Masterpieces of French Art Pottery, 1885-1910

Jason Jacques

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Jason Jacques Inc., Art Nouveau and Japonist Ceramic Masterworks
29 East 73rd Street, New York, NY, 10021 www.jasonjacques.com

Welcome to the show, we are pleased you made it. I have labored many years to acquire the collection that you are about to enjoy. We decided to title the exhibition Masterpieces of French Art Pottery. Read this catalog and you will become well acquainted with the masters who created these magical works of art during a time when there was a full-blown international renaissance in the applied arts.

People are not used to hearing of a "renaissance" in the applied arts. Nevertheless, the word is fully justified. As in the Renaissance when Italy was at the center of the world, and Italian painters who are amongst the immortals of human history created incomparable works, in the Art Pottery Renaissance, centered in France, a galaxy of brilliant master potters produced the greatest ceramics in Western history. Their feverish entrepreneurship, their bold technical and artistic explorations, and their creative relationships with one another all make a fascinating story that is traced in the following pages.

Jason Jacques Inc., my firm specializing in Art Nouveau and Japonist ceramics, is marking its 15th anniversary this year with the opening a new gallery at 29 East 73rd Street designed by Joseph Holtzman. Here you will be treated to a series of comprehensive exhibitions. Masterpieces of French Art Pottery is the premiere show in the new space, and I couldn't have asked for a more extraordinary group of ceramics. In the past 100 years there has not been a more significant exhibition of works by these great artists. It is an incredible honor to be able to share my passion for French art pottery with you today.

Jason Jacques, 2005

Hector Guimard (1867 Lyon—1942 New York)

Hector Guimard was an architect and designer, best known for buildings like the Castel Béranger and, most famously, the Paris Metro entrances. However, he also designed furniture and furnishings, mainly for the interiors of his own buildings. Concern for stylistic unity is characteristic of Guimard's modernism, which promoted the concept of the total work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk), then a recent innovation. Guimard's notion of unity also arose from his somewhat paradoxical view of nature, according to which basic forms repeat themselves in endless variants. This principle accounts for the swirling asymmetry of Guimard's designs, where stylized plant forms twist and turn in upon themselves, in contrast to the allover repetition of plant motifs found in designs by William Morris.

Guimard's idea of universality in diversity is magnificently demonstrated in his design for the Vase de Cerny, executed by the Sèvres National Manufactory. One of three vase designs supplied by Guimard to Sèvres, this model features a cylindrical body that explodes in a riot of asymmetrical curvilinearity at the lip. The tight composition of these crown forms—suggestive of branches or stems—provides a dynamic flourish to the otherwise staid body. Yet it is precisely the body's structural stability that makes it a perfect vehicle for an exquisite crystalline glaze. The repetitive density of the glaze perfectly complements the vase's crown, endowing the entire piece with unity through variation, the first principle of Guimard's design philosophy.

Much of the credit for the success of this ceramic masterpiece must be given to the Sèvres Manufactory, whose experimentation with crystalline glazes during the 1890s resulted in new levels of technical control. Prior to the late 1890s, crystalline glazes were accidents of kiln firing. By 1900, new soft-paste porcelain developed by the chemists Charles Lauth and Georges Vogt, fired at lower temperatures than previous pastes, enabled Sèvres technicians to reliably produce crystalline glazes. Guimard's Vase de Cerny is a perfect example of the marriage of artistry and technology which laid the foundation for the French art pottery renaissance.

Hector Guimard
Vase de Cerny
Sèvres National Manufactory
Sèvres, France date: 1904
Porcelain with crystalline glaze
height 10.5 inches, diameter 4.75 inches
1

Ernest Chaplet (1835 Sèvres — 1909 Choisy-le-Roi)

Chaplet was undoubtedly the most innovative ceramist of the French art pottery renaissance. Apart from his numerous technical and aesthetic breakthroughs, Chaplet redefined the status of the ceramist by bestowing upon him sole creative authority. Previously, French manufacturers of art pottery, regardless of their scale of production, required a division of labor that segregated artist from artisan. Chaplet began his career at age thirteen as an apprentice porcelain painter at the Sèvres National Manufactory. At age forty, he was recruited by Haviland & Company to research and develop art pottery within an atelier system of production. By age fifty, Chaplet had decided to work for himself, and in so doing, would use only his hands to fashion some of the most influential ceramics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Between 1887 and 1904, Chaplet became France's premier studio ceramist, a new vocation that existed in large part thanks to his pioneering efforts.

During the early 1870s Chaplet developed barbotine decoration, a method of painting earthenware with liquid clay. It was this accomplishment which attracted the interest of Haviland & Company, owners of a porcelain manufactory in Limoges. Seeking new markets, Haviland established a research atelier in Auteuil, and in 1875 hired Chaplet to supervise production of barbotine ware. High production costs forced Haviland to close the Auteuil atelier in 1881, but Chaplet convinced the firm to open another atelier in Vaugirard in 1882. Here Chaplet directed production of matte brown stoneware that helped legitimize this clay as a medium for art pottery. Before the atelier folded in 1885, Chaplet quietly succeeded in producing a true sang de boeuf glaze, for which he received a gold medal at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition.

In 1889 Chaplet relocated to Choisy-le-Roi, where he immersed himself in glaze research. Like his sang de boeuf, Chaplet's studio glazes resulted from successive firings in different kiln atmospheres. As Chaplet's glazes became increasingly complex, his clay bodies grew simpler, ultimately severing their connection to Far Eastern prototypes. France's consummate studio ceramist, Chaplet ultimately believed that non-figural glazes provided sufficient decoration for a ceramic art of the future. Therein lies his major stylistic contribution to 20th-century studio pottery.

