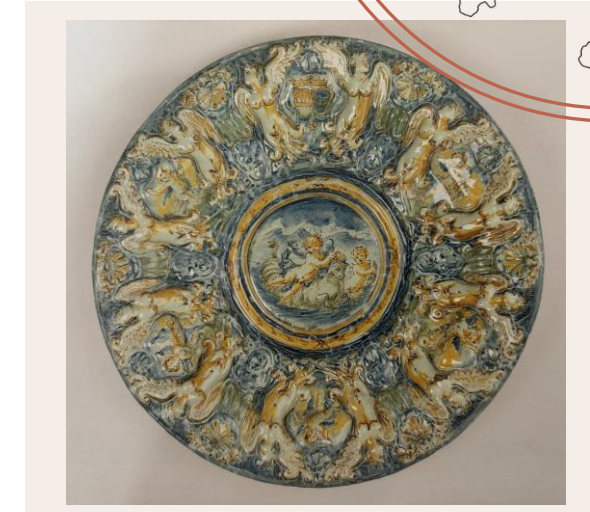
The trade in Ligurian ceramics through the ports of Genoa and Savona achieved considerable success in both the Italian and Mediterranean markets. At the same time, the production of high-quality maiolica, characterised by particularly tin-rich tin glaze, underwent continuous refinement.

Large plates were decorated with motifs inspired by Oriental prototypes, described at the time as *persiano ossia cinese*. Executed in an elegant graphic language, these compositions feature airy landscapes populated by deer, hares and birds. In the second half of the 17th century, the Medici commissioned a table service comprising 350 plates “in imitation of Chinese porcelain”, executed in monochrome cobalt blue.

During the century, the presence of masters from Urbino inspired Savonese painters to produce figurative scenes of ladies and knights in outdoor settings, rendered in monochrome blue. These compositions are distinguished by a freer, more spontaneous brushwork and a serene, elegant character.

The most distinguished painters from Savona’s ceramic-making dynasties, including Bartolomeo Guidobono, were summoned to work at the royal court in Turin. There they produced exceptional maiolica of particular elegance, marked with the Turin cross shield.

SAVONA



Manifattura Salomone, Grande piatto (reale) in maiolica decorata in policromia a gran fuoco, seconda metà del XVII secolo



Grande coppa in maiolica decorata in monocromia blu con scene di cavalieri

NAPLES - Bourbon Maiolica and Porcelain

When Charles III of Bourbon, the young King of Naples, married Maria Amalia of Saxony in 1738, seventeen Meissen porcelain services arrived in Naples as part of her dowry, sparking the King's keen interest in the art of porcelain production. From 1740 onwards, a room in the Royal Palace of Capodimonte was converted into a workshop for porcelain manufacture. Vittorio Schepers was appointed Arcanist and placed in charge of the technical direction of the manufactory, working alongside outstanding artists from Naples and Parma.

Actual porcelain production began in 1743. When Charles III ascended the Spanish throne, he had raw materials, models and a large number of the artists transferred to Madrid, where production continued. The small sculptures modelled by Giuseppe Ricci bear witness to the manufactory's exceptional artistic standards. Its supreme masterpiece, however, is the small **salottino** at the Reggia di Portici, whose porcelain decoration is adorned with so-called **chinoiserie** scenes. Today, the room is preserved in the Capodimonte Museum.

In 1771, Charles III's son, Ferdinand IV, re-established the royal manufactory. Under the influence of the archaeological excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii, vases and table services were created that fully embraced the emerging Neoclassical taste.

Alongside these refined courtly objects came outstanding sculptures in biscuit porcelain — unglazed porcelain — whose models drew inspiration from Antiquity. One of the manufactory's most distinguished masters was Filippo Tagliolini, originally from the Veneto. The manufactory remained active, with interruptions, until 1799.



Vaso in maiolica decorata con colori a piccolo fuoco, rosso e oro



Fabbrica Reale Ferdinanda, Filippo Tagliolini modellatore, Gruppo in biscuit che raffigura Alessandro e Diogenem, 1800 ca.

VENICE – Venetian porcelain

While China had already been producing for centuries, the first European hard white porcelain was discovered in Dresden in 1707; in 1718 in Vienna a soldier Claudius Innocentius du Paquier, having obtained the secrets of processing, founded the second European manufacture.

