

SO – IL VIEWING CHINA

ARTWORK LABELS

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SO – IL: Viewing China

New York–based architecture and design practice SO – IL (Solid Objects – Idenburg Liu) designed the display system for this exhibition in order to focus people's attention on a selection of historical porcelain from the NGV Collection. The objective was to use a modernist architectural language to invite a contemporary audience to view these works in a new way.

Porcelain is ubiquitous in our lives today: we eat off it, drink from it and incorporate it into our bodies in dental fillings and prostheses. It is so commonplace that it can sometimes seem invisible, and decorative porcelain, in particular, is often regarded as outdated and uninteresting. This exhibition asks the question, do we overlook the material and aesthetic properties of porcelain because it literally surrounds us?

According to the architects, 'our exhibition design unravels assumptions of gallery objectivity, and instead suggests new ways of looking at the delicate artefacts. Rather than interfering with views of the objects, the coloured panels serve as filters. Each multi-faceted case offers multiple unique views of each object'. Architecture is embraced as a framing device to draw objects into focus, recontextualising their historical subject and highlighting it so audiences can engage with it afresh.

Meissen Porcelain Factory, Meissen

manufacturer

Germany est. 1710

Johann Joachim Kretzschmar modeller

Germany active 1712–40

Augustus the Strong Elector of Saxony and King of Poland

1714–25

porcelain (hard-paste)

Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1975

D143-1975

Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, was the patron who oversaw the alchemical experiments that led to the successful formulation of a hard-paste porcelain at Dresden, Germany, in 1708. This was the first such porcelain to be produced in Europe. This diminutive figure is a portrait of Augustus himself, shown in the coronation regalia of a Polish king, executed in the new Saxon porcelain body.

Mennecy Porcelain Factory, Mennecy
manufacturer
France 1734–1812

Bonbonnière

c. 1760

porcelain (soft-paste), silver

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne
Morris, Governor, 1998

1998.47

Vincennes Porcelain Factory, Paris

manufacturer

France 1740–56

Dog

c. 1753

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of The Wynne Morris Collection, Governor, 1983

D16-1983

The Vincennes factory, forerunner of the Royal Sèvres factory, was established with financial support from the French crown. This delightful, near life-size sculpture of a dog is possibly a portrait of a favourite pet of Madame de Bellefond, granddaughter of the Marquis de Châtelet, governor of the Château de Vincennes.

Chantilly Porcelain Factory, Chantilly
manufacturer
France c. 1730–92

Covered jug
c. 1750
porcelain (soft-paste), silver

The Peter Wynne Morris Collection.
Purchased NGV Foundation, 2008

2008.122

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory, **Saint-Cloud** manufacturer France 1666–1766

Spice box

c. 1715–20

porcelain (soft-paste)

Purchased through the NGV Foundation with the assistance of
Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2003

2003.431.a-b

This compartmentalised spice box with its swivelling lid would have contained pepper, cloves and nutmeg to be taken as digestives following the main course, or as palate cleansers in between courses. The consumption of spices no doubt masked the bad breath of rotting teeth. The form was derived originally from a silver shape, but such boxes were produced in both porcelain and earthenware during the eighteenth century.

Chinese

Wine ewer

Southern Song dynasty 1127–79
porcelain (Qingbai ware)

Felton Bequest, 1939

3913-D3

Chinese ceramic artists had mastered porcelain technology by the third century CE, a technical achievement that would not be copied in the West until the early eighteenth century. Qingbai ware is a type of porcelain that was produced under the Song (960–1276) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties in Jiangxi province in south-eastern China. It was the first type of porcelain produced on a very large scale.

Mennecey Porcelain Factory, Mennecey

manufacturer
France 1734–1812

The four seasons

c. 1770

porcelain (soft-paste)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1992

D24.1-4-1992

The putto's function as an allegorical figure developed in the sixteenth century and continued into the eighteenth century. This group of four putti executed in soft-paste porcelain are allegories of the four seasons. Each figure is accompanied by symbolically charged objects that illuminate their allegorical meaning. Spring is accompanied by blooming flowers, summer by ripened wheat, autumn by the grape harvest and winter by a brazier, a source of warmth.

