



Sacred Ceramics: Devotional Images in European Porcelain

The Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre, V&A South Kensington

Tuesday 30 September 2025

Schedule

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| 10:00 | Museum opens |
| 10:00 | Registration |
| 10:30 | Welcome |
| 10:45 | Introduction
Julia Weber, <i>Director, Porcelain Collection, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden</i> |
| 11:00 | Catholic China: Porcelain, the Jesuits, and Counter-Reformation Propaganda
Matthew Martin, <i>Senior Lecturer in Art History and Curatorship, The University of Melbourne</i> |
| 11:20 | Religious Sculpture in Meissen Porcelain
Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, <i>Independent Curator and Scholar</i> |
| 11:40 | Comfort Break |
| 11:55 | Marian Figures in Meissen Porcelain: A Female Body between a Catholic Court and a Protestant State
Rebecca Klarner, <i>Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Researcher, University of Leeds/V&A and Assistant Curator, V&A Wedgwood Collection</i> |
| 12:15 | The Divine Mission of Du Paquier: Grace, Virtue and Propaganda in the Context of Habsburg Piety
Claudia Lehner-Jobst, <i>Director and Collections Curator, Augarten Porcelain Museum, Vienna</i> |
| 12:30 | Q&A |
| 12:40 | Lunch Break |



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- 13:30 **Handling Session Ceramics, Terracotta and Ivory**
Simon Spier, *Curator Ceramics & Glass 1600-1800, V&A* and Kira d'Alburquerque, *Senior Curator Sculpture, V&A*
(Places are limited, please sign up during registration)
- 14:10 **Handling Session Repeat** (as above)
- 14:50 **A Reliquary Made by the Imperial Vienna Porcelain Manufactory**
Manuel von Aufschnaiter, *Postgraduate Student, Art History, University of Vienna*
- 15:10 **The Influence of Religious Patronage on European Porcelain Commissioning: Investigating the Rarest Monumental Sacral Porcelain Ensembles and the Ritual Use of the Porcelain Objects in European Ecclesiastical Rites**
Carina Nathalia Madonna Visconti Paff, *Art Historian, Licensed Art Expert and Embassies Art Advisor*
- 15:30 **St Augustine's Church at Hammersmith: A Contemporary Ceramic Commission for a Catholic Church**
Julian Stair, *Ceramic Artist, Academic and Writer*
- 15:45 **Q&A**
- 15:55 Tea and Coffee Break
- 16:20 **Piety and Politics in Italian Porcelain**
Errol Manners, *Historic Ceramics Specialist*
- 16:40 **Reflections on the Devotional Sculpture from Buen Retiro**
Félix Zorzo, *Assistant Curator European Decorative Arts, National Museums Scotland*
- 17:00 **Porcelain for the Pope: Sacred Ceramics in Eighteenth-Century France**
Susan Wager, *Assistant Professor of Art History, University of New Hampshire, Durham*
- 17:15 **Q&A and Closing Remarks**
- 17:45 Museum closes

Generously supported by the French Porcelain Society



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Programme

Matthew Martin

Senior Lecturer in Art History and Curatorship, The University of Melbourne

Catholic China: Porcelain, the Jesuits, and Counter-Reformation Propaganda

In 1712, the Jesuit missionary François-Xavier d'Entrecolles sent a letter from Jingdezhen in China to his superiors detailing, for the first time, the method for producing Chinese porcelain. This information came a few years after a kaolinic porcelain formula had been independently arrived at by experimentalists in Dresden, so the impact of this missive on European porcelain technology is not entirely clear. What d'Entrecolles's letter does suggest is that his access to information about Chinese porcelain production was deemed evidence of the success of the Jesuit global mission and imparted to porcelain special significance in Jesuit propaganda. This paper will explore the implications of this development for understanding religious sculpture executed in European porcelain.

Maureen Cassidy-Geiger

Independent Curator and Scholar

Religious Sculpture in Meissen Porcelain

The conversion of two Saxon princes to the Catholic faith in 1697 and 1712, followed by the arrival in 1719 of the deeply pious Maria Josepha of Austria, led to an intensity of private devotion at the court in Dresden. In tandem, the 'white gold' of the royal porcelain manufactory at Meissen was harnessed to the production of religious figures, groups and altar garnitures for family chapels in Saxony and beyond. Some of these initiatives were driven by Maria Josepha while others are attributable to Cardinal Annibale Albani (1682-1751) in Rome who, in December 1738, ordered a series porcelain 'reliquary busts' for a chapel in St. Peter's designed by Pietro Bracci for the tomb of Pope Clement XI Albani (1649-1721). This project was abandoned by 1746 but yielded at least sixteen different busts which might be attributed to Lorenzo Mattielli (d. 1748); to date, despite entries in the *Arbeitsberichte* and the survival of examples of altogether twelve different models, not to mention two of the original plaster molds, most of the saints are unidentified and the iconographic program remains a mystery, though it might have been devised by the Dresden-based Jesuit Ignazio Guarini (1676-1748).



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Rebecca Klarner

Collaborative Doctoral Partnership researcher, University of Leeds/V&A and Assistant Curator, V&A Wedgwood Collection

Marian Figures in Meissen Porcelain: A Female Body between a Catholic Court and a Protestant State

In 1697 Augustus II, Elector of Saxony – known to history as Augustus the Strong – converted to Catholicism in order to be elected King of Poland; meanwhile the Saxon state remained Protestant.

