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# THE FRICK COLLECTION

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## FRICK TO FEATURE FRENCH FAIENCE

### *MASTERPIECES OF FRENCH FAIENCE: SELECTIONS FROM THE SIDNEY R. KNAFEL COLLECTION*

October 10, 2018, through September 22, 2019

This fall an exhibition at The Frick Collection will debut an important promised gift of French faience from the holdings of Sidney R. Knafel, who, over a fifty-year period, developed one of the world's finest and most comprehensive such private collections in the world. The seventy-five objects included in the gift will be shown in the Frick's daylit Portico Gallery. Together, they will tell the fascinating and complex history of an aspect of European decorative arts that warrants greater attention. The exhibition, which is organized by Decorative



*Plate, Rouen, ca. 1725, Faience (tin-glazed earthenware), D. 9 5/6 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb*

Arts Curator Charlotte Vignon, will be accompanied by a catalogue published in hard and softcover editions by the Frick, in association with D Giles Ltd.



*Platter, Nevers, ca. 1660–70, Faience (tin-glazed earthenware), H. 16 inches, W. 19 3/4 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb*

Comments Ian Wardropper, “We are immensely grateful to Sid and his wife Londa for being such generous friends and benefactors of the Frick, and especially to Sid for allowing us to present so many pieces—comprising his promised gift to the Frick—from his exceptional collection. Our ceramics holdings have grown in importance in recent years, especially in porcelain, so we are particularly pleased to display such a marvelous representation of the great variety and creativity of French faience. Adds

Vignon, “Faience was largely commissioned by a local regional aristocracy, and the result is another wonderful chapter in the history of ceramics that developed quite apart from the centers of political power and artistic innovation in Versailles and Paris. While our holdings in ceramics trace their origins to Henry Clay Frick’s interest over one-hundred years ago in Chinese and Sèvres porcelain, the institution has never before exhibited such a large and impressive body of faience. We are delighted to illuminate this complementary topic through such a distinguished gathering of works and a related publication.”

## **FAIENCE DEFINED**

Faience is the term for tin-glazed earthenware produced in France during the sixteenth through eighteenth century. Historically, pieces were thrown on a potter’s wheel, formed in a mold or, less frequently, shaped by hand. Because the clay used was porous, it was covered with a vitreous glaze made of silica (sand) to make the vessels impermeable. With the addition of tin oxide, the transparent glaze became white and opaque, thus masking the clay’s natural red or gray color and providing a uniformly white ground to which painted decoration composed of metallic oxides could be applied. Faience is categorized according to whether it is decorated using the *grand feu* (high fired) or *petit feu* (low fired) technique. In *grand feu*, metallic oxides are mixed with water and applied to the tin-glazed surface before being fired at a temperature of about 1650 °F. The palette is consequently limited to those oxides that can withstand such high heat: cobalt (blue), antimony (yellow), manganese (purple and brown), iron (red-orange), and copper (green). Upon firing, the oxides are absorbed by and permanently fused into the tin-glazed layer. With the vogue for porcelain at its height during the mid-eighteenth century, the desire to expand faience’s limited range of colors led French potters to develop the *petit feu* technique, in which objects were painted after firing then fired a second time—a process that allowed for a more extensive palette. The Knafel collection comprises pieces made exclusively with the *grand feu* technique.

Before its production in France, tin-glazed earthenware had been made for centuries. The technique was developed in the Middle East before the ninth century and spread as a result of Arab conquests and commercial exchanges in the Mediterranean, arriving in Italy in the thirteenth century. Known as maiolica in Italy, tin-glazed earthenware experienced a Golden Age during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and manufactories flourished in Urbino, Casteldurante, Pesaro, Faenza, Deruta, and Gubbio. Italian Renaissance maiolica elevated tin-glazed earthenware from a sophisticated type of pottery to an ambitious art form rivaling contemporary silver and also strongly influencing the production of tin-glazed earthenware in France. This influence is reflected in the French word *faience*, which derives from Faenza, the city in northern Italy that was an important center of maiolica production during the Renaissance.

## INFLUENCE OF ITALIAN CERAMICS



Painting attributed to Gironimo Tomasi, *Plate*, Lyon, ca. 1582–85, Faïence (tin-glazed earthenware), D. 17 3/4 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection, Photo: Michael Bodycomb

The production of tin-glazed earthenware in France is directly related to the arrival in Lyon, during the second half of the sixteenth century, of several Italian maiolica potters and painters who were seeking opportunities outside Italy. Lyon was a culturally rich city at the crossroads of Italy, France, and the Holy Roman Empire, with a large Italian community, documented as early as 1512. Many Italian ceramists are known to have established themselves in Lyon, although their work has not yet been identified. The only recorded objects with signatures are those painted by Gironimo Tomasi, who worked in Urbino and Albissola before immigrating to Lyon. Stylistic comparison suggests that three (possibly four) pieces in the Knafel collection were possibly made by Tomasi in Lyon, sometime between his arrival in the city, in 1581, and his

death, in 1602. These rare objects, among them the plate, are painted in the tradition of those produced a generation earlier by the Fontana workshop in Urbino, where Tomasi received his early training.