Ernest Chaplet
Tall Vase with Four Handles
Choisy-le-Roi, France circa 1889-1904
Porcelain with sang-de-boeuf glaze
height 18 inches, diameter 5 inches

Ernest Chaplet
Pair of Chinese Style Vases
Choisy-le-Roi, France circa 1889-1904
Porcelain with flambé and sang-de-boeuf glazes
height 12.5 inches, width 5.25 inches
3

Ernest Chaplet
Orange Peel Vase
Choisy-le-Roi, France circa 1889-1904
Stoneware with orange peel glaze
height 6 inches, width 5.5 inches
4

Ernest Chaplet
Bear Figurine
Choisy-le-Roi, France circa 1889-1904
Porcelain with orange peel glaze
height 3.75 inches, width 3.5 inches, depth 2.5 inches
5

Albert Dammouse (1848 Paris — 1926 Sèvres)

Dammouse stands out among his contemporaries as the finest painter of stoneware. After spending much of his career as a modeler and decorator for industrial porcelain manufacturers, Dammouse produced his finest work as a studio ceramist during the 1890s. In that decade Dammouse promoted stoneware as a medium for art pottery, largely through an expressive style of decoration in which Japanese-inspired imagery was executed in thick, rich glazes. Dammouse placed as much importance upon the textural effects of his glazes as he did upon his nature-based motifs. Although his mentor Ernest Chaplet abandoned figural decoration for abstract glazes, Dammouse continued to adhere to a tradition of representational imagery while stressing the importance of glazes as a decorative element in their own right.

Dammouse began his career working for porcelain companies. Between 1869 and 1871 he helped Louis Solon develop pâte-sur-pâte decoration at the Sèvres National Manufactory. During the 1870s Dammouse designed tableware for Pouyat and Haviland & Company. Dammouse also found occasional work as a decorator at Haviland's barbotine atelier in Auteuil. After that atelier closed in 1881, Dammouse modeled and decorated stoneware at Haviland's atelier in Vaugirard. Supervised by Chaplet, Dammouse came to view stoneware as an ideal ceramic medium, similar to porcelain in durability and receptivity to high-temperature glazes, but cheaper and easier to produce. When Haviland closed its Vaugirard atelier in 1885, Dammouse and his younger brother Edouard founded their own workshop in Sèvres.

As a studio ceramist, Dammouse gravitated toward Japanese influences, which had played a dominant role at Haviland's stoneware atelier. Dammouse adopted a repertoire of motifs based on flowering and aquatic plant life, which he stylized in the manner of Japanese prints and textiles. Dammouse now combined his skill as a decorator with his mastery as a glaze technician. Apart from Chaplet, no other ceramist of the 1890s created such an astonishing combination of opposing qualities of texture and opacity. Alternately smooth and crusty, thick and thin, matte and glossy, Dammouse's glazes commingle to create surface topographies upon which figural imagery is seamlessly integrated. Dammouse's singular accomplishment lies in his use of stoneware as a medium for exploring a wide range of glaze effects within the parameters of figural decoration.

Albert Dammouse
Iris Vase
Sèvres, France circa 1885-1900
Glazed stoneware
height 12 inches, diameter 6.25 inches
6

Albert Dammouse
Monumental Floral Vase
Sèvres, France circa 1885-1900
Glazed stoneware
height 26 inches, diameter 13 inches

Auguste Delaherche (1857 Beauvais—1940 Paris)

Delaherche ranks among the preeminent figures of the 19th-century French art pottery renaissance, whereas his stature as a 20th-century studio ceramist transcends national boundaries. As a boy he developed an obsessive love for pottery, and this childhood passion guided him toward what can best be described as a calling rather than a profession. Like his contemporaries, Delaherche benefited from advances in the material conditions of pottery production. That said, Delaherche maintained an almost mystical relationship to fire, which he viewed as an unpredictable force that the ceramist must master. Driven by relentless perfectionism, Delaherche abandoned any technique whose results could not be reproduced, and destroyed any pot that failed to meet his exacting standards.

The son of an affluent textile manufacturer, Delaherche grew up surrounded by ceramics. The extensive collection of his Uncle Alexandre highlighted pottery from the Beauvais region, including pieces by the 16th-century master Bernard Palissy. Beauvais's traditional architecture featured exquisite tilework, which Delaherche's uncle also encouraged him to appreciate. After studying at the Paris École des Arts Décoratifs, Delaherche decided to become a ceramist. In his first period of production (1883-1886), he used the manufactory of Ludovic Pilleux to fabricate inexpensive pottery for the general public. In 1887 Delaherche acquired Haviland's stoneware atelier, and began his second period of production, now as an art potter.

In his atelier Delaherche worked exclusively with stoneware, an unconventional medium for art pottery during the late 1880s. Having used this clay at Pilleux's manufactory, Delaherche was well qualified to explore its aesthetic potential. Decoration ranged from the modish to the avant-garde: one iconic vase sports iridized peacock feathers, while another bears a matte-glazed leaf design whose minimalism seems as modern now as it did in 1889. Delaherche's ceaseless experimentation with kiln techniques enabled him to create his remarkable glazes, but also fueled his belief in fire as a capricious deity. In 1894 Delaherche relocated to Armentières, a village adjacent to Beauvais. Beginning in 1904 he made his pots assisted only by his wife. Simple forms with flowing glazes became the hallmark of his mature style, ushering in the era of modern studio pottery.

Auguste Delaherche
Horse Chestnut Vase
Vaugirard, France circa 1887-1894
Glazed stoneware
height 14.75 inches, diameter 10.5 inches
8

Auguste Delaherche
Abstract Charger
Vaugirard, France circa 1887-1894
Stoneware with flambé glaze
diameter 19 inches
9

Jean Carriès (1855 Lyon—1894 Paris)

Carriès was a seminal figure of the French art pottery movement, a man of lowly origins who achieved prominence as a sculptor, then turned to the humble medium of stoneware to express his deepest artistic aspirations. Driven by demons as intense as his talent, Carriès battled depression and illness while working on his ultimate creation, a monumental portal made of stoneware. Although his premature death quashed that project, Carriès's legacy endures through his pottery and the influence it has exerted on other ceramists well into the 20th century.

Carriès's parents died from tuberculosis in 1861, an event that consigned the young boy and his siblings to an orphanage. In 1874 Carriès entered the Paris École des Beaux-Arts, but was dealt another blow when his sister Agnès succumbed to tuberculosis in 1876. He experienced an artistic epiphany upon viewing Japanese stoneware at the 1879 Paris Universal Exposition. Although he achieved success as a sculptor during the 1880s, Carriès dreamed of becoming a ceramist. Having never overcome his sense of social inferiority, he saw himself as an artisan and looked to stoneware as a medium appropriate for an artist of the common people.

