



San Francisco Ceramic Circle

An Affiliate of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

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P.O. Box 26773, San Francisco, CA 94126

www.patricianantiques.com/sfcc.html

SFCC FEBRUARY LECTURE

Sunday, **FEBRUARY 25**, 2017

9:45 a.m., doors open for social time

10:30 a.m., program begins

Gunn Theater, Legion of Honor

A Glittering Occasion: Reflections on Dining in the 18th Century

Dr. Christopher Maxwell

Curator of European Glass

Corning Museum of Glass

About the lecture: *One week later than usual*, in conjunction with the Casanova exhibition at the Legion of Honor, the lecture will discuss the design and function of 18th-century tableware. It will address the shift of formal dining from daylight hours to artificially lit darkness. That change affected the design of table articles, and the relationship between ceramics and other media.

About the speaker: Dr. Christopher L. Maxwell worked on the redevelopment of the ceramics and glass galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum, with a special focus on 18th-century French porcelain. He also wrote the V&A's handbook *Eighteenth-Century French Porcelain* (V&A Publications, 2010). From 2010 to 2016 he worked with 18th-century decorative arts at the Royal Collections. He has been Curator of European Glass at the Corning Museum of Glass since 2016. Dr. Maxwell is developing an exhibition proposal on the experience of light and reflectivity in 18th-century European social life.

This month, our Facebook page will show 18th-century table settings and dinnerware.



The dining room at Mount Vernon,
restored to the 1785 color scheme of varnished dark green walls
George Washington's Mount Vernon, VA (photo: mountvernon.org)

SFCC Upcoming Lectures

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, Gunn Theater: Gunn Theater: Jody Wilkie, Co-Chairman, Decorative Arts, and Director, Decorative Arts of the Americas, Christie's: "Ceramics from the David Rockefeller collection."

SUNDAY, APRIL 15, Sally Kevill-Davies, cataloguer of the English porcelain at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, will speak on Chelsea porcelain figures. The talk will follow up on SFCC's donation of the Chelsea *Carpenter with his tools* to the Legion of Honor in 2016.

SUNDAY, MAY 20, Gunn Theater: SFCC member and former Vice President Glenn Berry, distinguished collector of neoclassical porcelain, "Porcelain Plaques: A New Type of Canvas, An Elevation of an Art Form."



Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London
Plaice Tureens, Covers, and Spoons, c. 1755
Soft-paste porcelain, tureen length 26 cm.
The David Rockefeller Collection (photo: Christie's)

More on Dining: At Winterthur

Dining by Design: Nature Displayed on the Dinner Table opens at the Winterthur Museum, Delaware, on April 1, 2018. The show will look at how dining and dinnerware from the 1600s through modern times have displayed the natural world, from painted butterflies and hand-modeled flowers to tureens in the shapes of the foods served in them.

Plate from dinner service ordered by Ulysses S. Grant and his wife
Porcelain, China, 1879
Winterthur Museum, Gift of Daniel and Serga Nadler 2014.16.234 (photo: museum)



FEBRUARY LECTURE BACKGROUND: Dinner Plates; or, Reinventing the Wheel



We take ceramic dinner plates for granted. Machines prepare the clay flawlessly and gas kilns fire it with few losses. Before the industrial revolution, though, most dining plates were metal or wood. It was hard to make flat or even shallow ceramics that would heat and cool evenly enough to fire without warping or breaking. Vessels were easier because closed forms offer a feedback loop of reinforcement.

At first, porcelain was especially difficult. Soft-paste, with its component of ground glass, is notoriously unstable in firing. The French soft-paste tradition was almost a century old before Sèvres made dinner services. Meissen made hard-paste for twenty years before dinner services appeared, and then only for Augustus the Strong himself. That said, Meissen went on to create what are still standard dinner plate shapes, and Sèvres developed the most widely imitated decorations.

Unknown maker, Faenza
Plate, late 15th-early 16th century
Tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica)
Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (photo: SFCC)

Meissen's first complete services date to 1729-31.

The shapes are simple and the decoration is restrained, but there was obvious merit to showing off the "white gold" itself. About 1732-33, Meissen's chief modeler J.J. Kändler wrested artistic leadership of the factory from its painters. He reinvented porcelain tableware as sculpture, with more than a nod to silver shapes but truly fitting to the medium. He began with relatively simple basket-weave (osier) rim motifs and soon added more elaborate models. A few had all-over low relief; most technically daring were dessert plates with pierced rims.



Meissen Porcelain Manufactory
Plate from the 'Yellow Lion' Service,
design c. 1730, made c. 1734
Hard-paste porcelain with enamels
Collection of Malcolm Gutter, promised gift to the FAMSF (photo: SFCC)



Meissen Porcelain Manufactory
Dessert Plate from the General Möllendorf Service (detail), 1761
Hard-paste porcelain with enamel and gold
San Francisco, Legion of Honor, Gift of the DeYoung Museum Society (photo: SFCC)



Meissen Porcelain Manufactory
Plate from the Swan Service, 1737-41
Hard-paste porcelain with enamels and gold, diameter 37.9 cm
Houston Museum of Fine Arts, The Rienzi Collection (photo: SFCC)

Meissen sometimes used opaque ground colors on vases or breakfast sets. For dinnerware, however, the ground was usually the pure white porcelain, no matter how elaborate the gilding or the painting might be. Sèvres's soft-paste porcelain could not show crisp molded detail like Meissen's, but from the 1750s the glazes were infused with translucent color. Color schemes were a balancing act between fashion and what the chemists created year by year. Sèvres developed yet another range of colors when it added hard-paste in the 1770s.



Royal Porcelain Manufactory, Sèvres
Dessert Plate from the 'Cameo' Service
for Catherine II of Russia (detail), 1777-79
Soft-paste porcelain with enamels and gold, diameter 26.0 cm
London, Victoria & Albert Museum (photo: SFCC)



National Porcelain Manufactory, Sèvres
Plate with Black-Ground Decoration, 1792
Hard-paste porcelain with gold and platinum
Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (photo: SFCC)