Kelsterbach Porcelain Factory,
Kelsterbach (attributed to) manufacturer
German 1761–68

Scent bottle

c. 1761

porcelain (hard-paste), silver

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mrs M. E. Cutten, Founder Benefactor, from
the collection of her father

Dr S. A. Ewing, 1980

D404-1980

Chantilly Porcelain Factory, Chantilly

manufacturer

France c. 1730–92

Pot-pourri vase

1740–45

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1997

1997.122.a-b

Mennecy Porcelain Factory, Mennecy
manufacturer
France 1734–1812

Covered basket
1745–50
porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1997

1997.123.a-b

Chantilly Porcelain Factory, Chantilly

manufacturer

France c. 1730–92

Pot-pourri vase

1745–49

porcelain (soft-paste), gilt-bronze (ormolu)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of The Wynne Morris Collection, Governor, 1985

D9.a-b-1985

The eighteenth century was a golden age for the European perfume industry. The heavy scents favoured in earlier periods to mask unpleasant odours were replaced by a wide range of delicate, especially floral, perfumes. Potpourri vases were often used in bedrooms or other private rooms for scenting the air. The vases, ornamental works in their own right, were often displayed in groups or as garnitures on furniture and mantelpieces. The practice of drying flowers and aromatic spices developed during the late seventeenth century and by the early eighteenth century perfume containers had become important items of fashion; small scent bottles were often carried in a pocket.

Mennecy Porcelain Factory, Mennecy manufacturer France 1734–1812

Musicians

c. 1760

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1994

D6-1994

Mennecy Porcelain Factory, Mennecy
manufacturer
France 1734–1812

Bust of an actor
1750–60
porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1998

1998.46

Meissen Porcelain Factory, Meissen
manufacturer
Germany est. 1710

Rustic cottage

c. 1745

porcelain (hard-paste)

Gift of Mr Peter Wynne Morris, 2007

2007.694

This cottage is from a set of architectural miniatures, referred to in Meissen factory records as a 'Dutch village', commissioned as decoration for the dessert table by the Saxon prime minister and director of the Meissen factory, Count Brühl, in 1743. These porcelain villages remained popular table adornments into the second half of the eighteenth century, and examples were owned by Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV of France, among others.

Plymouth Porcelain Factory, Plymouth
manufacturer
England 1768–70

Putto, candlestand
c. 1768–70
porcelain (hard-paste)

Purchased, 1975

D83-1975

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London

England c. 1744–69

Goat and bee jug

c. 1745

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Colin Templeton Collection. Gift of Mrs Colin Templeton, 1942

410-D4

The *Goat and bee jug*, named for its naturalistic modelling of a goat and bee on the surface, was one of the first models produced by the then newly formed Chelsea Porcelain Factory in the mid 1740s. Despite its small scale, it is a remarkable achievement in terms of both the complexity of design and fineness of modelling. The Chelsea factory was one of several established in Britain to compete with French and German porcelain factories, whose products were imported into Britain.

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London

manufacturer

England c. 1744–69

Sphinx

1750–52

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1939

4498-D3

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London

manufacturer

England c. 1744–69

Guanyin

1750–52

porcelain (soft-paste)

Purchased NGV Foundation, 2010

2010.11

This figure of Guanyin by the Chelsea Porcelain Factory, the mid eighteenth century's leading English luxury porcelain factory, precisely replicates a Dehua porcelain figure imported from China. It is possible that this figure was produced from a mould taken from a Chinese import. This is evidence of the continuing admiration for Chinese porcelain in the West.

Chinese

Guanyin

Qing dynasty, Kangxi period 1662–1722
porcelain (Dehua ware)

Gift of H. W. Kent, 1938

3733-D3

Chinese porcelain sculpture from the kilns at Dehua in Southern China began arriving in Europe during the seventeenth century and became highly desirable collector's items among the European elite. The translucent, creamy body of Dehua wares and their finely modelled details inspired later European porcelain sculpture.

Chinese

Guanyin

Qing dynasty, Kangxi period 1662–1722
porcelain, wood (Dehua ware)

Felton Bequest, 1921

2079-D3

Chinese

Guanyin

Ming dynasty – early Qing dynasty

1368–1777

porcelain (Dehua ware)

Felton Bequest, 1951

1102-D4

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London

manufacturer

England c. 1744–69

Teapot

1747–49

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1939

4497.a-b-D3

Chinese

Bowl

Northern Song dynasty 960–1127
porcelain (Qingbai ware)

Gift of H. W. Kent, 1938

3705-D3

Meissen Porcelain Factory, Meissen

manufacturer

Germany est. 1710

Johann Joachim Kändler modeller

German 1706–75

Pair of parrots

1738 designed, c. 1745 manufactured
porcelain (hard-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Gift of Peter Wynne Morris, 2007

2007.693.a-b

From the mid 1740s onwards the Vincennes manufactory began producing a large variety of porcelain sculptures, but the first mention of birds being produced was in 1749. Bird sculptures were made as decorative ornaments to be placed on furniture, chimneypieces or the dessert table, or were mounted into the base of ormolu candlesticks. Their prototypes were imported Chinese porcelain models or Meissen interpretations of the Chinese originals.