In 1888 Carriès built a workshop in Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye, and in 1889 he exhibited ceramics in his Paris atelier. Among the visitors was the Princess de Scey Montebeliard, a rich American who had married into French nobility. In 1890 she commissioned Carriès to create a stoneware portal for her Paris home. While work proceeded on this project, Carriès honed his skills as a ceramist. Initially inspired by Japanese prototypes, he developed a personal stylistic repertoire including bottles, bi-lobed gourds, and imaginary creatures inspired by Gothic cathedral sculpture. Carriès's stoneware, decorated with velvety matte glazes enhanced with gold, caused a sensation when 200 examples were exhibited in 1892 in Paris. Even so, stress from the portal project led to his becoming depressed. He contracted influenza, pleurisy developed, and two weeks later Carriès died at the home of Georges Hoentschel. Eulogized in the newspapers, he was hailed as a leader of the art pottery renaissance. The portal that led to his demise was never completed.

Jean Carriès
Double Gourd Vase
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye circa 1890
Glazed and gilt stoneware
height 7.75 inches, diameter 5 inches

Jean Carriès
Japonist Bottle
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye circa 1890
Glazed and gilt stoneware
height 6 inches, diameter 3.5 inches
11

Jean Carriès
Laughing Mask
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye date: 1891
Glazed stoneware
height 9.5 inches, width 7 inches
12

Georges Hoentschel (1855 Paris-1915 Paris)

Hoentschel played an extremely important, albeit ambiguous, role in the French art pottery renaissance, principally through his association with ceramists Jean Carriès and Émile Grittel. As one of Carriès closest friends, Hoentschel promoted the great ceramist's influential stoneware during his lifetime and after his tragically early death. Hoentschel also designed ceramics that were executed by Émile Grittel, a member of the so-called Carriès School. Although Hoentschel probably created some of the pottery that bears his mark, he should be understood as an astute disseminator and designer of ceramics produced by others.

Hoentschel used familial loans to establish an interior decoration and furnishings atelier in Paris. During the 1880s, Hoentschel's skills as an interior decorator secured his connections among the Paris elite, enabling him to introduce works by contemporary artists into otherwise eclectic interiors composed of 18th century furniture and Far Eastern decorative arts. In the late-1880s Hoentschel met Jean Carriès, then a successful sculptor who was developing an interest in ceramics. The two became close friends, and Hoentschel promoted Carriès' ceramics through his design firm. After Carriès' death in 1894 Hoentschel purchased the artist's estate, and acquired his atelier in Montriveau. Assisted by Carriès' artisans, Hoentschel resumed production of stoneware ceramics for his interior decoration business. Hoentschel supplied designs to his artisans, but did not actually make the pottery that bore his monogram. After ending his involvement with the Montriveau atelier around 1900, Hoentschel contracted Émile Grittel to fabricate stoneware at his atelier in Clichy-la-Garenne. Grittel continued to anonymously manufacture ceramics for Hoentschel until 1910.

As a ceramics designer Hoentschel remained firmly under the spell of Carriès. His designs of the 1890s reflect the Japanese influence that shaped Carriès's work, both in forms and glazes. In a sense, Hoentschel used stoneware fabrication as a means of preserving his memory of Carriès. While Hoentschel's interior decoration remained attached to upper class nostalgia for the 18th century, his stoneware firmly placed him at the forefront of the French art pottery renaissance, largely pioneered by his beloved friend Carriès.

Georges Hoentschel
Pair of Fu Lion Vases
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye date: 1890
Glazed stoneware
height 18 inches, width 7 inches
13

Georges Hoentschel
Pair of Monumental Fish and Algae Vases
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye date: 1898
Glazed stoneware
height 44.5 inches, diameter 24 inches

Émile Grittel (1870 Strasbourg—1953 Clichy-la-Garenne)

For much of his career Grittel labored anonymously for the Parisian interior decorator Georges Hoentschel, but he is now recognized as one of the finest ceramists of the Carriès School. An artistic child, Grittel was apprenticed to the sculptor Bordelet at age sixteen. In 1894 Grittel began working as a sculptor and bronze founder for Hoentschel. Hoentschel, a close friend of the great Carriès, had acquired the latter's Montriveau atelier upon his death with the intention of resuming ceramic production.

In 1895 Hoentschel sent Grittel to train with the artisans who had worked under Carriès. Grittel fabricated ceramics at Montriveau from 1895 to 1900, when Hoentschel stopped using the atelier. Grittel then relocated to Clichy-sur-Garenne. His marriage to the daughter of a wealthy Clichy grocer provided him with the capital to build workshops for the production of ceramics, furniture, and bronzes. Although Grittel's independence caused a breach with Hoentschel, the decorator eventually relented and became Grittel's principal client. Hoentschel would provide designs for ceramics and bronzes, and often visited to supervise production. Grittel's ateliers mainly produced furniture, boiseries, and bronze ornaments in the 18th-century style favored by Hoentschel and his elite clientele.

During this period Grittel remained active as a ceramist, fashioning Japonist stoneware in the style pioneered by Carriès. Grittel hand-built vessels resembling sake bottles and tea ceremony bowls, whose sides he frequently stretched to the point of deformation. He also produced sculpted gourds and fruits. Grittel glazed these pieces in matte enamels, occasionally adorned with gold. He rarely signed his work before 1915, the year of Hoentschel's death. Until then, Grittel's pieces had carried Hoentschel's monogram. After 1915 Grittel scraped the bases of his existing pieces and applied his own mark to them, reclaiming two decades' worth of ceramics. It is difficult to grasp Grittel's virtuosic accomplishment as a potter, obscured as he was by Hoentschel. Unlike other members of the Carriès school, he did not limit himself to traditional Japanese vessel forms. Grittel's handling of clay is Rodinesque in confidence; in their final states his pieces often seem otherworldly.

