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## CHINESE PORCELAINS BACK ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART FOLLOWING GALLERY RENOVATION

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art recently reopened its porcelain collection, which was off view for two years owing to building systems renovations. Visitors will find a newly renovated Porcelain Gallery located near the Seventh Street entrance to the West Building.

The National Gallery of Art's holdings in porcelain span the Ming and Qing dynasties, from the early 1400s to the late 1800s. Two-thirds of the Chinese porcelains on view date from the reign of Qing-dynasty Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722), a contemporary of King Louis XIV of France. All porcelains in the National Gallery of Art's collection are from the Widener Collection, acquired in 1942, or the Harry G. Steele Collection, Gift of Grace C. Steele, acquired in 1972.

### **History of the Porcelain Collection**

The 176 Chinese porcelains collected by Gallery founding benefactors Peter A. B. Widener and his son Joseph Widener are part of their splendid and large gift that included such major paintings as Giovanni Bellini's *The Feast of the Gods* (1514), Italian and French sculpture, and other decorative arts. Although founder Andrew W. Mellon had initially conceived the National Gallery of Art as exclusively devoted to painting and sculpture, the Widener's gift to the Gallery was conditional upon their collection being kept intact. Since Widener's paintings and sculpture were deemed too important to lose, the decision was made to accept the decorative arts objects, which included fine examples of furniture, tapestry, metalwork, and ceramics. West Building

ground floor galleries where these objects are on view have been designed to resemble the rooms where decorative arts were displayed in the Widener family home at Lynnewood Hall in Pennsylvania.

Sixty-three additional Chinese and Japanese ceramics, chiefly from the 18th century but some as old as the 11th century, were given by the family of the late Harry Garfield Steele in 1972. Among the early works in the Steele collection is a Ming stem bowl from the Xuande reign (1426–1435), one of the finest periods of blue and white porcelain production. The bowl is displayed in the Italian cabinet galleries on the main floor Gallery 25, West Building.

### **About the Porcelains**

The Chinese, who developed the luxury art form of porcelain, define it as any ceramic so hard it will ring like a bell when struck. Pure white porcelain is made of a fine white clay called kaolin, combined with feldspar and flint or quartz. It can be coated with thin, transparent glazes or painted with thick, opaque enamels. Kiln firings bake the glazes or enamels onto the surface of the porcelain.

Monochrome or single-color glazed works are displayed in alcoves at either end of the Porcelain Gallery. Polychrome or multicolor enameled works occupy the large central space. Wall cabinets and alcoves are mirrored so that the porcelains can be seen from all sides. On view are groups of vessels, many designed to hold ink or water for brush-washing on scholars' desks, offering a panoply of rich glazes in the colors known as oxblood, apple green, peach bloom, and the pale blue sometimes called *clair de lune* or moonlight. Two fine oxblood vases known as *The Fire Cloud* and *The Flame* (both early 18th century) have unusual clouding and patterning of color.

Other vases, jars, dishes, and lanterns are glazed with painted designs of dragons, birds, and blossoming plum trees. Tall elegant baluster vases feature *famille verte* enamels over a colorless glaze. *A Pair of Lions on High Pedestals* (1662–1722), designed as incense burners, are a striking presence in the central gallery.

Many of the porcelains reflect Buddhist beliefs and values. The transparent glaze on a serene seated figure, *Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion* (late 18th century), lets

the pure white of the porcelain show through. This graceful figure may have been made for a household shrine. Light shines through porcelain perforated with a paper-thin floral pattern decoration, known as “rice grain” technique, in an elegant round vessel shaped like a Buddhist monk’s begging bowl.

A complete catalogue of the Gallery’s porcelain collection is included in **Decorative Arts, Part II: Far Eastern Ceramics and Paintings; Persian and Indian Rugs and Carpets**, published as part of the National Gallery of Art’s systematic catalogue series. The volume is available for \$75 in the Gallery Shops, by calling 1-(800)-697-9350 or (202) 842-6002, or faxing (202) 789-3047. You can visit the Shops online at [www.nga.gov/shop](http://www.nga.gov/shop) (<http://www.nga.gov/shop>) .

An online tour of the Gallery’s decorative arts collection, including the porcelain collection, can be found at [www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/decarts.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/decarts.shtm) (<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/decarts.shtm>) .

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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