

NEWSLETTER JULY 2005

Dear MajolicAddict,

NEWS UPDATE

Unfortunately, we cannot show you a preview of our new shipment yet.

The shipment was delayed in customs and we couldn't get it online in time for this month's Newsletter. We promise that we will post it on our website as soon as we can and that, as usual, you will be the first to see it.

Life goes on, and as we were brainstorming about this month's feature topic, our minds inevitably wondered off to our recent trip to Italy.

I guess I could tell you about ancient Rome, the wonderful Tuscan countryside and romantic villages, the terrific food and wine, but you may be more interested in knowing about majolica.

Well, the truth is, we did not see any English or continental majolica, but there was plenty of Italian maiolica to make up for that.

FEATURE ARTICLE

About Italian maiolica in general

We've already explained the difference between majolica and maiolica in our [April Newsletter](#). Maiolica is the name for the Italian earthenware that is covered with an opaque, white tin glaze and then hand-painted.

The tin-glaze technique had been around in the Middle East since the 9th Century. It was introduced in Europe when the Moors conquered parts of Spain. In the 11th Century the Italians imported the Hispano-Moresque pottery and Italian potters began to work with the tin glaze. They called it maiolica and continued to refine this type of pottery into what has become the most splendid ceramic art of the Italian Renaissance.

Florence led the way in the maiolica production, which reached its height during the mid 15th Century. Painters started to use a wider range of colors and the Moorish and Gothic decorations became pictorial and narrative.



Maiolica evolved from being merely utilitarian to being decorative and for the first time, plates had holes and could be hung on walls as if they were paintings. In fact, like with Victorian majolica, artists focused more on the decorative aspect of the product than on its functional aspect.

Ceramics had finally gained the status of an art form.

The Musei Capitolini in Rome houses some wonderful collections of antique maiolica.

About the Della Robbia Family

I first discovered the Della Robbia ceramics many years ago in Spain and I fell in love again when I saw the terra-cotta art in the streets and churches of Rome. I realized that they are the perfect fusion between sculpture and ceramics and I couldn't wait to see the Della Robbia collection at the Bargello museum in Florence. The Bargello has the most stunning collection of Italian Renaissance sculpture that I've ever seen. Among works of Donatello, Pisano, Cellini, Ammannati and Michelangelo, there's a marvelous collection of works by Andrea and Giovanni Della Robbia on the second floor.

Strangely enough, the most famous member of the Della Robbia family, is not represented. Luca Della Robbia started sculpting in the customary materials such as marble, stone and bronze, but he quickly became frustrated with how time consuming and expensive that was. As a result, he established the new artistic tradition of applying the already existing tin-glaze technique (used for maiolica pottery) to his sculpture.

The ease of shaping the clay compared to marble was time-saving and far less expensive, but the opaque white glaze, which completely covered the brick colored terra-cotta clay, still made it look like marble.

Luca further perfected the glaze, so that it became resistant to damage from wind and rain. Sculptures from the Della Robbia workshop included outdoor ornaments, furnishings for church interiors, objects for private devotion and portraits.

After Luca's death in 1482, his nephew Andrea took over the thriving family business. Later on, Andrea's son, Giovanni began a large-scale production of tabernacles and altars, which can still be found all over Tuscany today.

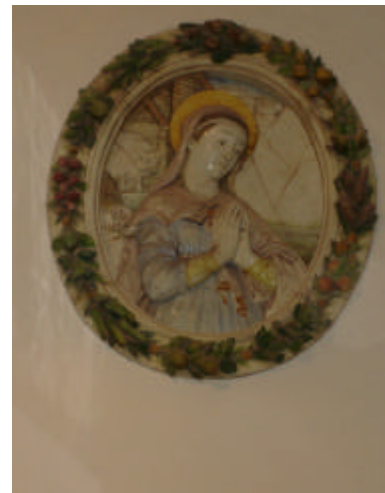


I'm a big fan of both Luca and Andrea and although it is often difficult to separate them from each other, they do have their own personal style.

There's something pure about how Luca Della Robbia's glowing, almost entirely white figures are set against his signature, blue background. It's the perfect style for his many religious pieces and nothing brings Tuscan skies so vividly to mind!

My favorites are his small and intimate images of the Virgin Mary with Child. Mary is gentle and pure yet, at the same time I find her profoundly expressive and very powerful. Jesus, on the other hand, brings whimsy and movement to the piece. They are the perfect, harmonious picture of tender interaction between a mother and her child and they make me happy.

Andrea Della Robbia is best known for the colorful garlands of fruits, flowers and foliage that frame most of his works. Like Luca, Andrea was a very talented sculptor and this can be seen in the delicacy and detail of his molding.





I was moved when I saw his medallions of babies along the portico of the Ospedale degli Innocenti (Foundling Hospital) in Florence.

These simple images of bambini wrapped in blankets are being used by many organizations as symbols of children in need of care.

At the Bargello Museum, I went back several times to admire his wonderful bust of a young girl. It was not permitted to take pictures there, but I bought a postcard, so that I can cherish her forever.

Today, maiolica is still being made in many of the same workshops in which it was created five hundred years ago. The methods of making maiolica have changed little in the past five centuries.

WEB UPDATE

Other than being proud of the drastically increased web traffic our new website is generating, we have no special website news this month.

COMING UP

Our upcoming shows

Raleigh, NC - Antiques Festival (August 6 – August 7)

Atlanta, GA - Scott Antique Market (August 11 – August 14)

Because of the show in Raleigh, we will not be at the August Metrolina Show in Charlotte (August 5 – August 7).

We hope that you've enjoyed this Newsletter.

Take care,

Liesbeth