Since the Reformation, the veneration of Mary, mother of Christ, had been a point of doctrinal tension between Catholicism and Protestantism. Marian figures were produced at Meissen in several versions, the earliest modelled by Johann Gottlieb Kirchner in April 1732 and were often objects of private devotion.

This talk will explore Meissen's Marian sculptures, the men and women who commissioned, collected and used them, and the representational role of these figures at a Catholic court within a Protestant state.

Claudia Lehner-Jobst

Director and Collections Curator, Augarten Porcelain Museum, Vienna

The Divine Mission of Du Paquier: Grace, Virtue and Propaganda in the Context of Habsburg Piety

The modest range of sacred porcelain from the Du Paquier Manufactory (1718–1744) in Vienna reflects a reluctance towards representations of the divine in a novel material within the ceremonial requirements at the heart of the Holy Roman Empire.

This lecture explores early Vienna porcelain and the sensual strategies of Catholicism in the light of the god-given status of the Habsburg rulers between the Spanish tradition and their geographically defined role as defenders of faith. The manufactory's influential Jesuit neighbours - as cultural and economic agents - become as visible as the counterworlds of private devotion and modern nobility.



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Manuel von Aufschnaiter

Postgraduate Student, Art History, University of Vienna

A Reliquary Made by the Imperial Vienna Porcelain Manufactory

Using the porcelain reliquary of Saint John of Nepomuk from Langenlois, produced around 1750 by the Imperial Manufactory in Vienna, this paper will explore the use of porcelain art in liturgical and ecclesiastical contexts in the 18th century. Although porcelain was considered a luxury material at the time, it was rarely used in churches and never gained widespread liturgical acceptance. Whether this was due to church regulations, critical opinion, or the fragility of the material remains unclear. Could the absence of strict material requirements for reliquaries have enabled the creation of this piece? And might it reflect Habsburg religious policy and the widespread veneration of the saint?

Carina Nathalia Madonna Visconti Paff

Art Historian, Licensed Art Expert and Embassies Art Advisor

The Influence of Religious Patronage on European Porcelain Commissioning: Investigating the Rarest Monumental Sacral Porcelain Ensembles and the Ritual Use of the Porcelain Objects in European Ecclesiastical Rites

The lecture will examine Europe's largest porcelain sacral compositions, focusing on Crucifixion groups like Neapolitan examples and Kaendler's unique Wawel Castle Museum piece. It will explore religious patronage's influence, including artistic and theological motivations, and the relationship between religious art and porcelain design. Furthermore, the study investigates rituals and devotional practices within Catholic churches and the Reformation's impact on sacral porcelain commissions, including figural groups, altar objects, and private devotion items. By comparing the Wawel and Neapolitan groups with other European examples, the talk will illuminate diverse forms and functions of sacred porcelain, highlighting its ceremonial use and patronage's enduring influence.



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Julian Stair

Ceramic Artist, Academic and Writer

St Augustine's Church at Hammersmith: A Contemporary Ceramic Commission for a Catholic Church

The commission for a Font, Altar and Reliquary at St Augustine's RC Church (2018-19) represented a continuation of my exploration of the dynamics of use in a social context, from our daily existence to life's great rites of passage: the Font symbolising the beginning of human life, whilst the Altar the site of the central sacrament of Christianity and a potent metaphor for one of the most essential social interactions, the supper table and its rituals, and the Reliquary housing holy relics marked the culmination of my work in making vessels for the containment of the human body in death.

Errol Manners

Historic Ceramics Specialist

Piety and Politics in Italian Porcelain

Relatively little religious sculpture was made by the early Italian porcelain factories, but what was made was spectacular. The most ambitious devotional works of Doccia and Capodimonte were dynastic and diplomatic gifts or for court use, while little was made for the market. Was the medium considered too frivolous? Or too closely associated with luxury? Could it occasionally even be subversive?



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Félix Zorzo

Assistant Curator European Decorative Arts, National Museums Scotland

Reflections on the Devotional Sculpture from Buen Retiro

In 1760 Charles III of Spain moved his porcelain factory of Capodimonte in Naples to the Buen Retiro royal park in Madrid, bringing over materials as well as Italian workers such as the head sculptor Giuseppe Gricci. His religious production stands out for its exceptional quality, although at both Capodimonte and Buen Retiro, devotional pieces were outnumbered by secular subjects. Prompted by the presence of a Buen Retiro figure of the Christ Bound at National Museums Scotland, this paper examines the limited and disparate sculptural religious production of the Spanish 'Real Fábrica'.

Susan Wager

Assistant Professor of Art History, University of New Hampshire, Durham

Porcelain for the Pope: Sacred Ceramics in Eighteenth-Century France

In 1756 the French royal mistress Madame de Pompadour sent a Vincennes porcelain holy water stoup to Pope Benedict XIV, requesting "a tiny piece of the True Cross" in return. The proposed exchange (bold as it was) fantasizes an equivalence between Vincennes porcelain and one of the most sacred relics in the Catholic world. Curiously, religious sculpture represented a very small portion of the French manufactory's output, especially compared to that of its rival, Meissen. Using the Vincennes stoup as a case study, this paper explores how French porcelain's substitutional nature might have conditioned its use as a devotional medium.
