
Director's Foreword

Anthony Alan Shelton

THE HISTORY OF ceramic technology, style, and decoration, and of the location and movement of manufacturing centres, has long been intertwined with the history of international trade, diverse markets, and social and cultural changes. One of the strengths of the Koerner ceramics collection is that it highlights some of the linkages between different cultural traditions and religious schisms and the repeated adaptation of makers to evolving market preferences across Europe, Asia, and North America. Carol Mayer's interpretation of the collection, both in the permanent exhibition and in this book, explicates these dynamic global entanglements; furthermore, she provides an elegant exposition that clearly justifies why one of Canada's most important European ceramics collections should reside in a museum of anthropology. Not only is *A Discerning Eye* a compendium of the

stories behind the pieces, but it also evokes the original display of the collection in Walter Koerner's home and the significance and charm which some of the pieces held for him. This is a book about the dynamic life of objects as they move between cultures and as cultures move between national boundaries, as well as a book about the transformation of collections as they themselves move between private household settings and public museums.

Locating what might usually be considered a European decorative art collection in an anthropology museum has sometimes been contested, one argument being that decorative arts and anthropology constitute different disciplines that provide distinct and mutually exclusive lenses to view different types of collections. Since European artworks were not traditionally part of ethnographic museums, it was argued, they should remain separate and

the artifacts of Europe be exhibited differently and in isolation. When Michael Ames and Carol Mayer decided to acquire the Koerner collection for MOA, they implicitly subverted these deep-seated preconceptions and prejudices and accepted what it would mean for MOA's development. Indeed, there have been several consequences to having such a collection.

One is that the mission of the museum has become more aligned with current anthropological practices that examine both the Western and the non-Western world and the relations between them. Another consequence is that because we are able to express these relations through our collections and teaching, we can more easily take on difficult subjects such as colonialism, inequality, and the dynamic international exchanges between objects and markets. A third consequence is

that this collection directly affects our acquisition policy in that, unlike most anthropology museums, we still collect from the West (including European-influenced Canadian ceramics), which we consider indivisible from the rest of the world. European pottery and ceramics tell the stories of complex cultural histories as much as non-European pottery and ceramics, and given their perplexing entanglements, it is difficult to understand either in isolation from the other. The Koerner European ceramics collection, like many of Walter Koerner and his family's other gifts, has helped shape what MOA is today and made possible what it can become in the future.