In the Republic of Venice, a young enthusiast, Giovanni Vezzi, began to produce the first Italian hard porcelain in 1720, clandestinely importing kaolin. Vezzi porcelain is mainly teapots and cups, as well as vases and some rare sculptures, based on models by silversmiths and painted by decorators of Murano or foreign glassworks. But given the costs, it was not economically successful: the factory was forced to close in 1727.

It was only in 1761 that a merchant from Modena, Geminiano Cozzi, opened the new porcelain factory in the city. After associating himself with a German Hausmaler Nathaniel Hewelcke, from 1763 he worked the kaolin earth of Tretto producing various ceramic materials (majolica, porcelain and earthenware) with considerable success: from fireplace tiles, to apothecary vases, table and coffee services, and many small porcelain sculptures, of great aesthetic quality, in baroque or oriental taste.



Zuppiera in porcellana con presa superiore a frutti "a trompe-l'oeil"

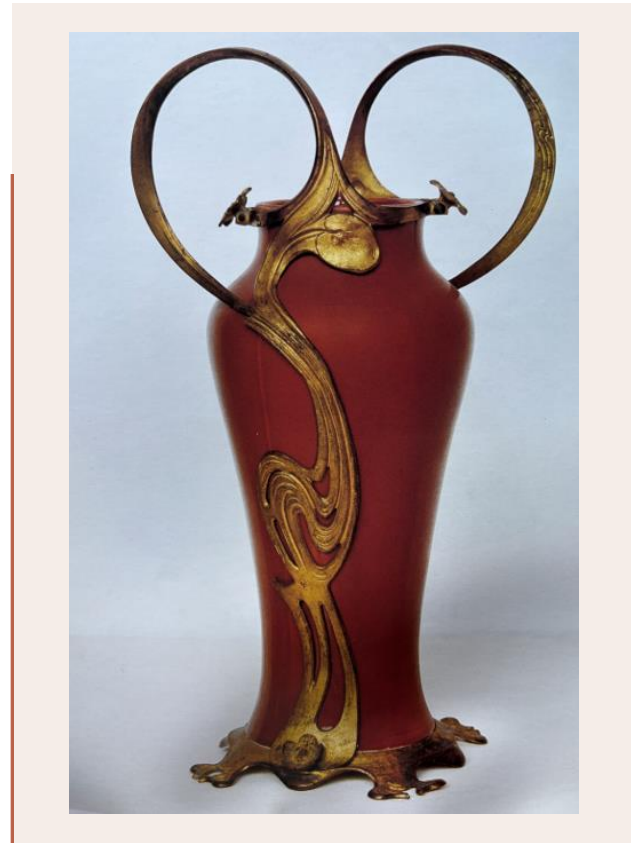
MILAN and LAVENO – The new industrial art of the twentieth century

The Art Nouveau is born in the Parisian shops of the new arbiters of taste, capable of bringing together avant-garde artists and expert producers of the different decorative arts.

At the Universal Expositions the new artistic formulas are presented with great success. In Italy, in Turin, in 1902 the "First Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art" took place: a showcase of European production innovations, many derived from the love for Japanese culture, such as, for ceramics, bulbous shapes, certain graphic formulas and glazed surfaces with "reaction" effects, or with elegant research by young Europeans, French and Germans, who participated in the fair.

The Milanese Richard Ginori and the Italian Ceramic Society in Laveno, on Lake Maggiore, competed to become the most powerful Italian ceramic production at the turn of the century.

MAILAND



Vaso terraglia forte con montatura in bronzo dorato

ON A JOURNEY THROUGH ITALY'S MOST IMPORTANT CERAMIC CENTRES



The exhibition journey reveals the extraordinary diversity and excellence of a unique artistic heritage through works that narrate of the history, culture and identity of the regions in which they were created.

If this exhibition project is of interest to your institution, we would be pleased to provide the complete presentation, including the full list of exhibited works and a detailed description of the individual ceramic centres.

ITALIAN CERAMICS – EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

Artworks & Multimedia	The exhibition presents a selection of approximately 20 works. Its flexible format allows for an expanded selection of works, according to the requirements of the exhibition venue. The proposed selection of works may vary according to the exhibition venue and the availability of the works.
Size	200-400 m²
Availability	2027
Duration	12-16 weeks
Producer	24 ORE Cultura
Curatorship	Raffaella Ausenda



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