Émile Grittel
Double Gourd Vase
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye circa 1905
Glazed and combed stoneware
height 7.75 inches, width 4.25 inches, depth 2.75 inches
15

Émile Grittel
Fantastical Gourd Vase
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye circa 1900
Glazed and gilt stoneware
height 11.5 inches, diameter 10 inches
16

Paul Jeanneney (1861 Strasbourg—1920 Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye)

Jeanneney played an important role in Jean Carriès's decision to become a ceramist; for that alone he deserves a place in any history of the French art pottery renaissance. But Jeanneney was also an extremely talented ceramist in his own right, and as such, one of the key figures in the Carriès School. While his Japonist stoneware generally remains faithful to its sources, Jeanneney also created original designs that capture the spirit of their Far Eastern counterparts.

Little is known about Jeanneney's background, but he may have befriended Carriès during the late 1870s, when Carriès was a student at the Paris École des Beaux-Arts. It is known that Jeanneney owned a large collection of Japanese stoneware, which, along with the exhibition of Japanese ceramics at the 1878 Paris Universal Exposition, strongly influenced Carriès's decision to become a ceramist. In turn, Carriès's ceramics inspired Jeanneney to fabricate his own Japonist stoneware. The circularity in these friends' relationship seems to have extended to their collecting practices. As a collector of authentic Japanese pottery, Jeanneney had a readily available supply of pieces to study. In the late 1880s Carriès began buying Japanese stoneware from Siegfried Bing, then one of the leading Parisian dealers in Japanese artifacts. Perhaps Carriès emulated his friend Jeanneney, whose personal collection had helped both men understand the aesthetic principles underlying Japanese stoneware.

Jeanneney's ceramics fall into two general categories. Some closely resemble Japanese prototypes, for example the double gourd-form vases whose pinched sides intentionally imitate the random deformations so admired by the Japanese in their own wares. A second group draw upon Japanese sources, but are strongly inflected by Jeanneney's personal style. These pieces include the iconic "chaire," or tea caddy, upon which Jeanneney attached trompe l'oeil fungi; and his stoneware masks, some of which depict twisted features similar to, but not identical with, Noh theater masks. Jeanneney dedicated his life to Japonist stoneware, continuing to create distinctive examples long after Carriès had passed from the scene.

Paul Jeanneney
Double Gourd Vase
Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye circa 1895
Glazed stoneware
height 9 inches, diameter 7 inches
17

Paul Milet (1870 Sèvres—1950)

Son of Optat Milet, Paul Milet entered his father's art pottery firm in 1894 and took over as general manager in 1899. Under his direction the firm expanded its production of decorative faïence to include stoneware and porcelain. It also increased its number of regular employees to eight by 1907, and later to twelve. Paul Milet continued his father's habit of seeking contract work from full-time employees of the Sèvres National Manufactory. Outstanding among those Sèvres artists who created pieces for Milet was Émile Belet.

Belet worked at the Sèvres Manufactory from 1876 to 1900. During that period he was recognized as one of firm's finest designers and decorators, receiving awards for pieces exhibited at the world's fairs of 1867, 1878, 1889, 1893, and 1900. Belet also designed jewelry and ornamentation that could be applied to a wide range of applied arts. As a ceramic designer, Belet excelled in naturalistic studies of flowers and animals that could be executed on plaques and chargers. Belet also specialized in the use of algae and other marine life as design motifs; he even illustrated a scientific book on different species of algae. This predilection is well served on one of the Paul Milet vases, which features a loop handle in the form of a sweeping piece of algae, as well as a naturalistically modeled crab hiding on a circular opening near the base. Interestingly, similar vase designs were reproduced in a collection of heliotype plates of Belet's designs [Recueil de Documents d'Art Décoratif, Serie E. Belet, Modèles de Céramiques, Armand Guérinet editor (Paris, France: Librairie d'Art Décoratif, n.d.) plates 11, 22]. Belet's talent as a floral designer is highlighted in his Milet morning glory vase, which boldly stylizes the floral motif, quite in contrast to the realistic renderings reproduced in the heliotype portfolio.

Paul Milet
Émile Belet
Kelp and Crab Vase
Sèvres, France circa 1902-1903
Glazed Stoneware
height 14.25 inches, width 7.5 inches
18

Paul Milet
Attributed to Émile Belet
Morning Glory Vase
Sèvres, France circa 1902-1903
Glazed Stoneware
height 14.75 inches, diameter 7 inches
19

Taxile Doat (1851 Albi-- 1939)

Doat is best known as the master of grand feu ceramics, that is, high-fired porcelain and stoneware. Although he achieved early success as a pâte-sur-pâte decorator at the Sèvres National Manufactory, Doat sought greater freedom to produce his own work. This required extensive knowledge of ceramic production, so during the 1890s Doat established two independent research ateliers. After years of experimentation, Doat became one of France's most versatile studio ceramists. Most unusually, while other studio ceramists carefully guarded their techniques, Doat shared his prodigious expertise in several articles, whose translation into English by Samuel Robineau provided a wealth of information to American art potters.

What is especially intriguing about Doat is his transition from industrial artisan to studio ceramist. In 1877 the Sèvres National Manufactory hired Doat to conduct pâte-sur-pâte design and decoration, and although Doat's production was prodigious—he created over 3000 pieces—he maintained an uneasy relationship with his employer. Like other accomplished artisans, Doat was granted a personal atelier within the manufactory. During the 1880s he exhibited his atelier porcelain in France and abroad to widespread acclaim, but his growing self-determination infuriated Sèvres administrator Émile Baumgart, who in 1897 forbade Sèvres employees to work independently. Doat's continued refusal to recognize this directive led to his dismissal in 1905.

However, by the time Doat left the Sèvres manufactory he had already gained recognition as one of France's finest studio ceramists. Inspired by Ernest Chaplet and Albert Dammouse, Doat initially established a small Parisian atelier in 1892, then built an improved atelier in Sèvres in 1897. There Doat conducted intensive research on both porcelain and stoneware, sometimes decorating stoneware bodies with porcelain pastes. He also perfected an astonishing variety of grand feu and crystalline glazes. Although Doat still favored pâte-sur-pâte decoration in historical revival styles, he also created a remarkable series of vases based on naturalistic gourd forms. Doat's display at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition secured his reputation as a studio ceramist. With the publication of his techniques in Keramik Studio (1903-04) and the book Grand Feu Ceramics (1905), French studio pottery practices were widely disseminated among English-language readers.

