International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza
A visit to the collections

The MIC founded by Gaetano Ballardini in 1908 represents a reference point for ancient, modern and contemporary ceramics in Italy and throughout the world. In the museum exhibition halls ceramic productions from all the ages and continents are represented: from ancient pieces found in Mesopotamia dated back to 5th millennium B.C. up to the production of contemporary great masters such as Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Fontana e Burri and others.

The starting point is the bookshop which offers a wide selection of publications and several ceramics created by the local workshops. Beside it the didactic section allows visitors to understand the ceramic materials and procedures of realization.

Two great installations open the visit: beside the ticket-office there is the great panel created by Pietro Melandri (completed in 1959) made up of 190 lusterware tiles superbly decorated, and in the entrance there is the panel Black and Gold created by Alberto Burri at Gatti Workshop in Faenza in 1993.

The first floor collections start with the Donation Paolo Mereghi, an example of donation of a private collection including ancient Italian, Iznik and Chinese ceramics.

The collection of majolica from 14th to 16th century follows. Elegant archaic ceramics decorated with cobalt blue, or green and brown glazes open the exhibition and testify the ancient tradition of Faenza, they are housed in the ancient convent of San Magliorio. In the central nave ceramics are exhibited in a chronological order offering examples of refined decoration and shapes from the Renaissance, closing with the well known “white of Faenza”, wonderful creations that determined the synonymy between the word majolica and Faïence. In the little rooms on the right ceramics are grouped in a typological order: ceramics for the chemistry, little sculptures, love vessels, istoriato plates richly decorated with scenes from mythology and holy bible.

The next section is devoted to Ceramics from Italian centers of the Renaissance divided into regional area: Lazio, Umbria (note the exclusive lusterware ceramics from Deruta and Gubbio recalling the Middle East techniques), Abruzzo, Marche (note the excellence of istoriato plates inspired to the great canvas of the Renaissance), Tuscany (note the unique “Porcellain from Medici” showing the technical research to discover the secret of Eastern porcelain) and Veneto.

Italian ceramics from 17th to 19th century are displayed in geographical and chronological order: the main centers of production are represented, first the baroque style, then the neoclassical movement influence the shapes and the decorations (note the wide space devoted to the elegant Faenza 18th century production of Ferniani Manufacture). The section ends with example of paintings on majolica, inspired by the 19th century history of the art.

Visitors can leave the old building and enter in the modern and contemporary section. The exhibition starts with works in Liberty style testifying the researches on glazes and materials included refined lusterware and salt stoneware produced by Chini Manufacture, poetic little sculptures in white majolica and bare earthenware by Baccarini, the elegant fireplace by Calzi and the rich Liberty decoration by Nonni (note the group of figures of the Parade), and other protagonists of the new production of 20th century. The visit continues in the next section housing the contemporary works by the greatest Italian masters included Fausto Melotti and Lucio Fontana.
The visitors can come down to ground floor and enter in the section devoted to **European ceramics of the 20th century** where they can admire "a museum inside the museum" containing the works by Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Léger and other great pieces.

The next step (again in the old building) is the **Precolombian ceramics**, a unique opportunity to admire about 200 original and very ancient pieces of South American culture free from European influence. Beside ceramics some rare textile items are exhibited.

**Classical ceramics** from the Mediterranean area and from the near ancient East production testify about 6,000 years of ceramics production, from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic time. Over this collection, in the flies, the **Bio-ceramics** are collected. They represent an example of technical and biomedical research. In this sector, it is preferable to talk about components rather than objects, their apparent simplicity is the result of a complex research that crosses several fields of study and of a refined technology developed precisely for their production.

The **Islamic collection** represents one of the most interesting example of the ancient Islamic production existing in Italy. Examples of siliceous faïence together with cobalt blue decoration, gold calligraphic patters are here shown beside more than one thousand fragment collected in 64 drawers.

Another section, beside the bookshop, houses the **Far East Ceramics**, about 400 works representing the main centres of production of China, Japan, Thailand – the Ancient Siam – and Vietnam. These sites are symbols of the history of the international trade of porcelain since Marco Polo time up to the Eastern Indie Company which allowed Europe to appreciate and imitate the technique and art of potters from.

The last section is situated in the underground, in the new building, opposite to the entrance, and it is devoted to **popular and devotional ceramics**, it testifies more than five hundred of Italian production devoted both to religious and everyday ceramics. In this section a rare example of popular Holy Crib “Presepio Zucchini”, surrounded by a paper scenography by Romolo Liverani, is preserved.

Along the halls of the Museum it is possible to admire contemporary works such as the life-size ceramic elephant exhibited together with other sculptures created by Luigi Ontani at Gatti Workshop in Faenza, the great sculpture “Atteone” by Angelo Biancini, the suggestive wall installations by Enrico Baj and Ana Cecilia Hillar.