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory, Saint-Cloud manufacturer

France 1666–1766

Cup and saucer

c. 1730
porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1996

1996.549.a-b

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory,

Saint-Cloud manufacturer

France 1666–1766

Teapot and stand

c. 1740

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1980

D390.a-c-1980

The plain, white body of this teapot and stand with applied prunus sprig decoration is a conscious imitation of Chinese sprig-decorated Dehua porcelains. The applied prunus decoration was the most copied of all Chinese *blanc de chine* decorative devices employed by European factories during the eighteenth century. The teapot is of gourd form. Similar shapes were produced at Chantilly and Meissen. Chinese and Japanese porcelain shapes often took their forms from nature, but no Asian prototype for these teapots has yet been identified.

Mennecy Porcelain Factory, Mennecy

manufacturer
France 1734–1812

Cassis pot

c. 1745

porcelain (soft-paste), silver

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1992

D23-1992

This charming teapot reflects the rising European fashion during the eighteenth century for taking tea. The Chinese practice of sprigging the white surface of a vessel with vegetal ornament is imitated, although here the decoration is wholly European in inspiration. The handle is modelled naturalistically in the shape of a bifurcating branch. Each stem terminates with two leaves and a large spray of blackcurrants (*cassis*). Indicative of its luxury status are the silver mounts that link the handle, cover and spout.

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory, Saint-Cloud manufacturer

France 1666–1766

Covered jug

1725–35

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1997

1997.121.a-b

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory, Saint-Cloud manufacturer

France 1666–1766

Cup and saucer

c. 1730
porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1996

1996.550.a-b

Chantilly Porcelain Factory, Chantilly

manufacturer
France c. 1730–92

Chinese figure

1735–45
porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1997

1997.326

This small sculpture of a man sitting cross-legged on the back of a monster draws its inspiration from imported Chinese *blanc de chine* wares. Yet, despite the exotic subject, the sculpture is unmistakably European in its treatment of the man's features and dress, and the fantastic interpretation of the monster.

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory, **Saint-Cloud** manufacturer France 1666–1766

Pair of Chinese figures

c. 1730

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1995

1995.27.1-2

The warm, creamy colour of this pair of figures is characteristic of the Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory and contrasts noticeably with the Chantilly figure, which has been coated in a white tin glaze. Although the simple, block-like modelling and the linear fall of the drapery on this pair of Chinese figures are directly inspired by Chinese Dehua porcelains, the figures are entirely European in conception and are without Asian prototypes.

Derby Porcelain, Derby manufacturer

England c. 1748–1848

Allegory of Hearing

c. 1750

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1938

3811-D3

This figure group depicts a musician playing a harp while a small boy listens on. It is intended as an allegory of the sense of hearing and is one of a group of five models of allegories of the senses inspired by Continental sources produced by the Derby factory. Although the figure group draws a general aesthetic inspiration from Chinese Dehua ware figures, the composition is wholly European. Not only are the pseudo-oriental costumes the products of European artistic imagination, but the very idea of an allegory of the senses is a notion arising out of the European Classical tradition.

Bow Porcelain Works, London

manufacturer

England c. 1748–76

Lion and lioness

c. 1750

porcelain (soft-paste)

Purchased NGV Foundation, 2010

2010.10.1-2

Large-scale porcelain sculptures by the Bow factory are quite rare, with the quality of the pastes presenting considerable technical obstacles to the production of objects of any great size. There are only four other pairs of lions of this model known to exist and of the five, this pair is undoubtedly the best. Other examples of Bow lion figures can be very lumpish in form but these examples are wonderfully modelled with an excellent glaze and exemplify the very best sculptural porcelain the Bow factory was able to achieve. They may contain a distant echo of Chinese Dehua ware foo dogs, which were eagerly collected in Europe.