Taxile Doat
Vase with Seashell Lid
Sèvres, France date: 1931
Porcelain with grand feu glazes
height 11.25 inches, diameter 3.5 inches
20

Taxile Doat
Oxblood Red Gourd Vase
Sèvres, France date: 1907
Porcelain with grand feu glazes
height 8.25 inches, diameter 3 inches
21

Leonard Gebleux (b.1884-d.1928; for the Sèvres National Manufactory)

Gebleux worked as a decorator, then, as artistic director (1920-1927) at the Sèvres National Manufactory, France's largest industrial producer of art pottery during the 19th and 20th centuries. Sèvres primarily manufactured France's finest porcelain tableware, but throughout the second half of the 19th century, sought to enter the growing market for art pottery. Thanks to enormous financial resources supplied by the French state, Sèvres was uniquely placed to employ exceptionally skilled artists and artisans and to develop new materials and techniques for ceramic production. These factors combined to make Sèvres one of the most influential forces in the French art pottery renaissance.

Sèvres began to work in the Art Nouveau style during the mid- to late-1890s. With the appointment of Émile Baumgart as director in 1891, the firm undertook a thorough examination of the manufactory's artistic and technical aims for the future. As art and studio potters began consolidating a market for their work in the early 1890s, Sèvres followed the trend, and by 1900, was France's largest producer of pottery in the Art Nouveau style. The artistic and commercial stature of Sèvres in this arena reached its apogee in 1900, when the firm displayed hundreds of pieces of Art Nouveau pottery at the Paris Universal Exposition. One of Sèvres's most distinctive styles involved the use of enamel glaze decoration on porcelain. Designers like Gebleux used a familiar repertoire of stylized plant motifs, but executed them with an unprecedented level of artistry and technical expertise. Layering enamel glazes to create extraordinarily complicated decors, Sèvres contributed an outstanding body of work to the Art Nouveau movement, which would begin to suffer from the effects of cheap imitation and mass production a mere three years after Gebleux's superb mistletoe vase was created.

Leonard Gebleux
Sèvres National Manufactory
Mistletoe Vase
Sèvres, France date: 1902
Porcelain with enamel glazes
height 37.25 inches, diameter 13.75 inches

Pierre Adrien Dalpayrat (1844 Limoges—1910 Paris)

During the 1890s Dalpayrat was so well known for his flambé pottery that the term "Dalpayrat red" was coined to designate the distinctive color that decorated his stoneware. Before he achieved this level of fame, however, Dalpayrat spent almost half his career as an itinerant faïence painter. His success reveals as much about the burgeoning market for art pottery during the last decade of the 19th century as it does about Dalpayrat's considerable skills as a ceramist and entrepreneur.

Although trained at the Limoges Municipal Practical School of Porcelain Painting, Dalpayrat made his living as a faïence painter, working at six different manufactories between 1867 and 1888. On average he spent two years at each faïencerie, yet the brevity of his tenures suggest wanderlust rather than a chronic inability to hold a job (Dalpayrat achieved the position of director or co-director at three of the manufactories where he was employed). In 1889 Dalpayrat settled in Bourg-la-Reine, a ceramic production center southwest of Paris. During the early 1890s he undertook stoneware production, possibly due to the well-publicized successes of Ernest Chaplet and Auguste Delaherche at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition. Around this time Dalpayrat also seems to have changed his professional self-image, now designating himself "artist-ceramist" on his official papers.

Dalpayrat's meteoric rise to fame occurred in late 1892, when he exhibited fifty stoneware pieces based on models by Alphonse Voisin-Delacroix at the prestigious Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. This exhibition unveiled his first flambé glazes, which were created by transmuting copper oxides at the atomic level through successive firings in oxygen-depleted and oxygen-rich kiln atmospheres. The immediate success of Dalpayrat's ceramics speaks to contemporary enthusiasm for novel glaze effects, as well as growing acceptance of stoneware as a medium for art pottery. Dalpayrat soon found himself the proprietor of a booming atelier. Prominent modelers included Jean Coulon, whose Symbolist pitcher La Nuit depicts an owl, attribute of night, composed of recumbent female forms. Japonist influences appear in vases based on gourd forms and stylized plant motifs. What unites these disparate body shapes is their sumptuous flambé glazing, Dalpayrat's unique contribution to the evolving French art pottery renaissance.

Pierre Adrien Dalpayrat
Tall Organic Vase
Bourg-la-Reine, France date: 1902
Stoneware with “Dalpayrat red” glaze
height 14 inches, diameter 5.5. inches
23

Jean Coulon
Pierre Adrien Dalpayrat
La Nuit
Bourg-la-Reine, France date: 1894
Glazed stoneware
height 10.75 inches, diameter 6.5 inches
24

Pierre Adrien Dalpayrat
Teapot
Bourg-la-Reine, France date: 1898
Glazed porcelaneous stoneware
height 10.75 inches, diameter 6.5 inches
25

Edmond Lachenal (1855 Paris—1930 Paris)

Lachenal formed a pivotal link in a chain of influential French art potters, and his wide range of styles reflects the complex transition from historical revivalism to Art Nouveau. Lachenal also bridged a period of shifting systems of production, during which industrial manufacturers spawned atelier and studio potters. If Lachenal's career seems to lack a clear stylistic trajectory, the exquisite ceramics produced at his atelier in the 1890s confirm his status as a master art potter.

Like many of France's greatest art potters, Lachenal began his career as an apprentice in a ceramics manufactory. Around the age of fifteen Lachenal was hired by Théodore Deck, a pioneering figure in France's art pottery movement. Deck's small-scale Paris manufactory specialized in richly painted and glazed earthenware in fashionable Iznik, Chinese, and neo-Renaissance styles. This responsiveness to prevailing market tastes suggests an essentially conservative artistic temperament, yet Deck's development of new glaze techniques placed him in the vanguard of early art potters. Lachenal began his career in Deck's painting atelier, the manufactory's most prestigious department. He would eventually become its director.