## PRODUCTION IN NEVERS AND ROUEN

In the early 1590s, Lyon lost its political and economic independence, which adversely affected the growth of the city's manufactories and workshops, including those making faïence. Famine and fear of plague further prompted the city's Italian potters to move to Nevers, in central France, which had been ruled by an Italian prince, Luigi Gonzaga of Mantua, since his marriage in 1565 to Henriette of Cleves. Among the numerous Italian artists and craftsmen Gonzaga attracted to Nevers was Augustin Conrade (also known as Agostino di Domenico Conrado), whose family went on to dominate the production of faïence in Nevers until the mid-seventeenth century, at a time when Nevers was the only town in France producing faïence. Originally from Albissola in Liguria,



Painting attributed to Gironimo Tomasi, *Dish*, Lyon, ca. 1582–1600, Faïence (tin-glazed earthenware), D. 18 7/8 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection, Photo: Michael Bodycomb

Conrade spent a few years in Lyon prior to establishing a workshop in Nevers, in 1584, where he was soon joined by his nephews Dominique, Baptiste, and Bernardin. In 1608, Dominique founded the faïence manufactory called Les Trois Rois (The Three Kings), and, in 1610, Baptiste opened La Croix d'Or (The Golden Cross). Antoine Conrade, great nephew of Augustin, was the head of Les Trois Mores (The Three Moors), the largest workshop in Nevers from 1626 until his death, in 1647. This workshop is likely to have produced the spectacular plate illustrated on the previous page, whose complex shape and decoration combining sphinxlike creatures, winged figures, and fantastic

grotesques is largely inspired by Italian models. Its monochrome blue decoration, however, was produced mainly in Nevers but never in Italy.



*Ewer*, Nevers, ca. 1680, Faïence (tin-glazed earthenware), H. 27 1/2 inches, W. 13 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection, Photo: Christophe Perlès

By the middle of the seventeenth century, Italian potters had been established in France for several generations, and some native French potters had no Italian roots at all, thus the Italian influence had become weaker. In Nevers, potters and painters began to explore new types of decoration, forging an artistic identity distinct from their Italian predecessors. At the forefront of this effort was the introduction of a dark blue background, often referred to as “Nevers blue,” represented in the Knafel collection by a very large ewer that is one of the most ambitious examples of French faïence, along with a recently discovered basin. Their shapes recall silver pieces used at the court of Louis XIV, while their painted decoration—with figures wearing turbans, a shepardess, and



*Basin*, Nevers, ca. 1665-85, Faïence (tin-glazed earthenware), H. 19 1/2 inches, L. 22 3/4 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection, Photo: ©Camille Leprince

peddlers—is inspired by early seventeenth-century French literature, including the popular novel *L’Astrée*, by Honoré d’Urfé (published 1607–27). These two exceptional pieces were originally intended for display during a banquet, set out on a credenza to impress guests, either inside a princely residence or outdoors, in a lavish *jardin à la française* (French garden).

Rouen became an active center of faïence production when, in 1644, Nicolas Poiret was granted a royal privilege from Louis XIV that gave him the exclusive right to produce faïence in Normandy for the next fifty years. Edme Poterat directed Poiret’s manufactory until 1674, when he acquired it. With such an advantageous monopoly, Poterat and his two sons, Michel and Louis, transformed Rouen into a major center of faïence production in Europe. When the royal privilege expired in 1698, several new faïence manufactories opened in the city. The first half of the eighteenth century saw the establishment of eighteen manufactories, fourteen of which operated simultaneously. The signature of Rouen faïence at this time was a type of intricate decoration imitating embroidery, called *lambrequins*. The tradition evolved from the practice of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Chinese potters, who adorned finished porcelain objects with a piece of embroidery. Later, Chinese potters painted export porcelain with motifs reminiscent of the embroidered decorations, inspiring Dutch, Nevers, and Rouen potters to do the same. It was in Rouen, however, that this style of



*Platter*, Rouen, ca. 1725, Faïence (tin-glazed earthenware), D. 21 5/8 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection, Photo: Michael Bodycomb

painted decoration became the most elaborate. Pieces in the Knafel collection demonstrate the varied ways in which the lambrequin motif was adapted in Rouen—sometimes covering an entire object and other times used in borders,

thick or thin, surrounding a central scene such as children playing, bouquets of flowers, or coats of arms.