Derby Porcelain, Derby manufacturer

England c. 1748–1848

Jean-Jacques Spängler modeller

England active 1750s

Bugbear and Companion

c. 1790–92

porcelain (soft-paste)

Purchased, 2006

2006.259.a-b

This unique pair of figures takes its inspiration from Titian's painting *Apollo and Daphne*, c. 1518, and a pair of large-scale marble sculptures of the subject by Guillaume and Nicolas Coustou, c. 1714, now in The Louvre. Bisque (unglazed) figures reflected the eighteenth-century taste for antique marble statuary and were generally regarded more highly than decorated figures. The subtlety of the modelling was on full display in these figures, and they were generally of superior quality to painted figures, as defects were unable to be disguised by decoration.

Chantilly Porcelain Factory, Chantilly

manufacturer

France c. 1730–92

Crouching Venus and The knife-grinder

1740–45

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Wynne Morris Collection. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1997

1997.325.1-2

This figure of the Classical goddess Venus at her bath is executed in soft-paste porcelain by the French Chantilly factory, which was founded under the patronage of the Bourbon-Condé family. The lustrous white body shows the influence of Chinese Dehua wares, but the subject is purely Western. The scale of the figure and its subject matter recall bronze sculptures popular among seventeenth and eighteenth-century collectors.

Sèvres Porcelain Factory, Sèvres

manufacturer

France est. 1756

Étienne-Maurice Falconet modeller

France 1716–91

Charles-Nicolas Cochin (after) engraver
François Boucher (after)

La lantern magique, figure group

1757 modelled, c. 1757–60 manufactured
porcelain (biscuit, soft-paste)

Purchased with funds donated by Peter and Ivanka Canet, 2015

This group was first modelled by Falconet in 1757 and is based on an engraving by Cochin after a now-lost tapestry design by the painter François Boucher. Examples from this series of children playing at a fair were first sold to Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour, and others were known to belong to Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria. Porcelain figures evolved as table decorations, replacing those made of sugar or wax. White, unglazed biscuit porcelain was launched at the Sèvres manufactory in 1751 and proved an ideal substitute for sugar sculpture; it soon replaced glazed porcelain figures at Sèvres.

Meissen Porcelain Factory, Meissen manufacturer

Germany est. 1710

Johann Friedrich Eberlein modeller

Germany 1695–1749

The judgement of Paris, centrepiece

c. 1745

porcelain (hard-paste)

Gift of Peter and Barbara Burton in memory of Peter and Yvonne Rowley through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.319

This large sculptural work depicts the ancient Greek myth of the contest between the three most beautiful goddesses – Hera, Athena and Aphrodite – and the prize of a golden apple. Paris, the Trojan prince, was appointed to judge this impossible contest and we see him seated here in a cave, holding the golden apple. This contest was one of the events that precipitated the Trojan War. The Meissen work was most likely part of a table centrepiece, possibly for the dessert table, and would have been complemented with other figures from the Greek myth.

Capodimonte Porcelain Factory, Naples manufacturer

Italy 1743–59

Giuseppe Gricci modeller

Italy c. 1700–70

Goffredo at the tomb of Dudone

c. 1745–50

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1991

D4-1991

This impressively large porcelain sculpture shows Goffredo, a crusader, mourning at the tomb of Dudone, a hero slain in battle at Jerusalem. The subject comes from Torquato Tasso's epic poem on the Crusades, *Jerusalem delivered*, of 1580. The Capodimonte factory in Naples was one of several porcelain factories established in Europe during the first half of the eighteenth century, following the success of porcelain production at Meissen in Germany.

Bow Porcelain Works, London

manufacturer

England c. 1748–76

Kitty Clive and Henry Woodward

c. 1750

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1938

3804A.1-2-D3

These portrait figures show the actors Kitty Clive and Henry Woodward in the roles of the Fine Lady and the Fine Gentleman from the 1749 Drury Lane production of David Garrick's play *Lethe*. The fine lady, Mrs Riot, exemplifies the dissolute woman of fashion, while the fine gentleman is a Grand Tourist who lives only for amusement and lies in bed all day, rising to dress extravagantly in the evening. The figure of Clive is based on a 1750 engraving by Charles Mosley after a watercolour by Thomas Worlidge, while Woodward is based upon a mezzotint by James MacArdell after a drawing by Francis Hayman.