The Illustrated Credenza
Proposals for
Lecture Presentation and/or
Museum Study Day

Valerie Taylor, PhD, Pasadena City College
valeriesusy@gmail.com

Lisa Boutin Vitela, PhD, Cerritos College
lisa.boutin@gmail.com

ITALIAN MAIOLICA IN THE RENAISSANCE STYLE
Research Objective

Our goal is to understand Isabella d’Este’s narrative-painted, tin-glazed earthenware service (*credenza di maiolica istoriata*) from the creation of the dishes through their display.

This splendid set was commissioned from master designer Nicola d’Urbino in a golden age of Italian ceramic production. In the sixteenth-century, tableware ensembles allowed viewers to see the multiple pieces arranged on a stepped sideboard and performing in concert during banquets.

Currently, the surviving twenty-three original dishes cannot be displayed together since four are in private collections and the rest are in twelve different museums around the world. Studying the original set one dish at a time in isolation is problematic and not unlike staring at still shots from a motion picture rather than seeing the entire film. Thus, we cannot visualize or experience the credenza in the style of Isabella’s dining protocols.

Project Background

This project brings together replicas of the twenty-three surviving dishes from Isabella d’Este’s credenza. Ceramicist Ester Mantovani at the recommendation of Mantuan scholar Mariarosa Palvarini spent two years training with master-painters in Urbania to fashion these wares. Isabella d’Este (1474-1539), daughter of the Duke of Ferrara and consort of the ruler of Mantua, was the most important female art patron and collector of her day. Her credenza is a key element of Renaissance visual culture and embodies rhetorical strategies of self-representation. The project directors have produced a film about Mantovani’s working methods. An online component in coordination with “IDEA” (The Isabella d’Este Archive: isabelladeste.ucsc.edu) is in development.
Lecture and Discussion

“The Illustrated Credenza”

- Screening of film “The Illustrated Credenza” by Valerie Taylor and Mario Piavoli
- Maiolica production in the Italian Renaissance
- Isabella d’Este’s maiolica istoriata service
- Ester Mantovani’s working methods
- Renaissance banqueting: gastronomy, etiquette, and display

Museum Study Day

Maiolica: History and Design Seminar

- In-gallery discussion of maiolica: materials and production techniques
- Ester Mantovani’s working methods
- Isabella d’Este’s credenza and Italian Renaissance maiolica istoriata
- Credenza “building”: participants contribute ideas for setting up a maiolica credenza
- Envision how maiolica narratives communicated stories in various display formats

Publications by Project Directors