Lachenal left Deck's manufactory in 1879, and in 1880 established an atelier at Chatillon-sur-Bagneux. At first he created earthenware plates imitative of Deck's Iznik style, but also began working with stoneware. Following in Deck's footsteps, Lachenal experimented with glaze formulas. Around 1890 he created a velvety matte glaze obtained through a combination of electrolysis and hydrofluoric acid baths. In 1895 he presented metallic luster glazed earthenware—manufactured by Keller et Guérin—at the Galerie Georges Petit, alongside ceramic reproductions of sculptures by Auguste Rodin, Pierre Fix-Masseau, and Agnès de Frumerie. Throughout his career Lachenal worked in earthenware, stoneware, and on occasion, porcelain. He tended to decorate earthenware with matte glazes or electrolyzed acid-bath enamels. In contrast, Lachenal applied grand feu glazes to his stoneware pieces, allowing the reduced oxides to drip down bodies usually derived from plant forms. Working with his son Raoul, Lachenal created an extraordinary range of ceramics that nonetheless conformed to the parameters of Art Nouveau style. In this respect, Lachenal remained true to the spirit of Théodore Deck's eclecticism.

Agnes de Frumerie
Edmond Lachenal
Nymph and Lily Vase
Chatillon-sur-Bagneux, France
Earthenware with matte vellum glaze
height 14.25 inches, width 8 inches, depth 4.5 inches
26

Edmond Lachenal
Lily Handled Vase
Chatillon-sur-Bagneux, France circa 1900
Stoneware with flambé glaze
height 13.25 inches, diameter 10.5 inches

Edmond Lachenal
Genie Bottle
Chatillon-sur-Bagneux, France circa 1895-1900
Stoneware with flambé glaze
height 13 inches, diameter 12 inches
28

Raoul Lachenal (1885-1956)

The son of Edmond Lachenal, Raoul Lachenal worked in his father's studio until 1911, when he established a new workshop at Boulogne-sur-Seine. While some of Raoul Lachenal's Art Nouveau ceramics resemble pieces by his father, he also produced distinctive stoneware that can hold its own against works by master glaze artists like Ernest Chaplet and Albert Dammouse. At his best, Lachenal can rightly be compared to these titans of the French art pottery renaissance.

Lachenal first exhibited his Art Nouveau stoneware at Paris salons in 1904. Period photographs show pieces with organic body forms, looping handles, and incised decoration similar to Edmond Lachenal's work from around 1900. Given the fact that father and son shared an atelier, the question of authorship is murky on several levels, notably those of direct influence and possible collaboration. Nonetheless, the son's stoneware is distinguished by its sophisticated use of conventionalized motifs and layering of high-temperature glazes. His whiplash handle vase is a masterpiece of body design and glaze effects, with the handles deftly composed around the piece's lip and shoulder breathing new vitality into an overused Art Nouveau leitmotif. What really brings this piece to life, though, is its thickly applied high-temperature glaze, whose palette of purple hues is as varied as the subtle shifts in depth across the body's surface.

Similarly, Lachenal's treatment of the peacock feather refreshes a motif that harks back to the English Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s. Thanks to unexpected juxtapositions of matte and glossy areas, the vertically arranged feathers border on abstraction and yield a complex figure-and-ground relationship between the motif and the surrounding space. Such optical complexity challenges the viewer's perception of familiar imagery. Then again, Lachenal's trumpet neck vase wears a remarkable volcanic glaze whose pitted surface is astonishingly fresh, almost contemporary. Here the purposeful juxtaposition of an overall cratered surface and a matte-glaze shoulder reveals keen sensitivity to textural effects. These three vases refute traditional accounts of Raoul Lachenal's Art Nouveau ceramics as undifferentiated restatements of his father's style from the same period.

Raoul Lachenal
Whiplash Handled Vase
Chatillon-sur-Bagneux, France circa 1900-1905
Glazed stoneware
height 10.75 inches, diameter 6.5 inches
29

Raoul Lachenal
Peacock Feather Vase
Chatillon-sur-Bagneux, France circa
1900-1905
Glazed stoneware
height 10.75 inches, diameter 6.5 inches

Raoul Lachenal
Trumpet Neck Vase
Chatillon-sur-Bagneux, France circa 1904
Stoneware with volcanic glaze
height 16.75 inches, diameter 7 inches
31

Émile Decoeur (1876-1953)

Decoeur holds an unusual position within the French art pottery renaissance. On the one hand, he belonged to an artistic lineage that began with Théodore Deck and extended through Edmond Lachenal; on the other hand, he was a transitional figure between Art Nouveau and subsequent styles. Decoeur thus represents the culmination of a tradition that he would renounce by 1910.

At age fourteen Decoeur was apprenticed to Edmond Lachenal, who had founded his own atelier in 1880 after working for Théodore Deck for ten years. One of the first French art potters, Deck's small manufactory produced artistic faïence in a variety of Orientalist and historical revival styles. Lachenal, however, advanced beyond this eclecticism to embrace aspects of Art Nouveau style, including the use of stoneware as a medium for art pottery. Like his mentor, Lachenal used his atelier, based in Chatillon-sous-Bagneux, for researching new glazes. During his apprenticeship with Lachenal, Decoeur helped fabricate a densely grained faïence similar to impure porcelain, but decorated with low-temperature enamel glazes. Although he worked on production pieces, Decoeur took his craft seriously, researching glazes during the day and attending design classes at night. Some of Lachenal's pieces produced during Deceour's apprenticeship also bear the young ceramist's signature.

Decoeur, inspired by Jean Carriès's stoneware, decided to master this medium. Through independent trials he eventually grasped the fundamental difference between faïence and stoneware: whereas fired earthenware achieves a biscuit state but remains porous until glazed, stoneware clay is vitrified by high-temperature firing. Without guidance, Deceour threw his own stoneware pots and decorated them with metallic oxides, producing richly textured flambé glazes. Although he began exhibiting independently in 1901, Deceour continued to collaborate with Lachenal until 1903. He then settled in Auteuil, where he befriended Fernand Rumèbe, with whom he collaborated from 1903 to1905. In 1907 Decoeur established his own studio in Fonteney-aux-Roses, where he continued to produce high-temperature glazed stoneware while experimenting with porcelain. After 1910 Decoeur renounced his previous efforts, and embarked on a new phase of production that favored simple forms with layered geometric decors. By the mid-1920s he had abandoned geometric design and begun producing some of the most breathtakingly austere studio pottery of the 20th century.

