



Connections

Works from the Albuquerque Collection

Six centuries of history, sixty years of collecting

Many of the pieces that comprise the Albuquerque Collection depict stories, myths and motifs from both Asian and European traditions, often interweaving elements from distinct cultures. One such piece, a small Ming dynasty enamelled porcelain brush stand dated to the second half of the 16th century, alludes to the popular Chinese myth in which only a few carp succeed in swimming against the current of the Yellow River, leaping the rapids of the Dragon Gate to be transformed into dragons. By suggesting and imparting the idea that great achievements – those that exalt and transform – require effort and courage, the story resonates with legends from other parts of the world. *Connections*, the first exhibition at the Albuquerque Foundation to showcase pieces from its founder's collection, seeks to highlight precisely how Chinese ceramic production reveals, in its filigree, a luminous mesh of cultural analogies and influences, inextricable from economic, social, and political processes, and that ultimately speak to us of the human experience in its broadest sense.

Assembled by Renato de Albuquerque over several decades of study and passionate pursuit, the collection grew and diversified. Its core is remarkably coherent and comprehensive in its focus on Chinese export porcelain from the Ming and Qing dynasties, yet it also encompasses earlier periods and includes pieces produced in other regions of the world. As evidenced in the exhibition,

branches and deviations are almost inevitable within the realm of export ceramics, because what these pieces reveal, in a sense, is precisely that they do not exist in isolation – that it is impossible to fully understand the messages they carry without the willingness to venture upstream, towards other contexts and other cultures.

Founding a cultural institution, overcoming all the stages this process entails – from its conception to its opening – is an endeavour comparable to swimming against the current of the Yellow River. It took several years of planning and intensive work to transform the former Quinta de São João, a family residence, into the Albuquerque Foundation, an institution with a mission to be dynamic and connected, safeguarding the collection to preserve the memories and stories it holds, while placing it in a vibrant and thought-provoking dialogue with contemporary artistic production. In addition to the exhibitions, research activities and engagement with the public that will shape the foundation's work in the coming years, other interpretations of the Albuquerque Collection will follow *Connections*, shedding light on new narratives and alternative readings of the pieces. The collection, a bedrock that provides stability and frames the institutional action within a broader perspective, will serve as the starting point from which to carefully and passionately track the traces and clues that artworks and artists have, since the beginning of time, put forth to frame our understanding of the world.

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Becky MacGuire



Model of a Pagoda
China – Qing dynasty, late 18th - early 19th century
porcelain painted in underglaze blue

For centuries, the world's most advanced potters were found in China. Chinese wares spread throughout the globe, dispersing a language of color, motif and form that impacted ceramic traditions everywhere.

But Chinese ceramic production, while unique in its technological achievement and revered for its sophistication, also reflected a complex web of outside influences. As early as the Tang dynasty (618-906), foreign glass and metalwork, Buddhism and Islam all journeyed to China from Central and West Asia on global trading networks, and all affected Chinese design. In the 16th century, when Europeans began to arrive by sea, that culture, too, began to have its impact.

The Asian works of art in the Albuquerque Collection – in porcelain, pottery, enamelled copper, carved wood, oil on canvas and glass painting – speak eloquently of this fascinating cultural intermingling. Crafted in China, Japan and India, they were intended for markets ranging from East Asia to Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Many of these pieces reveal closely interwoven threads of influence that tell us stories of global encounter.

Other works show us how Asian craftsmen used their unique mastery to produce pieces to entirely foreign taste. The export porcelains created at Jingdezhen manifest their origin in materials, techniques and decoration while also embodying the tastes and preferences of their global patrons and consumers.

And alongside these diverse strands of taste and influence we also see in these works of art an underlying and very human commonality. Worship and spiritual life, celebration of royal or political power, delight in the natural world and glorification of the trade that was the economic lifeblood of the age: these shared interests and concerns bridged the vast differences between East and West.

These cultural and human relationships are explored in *Connections* through three thematic sections.

The Spiritual Realm

Faith was central to life in both East and West in the early modern age.

