

The Oriental Ceramic Society Centenary Exhibition

Collectors, Curators, Connoisseurs: A Century of The Oriental Ceramic Society

15 October – 11 December 2021

About the exhibition:

The exhibition is arranged into six thematic sections:

1. Founder and Early Members (1920s)

This first section introduces the establishment of the Oriental Ceramic Society in the 1920s, focussing on founder members, many of whose collections now form the basis of the Asian collections in UK museums. The objects in this section either belonged to founder members of the OCS or were published or exhibited by them. Dating from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), long considered to be the golden age of ceramics in China, objects on display include exquisite examples from the different major kilns as well as a rare bowl from 12th century Iran bequeathed to the British Museum by collector Oscar Raphael.

2. Public Role of the OCS and the Royal Academy exhibition (1930s)

Moving into the 1930s, this section explores how the society developed from a private 'club' into a public institution of over 100 members. The objects chosen are a reflection of the landmark Royal Academy exhibition of Chinese art in 1935-6 which was initiated by members of the Society, including the first President and renowned collector, George Eumorfopoulos. There is a broad range of objects from a wide time span including archaic bronze ritual vessels and paintings, sculpture and ceramics, glass and cloisonné, many of which were lent to the original 1935 exhibition.

3. Philanthropy and the Institutional and Museum Legacy of OCS members

This section explores the legacy of three major OCS collectors. The relationships and friendships between these collectors and curators, nurtured through the OCS, resulted in major bequests to UK institutions such as the British Museum and the V&A.

- **Sir Percival David (1892 – 1964)**

Sir Percival David had a life-long commitment to scholarship and learning, establishing in 1930 the first lectureship in the UK in Chinese Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London – the first Art History degree anywhere in the UK. Sir Percival David's world-class collection of Chinese ceramics was displayed there in its own building. The collection has been moved in recent times to a purpose-built gallery in the British Museum. All the pieces chosen reflect Sir Percival's special interest in early blue and white porcelain and inscribed ceramics.

- **Sir Harry Garner (1891 – 1977)**

Sir Harry Garner was a renowned mathematician and government scientist. He was also President of the OCS and, in his spare time, an erudite and tireless scholar. He acquired some of the rarest Chinese ceramics, Northern Song imperial Ru ware, of which only around seventy pieces are known in the world. On display is a rare Ru cup stand dating from 1086-1106 and to reflect one of his other scholarly interests, three lacquer pieces. Upon his death the collection was split between two institutions, the British Museum and the V&A

- **Ferdinand Schiller (1866-1938)**

Ferdinand Schiller was the 'thirteenth' member of the OCS and collected extensively in many areas such as Song ceramics, fine Qing monochromes as well as jades and bronzes. Two monochrome porcelains have also been chosen for display. Upon his death, his collection went to his brother, Max, who eventually bequeathed it entirely to the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

4. Knowledge and Technology

This fourth section explores the immense contribution made to the study of ceramics and other areas by members of the OCS through lectures, publications and research trips. The focus is on four areas: rare underglaze copper red porcelains from 15th to 18th century China; early blue and white porcelain; porcelain from the Dehua kilns of early 17th century China; and jades including a delicately carved cup, a vase and figures of the Buddha and a mythical beast.

5. Collections of Present Members

At the heart of the exhibition is a section featuring the largest group of objects loaned by present private and institutional members. Deliberately chosen to reflect the scope and breadth of the Society's interests and activities during its 100-year history there are ceramics, jades, lacquers, metalware and sculptures.

Displayed in the Foyle Special Collections Gallery (within the Brunei Gallery, SOAS) will be a section devoted to **Archival Material** of the OCS such as photographs of early members of the Society, their collections, past exhibitions and books and catalogues published by the OCS. Other loans include archival material from Bluett and Sons, a key dealer who supplied many of these early collectors. There is also a display of rare books from the Sir Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, now housed in Special Collections, SOAS.