Émile Decoeur
Giant Coloquint Vase
Paris, France circa 1905
Stoneware with flambé glaze
height 14 inches, diameter 10 inches
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Émile Decoeur
Icicle Vases
Paris, France circa 1903-1905
Stoneware with thick flambé glaze
height 24 inches, diameter 10 inches

Joseph Mougin (1876 Nancy—1961 Nancy)

Joseph Mougin, along with his younger brother Pierre, produced pottery that in many ways epitomizes the Art Nouveau style, especially that of the Nancy School, where their manufactory was active from 1906. Based on natural forms, covered with flambé and crystalline glazes, Joseph Mougin's ceramics assert a powerful sculptural and decorative presence. However, it was in Paris, where he had gone to learn sculpture in 1895, that Mougin produced some of his most startling ceramic sculptures, during the early phase of his career.

A headstrong adolescent, Mougin knew by age seventeen that he wanted to become an artist. After two years of training at the Nancy École des Beaux-Arts, he departed for Paris, where he entered the National École des Beaux-Arts. There he frequented the atelier of the sculptor Ernest Barrias, hoping to learn how to produce monumental sculpture that commanded large commission fees and garnered Salon awards. His plans changed, however, when he visited a posthumous exhibition of stoneware by Jean Carriès. In 1897, the twenty-one-year-old renounced academic sculpture, intending to follow in Carriès's footsteps. Between 1897 and 1903 Mougin struggled to build a functioning kiln, with the aid of Charles Lemarquier, a student friend, and his brother Pierre. Despite persistent technical obstacles, by as early as 1900 he had produced a small but important body of ceramic sculptures.

As a student in Paris, Mougin would have encountered the illustrations of Ernst Haeckel. During the second half of the 19th century advances in microscopy and germ theory provoked widespread interest in organisms invisible to the naked eye. Illustrated publications on this subject proliferated throughout Europe, culminating in Haeckel's Art Forms in Nature, published in Leipzig between 1899 and 1904. These color lithographs of microbial life were widely influential in fin-de-siècle artistic circles, where a new form of decoration—biomorphic abstraction—inflected Art Nouveau style. Mougin's striking turn-of-the-century ceramics bear an unmistakable resemblance to a phylum of marine microbes known as spyroidea, which appear in Haeckel—proof of the rich and diverse influences on French art pottery.

Joseph Mougin
Spyroidea Vase
Paris, France circa 1900
Glazed stoneware with ceramic and glass cabochons
height 15.75 inches, diameter 10 inches

Ernest Bussière (1863 Ars sur Moselle—1913 Nancy)

Bussière was an unusual figure in the French art pottery renaissance insofar as he was a modeler of ceramic forms rather than a ceramist per se. An academically trained sculptor, Bussière had little involvement with the actual fabrication of his designs. Based on plant forms, these pieces were decorated with exceptionally refined metallic luster glazes. Both during Bussière's lifetime and afterwards confusion remained over the exact nature of the clay composition of his pieces. Often erroneously described as stoneware, they are actually made of pipe clay, a fine white earthenware. Fired at low temperatures, the glaze results from two successive coats, the first a velvety base, the second a thin "skin" of refracting pigments. This process is unique to the Bussière/ Keller et Guérin pieces.

Raised in Nancy, Bussière received his early training at the École Muniçipale de Dessin under Charles Pêtre, who encouraged students to closely observe natural forms. In 1882 Bussière was admitted to the Paris École des Beaux-Arts, where he studied until 1889. Beginning with his Salon debut in 1883, Bussière pursued a career as a sculptor, basing his reputation primarily on commemorative statuary. Given his success in this field, it is unclear why he collaborated with Keller et Guérin, a faïencerie located in Lunéville. Whatever the reason, Bussière first provided models for the firm around 1896. He then exhibited luster-glazed faïence at the 1899 Nancy Salon and the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition. At the Paris Exposition Bussière showed ceramics under his own name, rather than with Keller et Guérin's display. Clearly he saw himself as the creator of these pieces, despite the fact that he played no substantive part in their actual production.

In 1903 Bussière displayed over twenty pieces of plant-form ceramics at the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs. His final pottery exhibition took place in Nancy in 1909, after which he returned to his life as a sculptor and professor at the Nancy École des Beaux-Arts. Although Bussière's collaboration with the Keller et Guérin manufactory lasted a mere thirteen years, it resulted in some of the most esoteric pottery of the Art Nouveau movement.

Ernest Bussière
Orchid Vase
Keller et Guérin
Lunéville, France date: 1903
Earthenware with metallic luster glaze
height 13 inches, diameter 3.5 inches

Ernest Bussière
Thistle Vase
Keller et Guérin
Lunéville, France date:
Earthenware with metallic luster glaze
height 13 inches, diameter 3.5 inches
36

Clément Massier (1844 Vallauris—1917 Golfe-Juan)

Born into a family of industrial ceramists whose presence in the Mediterranean city of Vallauris can be traced back to the 18th century, Massier devoted himself to the creation of metallic lusterware with an almost obsessive fervor. After years of research, he became the first ceramist of the French art pottery renaissance to create a new luster glaze. However, Massier's legacy is based on his artistic use of this technical achievement. Drawing upon traditions of the Near East and East Asia, he also found inspiration in his homeland's distinctive landscape and life forms. Massier's ability to synthesize these far-flung and regional influences, coupled with his astonishing luster glaze techniques, made him unique among the art potters of the Art Nouveau movement.

His father, Jacques Massier, specialized in the manufacturing of culinary pottery. After Jacques's death in 1871, Clément established himself as a successful manufacturer of brightly colored enameled faïence that appealed to the conservative tastes of a wealthy international clientele. Around 1881 he relocated to Golfe-Juan, a nearby city strategically situated on the national railway route conveying tourists between Paris and the Côte d'Azur. He spent the next five years inventing techniques for creating iridescent glazes, and, after hiring the painter Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer in 1887, produced metallic lusterware never before seen in France.

