



International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza - Foundation

The International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza

Faenza is synonymous with ceramics all over the world. Manufacturers in the town have played an important, inspirational role for European ceramic producers for centuries.

To celebrate that continuous tradition the International Museum of Ceramics was founded by Gaetano Ballardini in 1908, as a reference point for ancient, modern and contemporary ceramics in Italy and throughout the world.

In the same year Faenza commemorated the third centenary of the birth of Evangelista Torricelli, a scientist from the town who invented the barometer, by exhibiting products from many Italian and European manufacturers alongside artefacts from ancient, mainly Italian, kilns. This 1908 exhibition, which was held in the ex-convent of *San Maglorio* - where the Museum was later housed, marked a cultural reawakening in the city and the donation of some of the ceramic items on display constituted the birth of the Museum.

Its establishment was funded and facilitated by illustrious Italian and foreign personalities from the artistic and cultural worlds. A local committee then built the foundations for the future development of the Museum in a statute that was approved by Royal Decree on 19 July 1912. The objectives of the institution included "collecting and displaying in a systematic fashion the various types of Italian and foreign ceramic production"; publishing a special newsletter detailing historical studies and ceramic art techniques; organising periodical ceramic exhibitions; "popularizing ceramic decoration styles, in order to increase their aesthetic and domestic use in the home, architecture and town planning" and "organising international competitions for the production of practical objects that are advanced in terms of aesthetics and techniques".

The ceramic treasury of the Museum, which contains a wide-ranging, international collection, was enriched before and after the Second World War thanks to acquisitions as well as donations. The Faenza Museum is home to the largest collection of its kind in the world, with its historical, artistic artefacts totalling about forty thousand, including those on display and in its vaults.

Alongside the *Nations Section* - the first major group - examples of pieces by contemporary Italian manufacturers and artists were collected and put together in the *Permanent Exhibition of Modern Italian Ceramic Art* in 1926. In 1916 the *Ancient Italian Majolica Section* was set up, with particular reference to Faenza production. The same year saw the beginning of the *Italian Regional Pottery Section*, which contained popular ceramics. The collections were maintained and gradually added to with new pieces: the *Far East Section* was first arranged in 1919. The IMC was dedicated to contemporary research and led the way in local archaeology by studying ceramic fragments. As a result, new and important sections were devoted to education, *Excavated Fragments of Italian Renaissance Majolica*, *Prehistoric Ceramics*, *The Classical World* and *The Middle East*. The latter underwent a major expansion in 1930 thanks to the contribution of Doctor Fredrik Robert Martin of Stockholm. From the 1940s to the 1980s various donations formed a substantial collection of *Pre-Columbian Ceramics*.

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Contemporary Italian ceramics continued to be documented with the annual "Faenza Prize" competitions, which began in the 1930s and became international in the 1960s, thus allowing the Museum to acquire pieces by manufacturers and artists from all over the world. The international competition has been a biennial event since 1989.

During the Second World War, bombing raids on Faenza, in particular the one on 13 May 1944 had a devastating effect on the IMC collections and buildings, which were almost entirely destroyed. These events led to an appeal launched by the then director Gaetano Ballardini, in which he asked friends, researchers and collectors as well as major international museums and public bodies to help him to reconstruct the collections and the Museum itself.

The reconstruction of the museum that Ballardini longed for was made possible with the contribution of organisations and enthusiasts from all over the world and was completed in 1952.

Since the 1950s several major donations consisting of ancient, modern and contemporary ceramics have helped to increase the artistic collection of the IMC considerably.

The aims of the Museum listed in its 1912 statute also included "collecting publications in order to offer researchers bibliographical material covering ceramic critique, history, art and technology". So the Museum Library was set up and over the years it has continued to expand its collection of books and documents. The development of the Library suffered a sudden setback with the 1944 bombings, when it was almost completely destroyed. After the war it was re-established partly with salvaged materials (a total of about four thousand volumes and journals) and partly through generous donations.

The growth in ceramic studies during the past twenty years, as well as a constant policy of turnover and acquisitions, have led to a much larger Library collection, which currently includes about sixty thousand volumes with items from all over the world.

Since 1913 the IMC has published the bi-monthly magazine *Faenza*, dedicated to the historical study of ceramic art, and a series of texts on ceramic history, some of which are also educational in nature, as well as annual volumes concerning the various IMC collections, which first appeared in the early 1980s.

A fundamental support tool for researchers dates back to 1927 when Ballardini set up the Ceramic Photographic Archive in order to provide a photographic record of ceramic works held in public and private collections all over the world.

The *Giocare con l'arte* (Playing with Art) Workshop that was established by Bruno Munari in 1979 plays an important educational role by aiming to help children view the objects in the museum and be more aware of them through hands-on activities. The workshop is used by nursery, primary and middle schools, mainly from the Faenza area, in addition to teachers and Italian or foreign ceramic artists who take part in special courses.

The IMC complex also houses a Restoration Workshop whose skilled technicians are responsible for preserving the pieces in the Museum, organising specialist courses and working on behalf of private and public organisations.

In the 1990s the Museum underwent a renovation project that continues today with an expansion of the display areas, all aimed at showing the artefacts in a more logical and complimentary way.

The International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza - Institution was founded in 1996 and in 2001 the Town Council created a Foundation to manage it, in order to grant the Museum greater organisational autonomy.