

Donation of the Month

Hand-Painted China

Plate and Pitcher, 2007.26.16-17, donated by Elsa Juhre Schmitz
Small plate, 1987.12.314, donated by Vera Key





With delicate precision and careful application, painters of porcelain china created beautiful works of art that have been handed down through generations. During the late Victorian period, from the 1870s to the 1890s, china painting became a widespread craze with clubs, societies, and written publications established around it. The art of porcelain painting was featured at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and coincided with the popularity of the Arts and Crafts Movement. At the core of this movement was an emphasis on hand-crafted or individually made objects and many women took pride in creating unique pieces of hand-painted porcelain for themselves and for others.

China painting was considered an acceptable leisure hobby for late Victorian middle-class women; however, many women were able to turn their artistic skills into serious art, exhibiting and selling their work. Commercial companies also employed women artists to paint “blanks,” or plain white, glazed porcelain forms. China painters outlined their designs with a china-pencil onto the glazed blank and then mixed paints made especially for painting and firing onto porcelain. China paints were usually sold in powder form in a variety of colors.

This beautiful plate and pitcher were hand-painted by Dea Carr Smith around the turn of the 20th century. Mrs. Smith was an artist as well as an art instructor and several of her painted porcelain pieces were recently donated to the museum by her granddaughter, along with several of her paintings. The pitcher is marked “Favorite Bavaria” and is painted with soft white daisies on a green/blue background. Mrs. Smith cleverly included her signature in the form of interlocking initials of her name, DCS, at the bottom of the painted design. The plate is marked Limoges and was probably a blank imported for painting. Many blanks came from Limoges among other companies. Both pieces have gold painted gilding around the edges and highlighting the designs. The small, handled dish is painted with deep pink roses and gold painted gilding around the edge and handle. A special treat on this piece is the artist’s full signature on the bottom of the dish, “y. Alison Weber,” in green.

Though extremely popular during its time, china painting, along with many elements of the Arts and Crafts Movement, lost favor by the 1920s as art and society moved towards a more industrialized era.

Resources:

“American Art Pottery,” by the Pottery Shopper: www.potteryshopper.com/.
Maurer, Terry. “These pieces the ‘Pickard’ of the litter:” from the Tri-City Herald published Sunday, July 30th, 2006, online at www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/lifestyles/antiques.
“China Painting” from Civilization.ca: www.civilization.ca/hist/cadeau/cachi01e.html.
Rogers Historical Museum object file.