While Massier's virtuosic glazes inspire awe, they also complicate attempts to classify their creator as a ceramist. Massier can be seen mistakenly as a painter on pottery, when in fact he always grasped the interconnectedness of form and decoration. In this respect his oeuvre is as avant-garde as that of Chaplet, Delaherche, and Carriès, studio ceramists who championed simple body forms and non-figural glazes. What distinguishes Massier's pottery from that of his contemporaries, however, is its lyrical quality. Unlike the glass artist Émile Gallé, Massier did not need to inscribe actual lines of verse on his pottery to elevate it to the realm of poetry; his marriage of form and glaze was sufficient to accomplish that aim.

Clément Massier
Mushroom Vase
Golfe-Juan, France circa 1897-1899
Earthenware with metallic luster glaze
height 13.75 inches, diameter 8 inches
37

Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer
Clément Massier
Persian Bottle FormVase
Golfe-Juan, France date: 1893
Earthenware with metallic luster glaze
height 16.5 inches, width 10 inches, depth 4 inches

Clément Massier
Winged Dragon Charger
Golfe-Juan, France circa 1895
Earthenware with metallic luster glaze
diameter 25 inches
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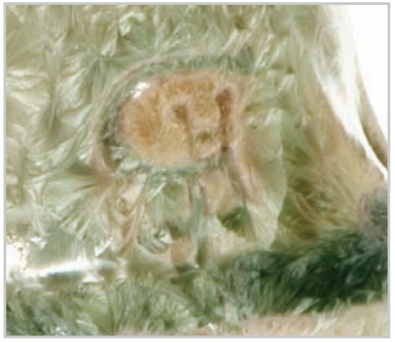
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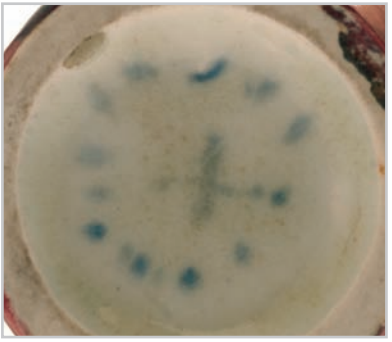
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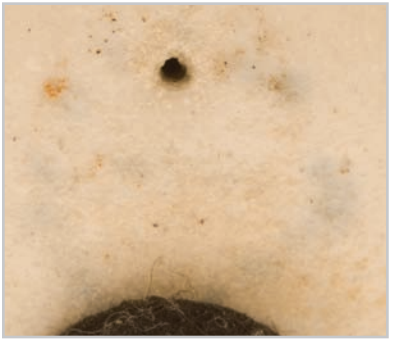
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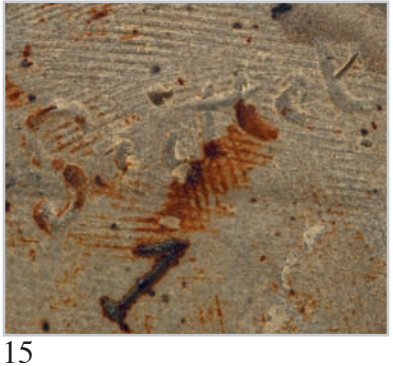
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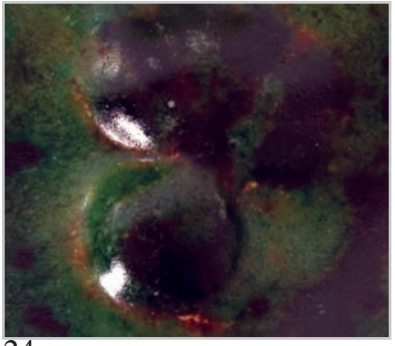

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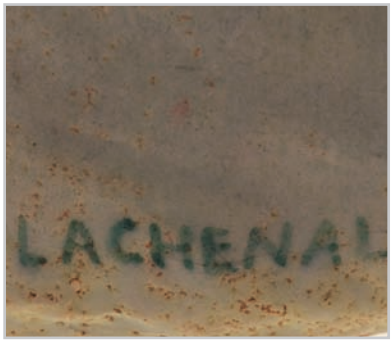

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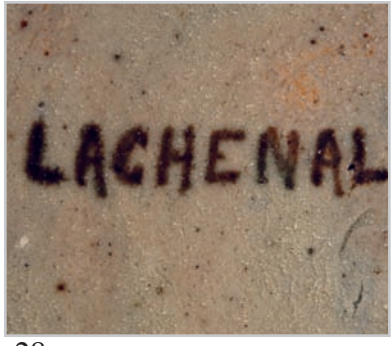

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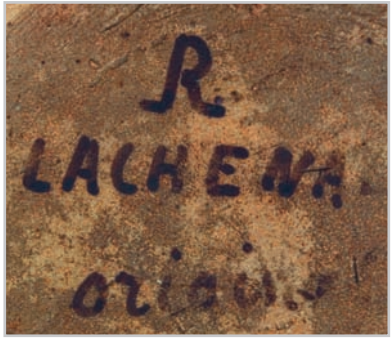

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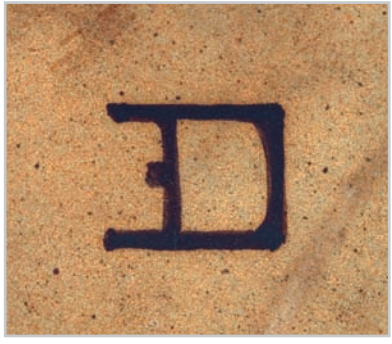

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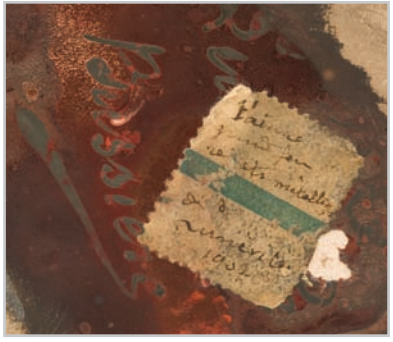
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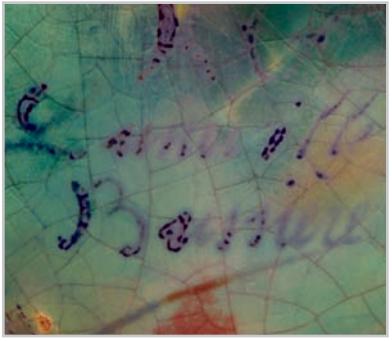
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