Intended to help fund France's ongoing and costly wars, sumptuary laws passed by Louis XIV in 1679, 1689, and 1709 contributed to the rapid geographic expansion and stylistic development of faience. In December 1689, the Sun King sent his private collection of silver furniture to the royal mint to be melted down, an example reluctantly followed by the aristocracy, who were pressured to relinquish their own precious metal objects—mostly silver table services—for the benefit of the state. As described about 1715 by the celebrated French memoirist Saint-Simon, this resulted in a sudden craze among French aristocrats for domestic faience: “In eight days, all who were of grand or considerable standing used only faience services. They emptied the shops selling it, and ignited a heated frenzy for this merchandise.”



Clérissy manufactory, *Platter*, Moustiers, ca. 1730–40, Faience (tin-glazed earthenware), H: 12 1/4 inches W: 16 7/8 inches, Sidney R. Knafel Collection, Photo: Michael Bodycomb

In the late seventeenth century, the region of Provence emerged as an important center of faience production, with workshops opening at Moustiers and in the port city of Marseille. The masterpiece of Moustiers faience in the Knafel collection is a large platter from the Clérissy manufactory, which depicts a complex scene with Asian merchants in the foreground and soldiers in the background, painted in monochrome blue with yellow highlights and touches of green.

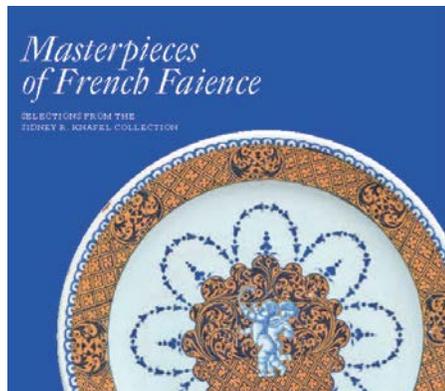
## SHIFT IN FUNCTION FROM DISPLAY TO USE

In the early days of faience production, objects were costly and therefore acquired, collected, and gifted exclusively by patrons at the highest levels of French society. Consequently, early pieces from Lyon and Nevers were intended only for display. The spread of faience workshops in Nevers, Rouen, and elsewhere in France during the eighteenth century changed the status of these objects and, ultimately, their function. One of the most important changes was the use of faience to serve food. To ensure the success of their workshops, French potters—beginning in Rouen—closely followed the culinary developments at the time. For instance, they created multiple dishes in different forms and sizes in response to the popularity of the *service à la française*, an elaborate style of dining wherein various components of a course were served at the same time. Such inventiveness reflects the ingenuity of French potters, who, over the course of two centuries, produced pieces of great originality and technical complexity, the finest of which are represented by impressive examples in the Knafel collection. The quality of such pieces almost obscures the fact that faience was essentially a provincial art, largely patronized and commissioned by a local aristocracy, far from the centers of political power in Versailles and Paris.

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and Mrs. Michael J. Horvitz, Nancy A. Marks, Peter and Sofia Blanchard, Margot and Jerry Bogert, Jane Condon and Kenneth G. Bartels, Mr. and Mrs. Jean-Marie Eveillard, Barbara and Thomas C. Israel, and Monika McLennan.

## PUBLICATION



Accompanying the exhibition is a beautifully illustrated catalogue published by The Frick Collection in association with D Giles Limited. Charlotte Vignon, the curator of the exhibition, traces the history of French faience, discussing detailed discussions of key centers of production. Collector Sidney R. Knafel discusses how his holdings developed and grew over the last half-century. With more than seventy illustrations, this valuable resource testifies to the creativity and beauty of an innovative tradition. The book is available in the Museum Shop or can be ordered through the Frick's Web site ([frick.org](http://frick.org)) or by phone at 212.547.6848. (72 pages; Hardcover, \$24.95, members \$22.46; Softcover, \$10.95, members \$9.86).

## INTERACT

Social:    /FrickCollection

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## BASIC INFORMATION

**General Information Phone:** 212.288.0700

**Web site:** [www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)

**Building project:** [www.frickfuture.org](http://www.frickfuture.org)

**E-mail:** [info@frick.org](mailto:info@frick.org)

**App:** [frick.org/app](http://frick.org/app)

**Museum address:** 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

**Hours:** Open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

**Admission:** \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; Pay-what-you-wish hours on Wednesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. **PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS:** Children under ten are not admitted to the museum

**First Fridays:** Museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January and September)

**Subway:** #6 local to 68th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

**Tour Information:** Included in the price of museum admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

**Shop:** The shop is open the same days as the museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

**Group Museum Visits:** Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

**Public Programs:** A calendar of events is available online

**Library address:** 10 East 71st Street, near Fifth Avenue

**Hours:** [www.frick.org/visit/library/hours](http://www.frick.org/visit/library/hours)

**Admission:** Open to the public free of charge

**#333, September 4, 2018** For further press information, please contact Media Relations; Phone: 212.547.0710;

E-mail: [mediarelations@frick.org](mailto:mediarelations@frick.org)