Buddhism had come to China in the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), travelling with merchants and monks from its birthplace in India to join the indigenous Chinese philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism. Buddhism became central to China, but in a unique iteration that was intricately interwoven with Daoist and Confucian attitudes and beliefs.

Islam, too, was first brought to China by merchants. In the Tang dynasty (618-906) Arab and Persian merchants settled along the southern coast and the first Chinese mosques were built. Under the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) Muslims were particularly favored at court, and the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty (Hongwu, r. 1368-98) was equally supportive.

Just a few medieval Christians journeyed to China; it was the arrival of Portuguese ships in the 16th century that heralded an influx of Christians. Christian missionaries established churches and monasteries wherever Europeans had an Asian foothold, and many commissioned works of art. Though successful in Japan before being expelled by the Tokugawa shogun early in the 17th century, Christians never made significant inroads in Chinese society, despite the Jesuits who became influential at the Imperial courts in Beijing.

All of these religious traditions are reflected in Chinese works of art.



Figure of a Deity

China – Ming dynasty (1368-1644), second half of the 16th century
porcelain painted in underglaze blue

Vase

China – Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period, c 1740
porcelain painted in *famille rose* enamels



Encounters

Long before the modern age, a web of trading networks connected the far-flung peoples of East and West. And accompanying the merchants, missionaries and commodities travelling on these networks were ideas, works of art and cultural influences. Chinese silk, both raw and woven, and the spices native to Southeast Asia were the most highly coveted Asian commodities in early trade. Silk had been produced in China since ancient times, and it remained China's major export through the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

In the 15th century, advances in shipbuilding and navigation empowered a 'Maritime Silk Route' and supercharged global trade. Much trade was intra-Asian, including with India; silver was the currency of exchange, largely mined in the Spanish New World, with some from Japan. Alongside more routine goods Asian lacquer and porcelain was loaded onto European ships.

Portuguese seagoing merchants first brought the Chinese custom of tea-drinking to Europe. By the arrival of the 18th century tea was fast becoming the dominant Chinese trade good, brought to Europe in vast quantities by the Dutch and English trading companies.

All of this trade engendered encounters with the unfamiliar, bringing both distant peoples and disparate cultures face to face.



Figure of a Sogdian
China – Tang dynasty, c 625-75
glazed earthenware

Portrait of an English Merchant
China – Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, c 1775-80
reverse-painting on mirror

Life East and West

The wealthy and the well-placed in Asia, Europe and the Islamic world all looked to Chinese ceramics to embellish their interiors and to elevate the practices of daily life. Chinese porcelain climbed the walls of shrines and palaces in India and the Middle East, was displayed in purpose-built niches in special rooms called *chinikhane*, while in Europe the *porzellankabinette* became *de rigueur*. Chinese porcelain formed in silver shapes graced the dining tables of European elites while in Islamic communities large Chinese porcelain dishes served food and ewers and basins facilitated ablutions.

Some of these Chinese porcelains depicted figures from courtly life both East and West, whether archetypes of the exotic 'other' or portraits in porcelain. Other wares were commissioned with personal symbols or coats of arms, linking their patrons directly with the prestigious material.

And some Chinese pieces simply portrayed the myriad aspects of daily life, revealing the commonality of human experience. Hunting, dancing, playing music, favored birds and beasts: Asian and European portrayals alike appear in Chinese works of art.



Tureen

China – Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, c 1720
porcelain painted in *verte-Imari* enamels and gilt

Ewer

China – Ming dynasty, Wanli period (1573-1620)
porcelain painted in underglaze blue and coloured enamels

Albuquerque Foundation

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Opening Hours

Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 6 pm.

Last admissions 30 minutes before closing.

Closed on Mondays.

Tickets

Adults: €10

Students and visitors from 13 to 18 years old: 8€

Visitors over 65 years old: 8€

Free admission

Children up to 12 years old

Sintra residents (on Sundays until 1 pm)

To book guided visits, school visits or special needs visits
please contact us through info@albuquerquefoundation.pt.

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