

Porcelain – Masterpieces from the ISE Collection

21 June – 4 September 2017



© Ise Collection / Photo : Shigefumi Kato

Vase with a motif of water fowl on a lotus pond
Ming Dynasty (15th-16th Century). National Treasure.

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Under the direction of Tetsuro Degawa, co-commissioner and director of the Osaka Museum of Oriental Ceramics (Japan), and Claire Déléry, co-commissioner and curator of the collections of Chinese ceramics, MNAAG

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Commissioners

Sophie Makariou, President of the MNAAG, general commissioner

Claire Déléry, heritage curator, commissioner

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The Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet will open the newly restored Hôtel d'Heidelberg with a temporary display of a vast collection of ancient Chinese ceramics on the ground floor. Loaned by Hikonobu Ise, a Japanese agro-industrialist enamoured of Chinese civilisation, this emblematic collection extends from the 5th Century B.C. to the 19th Century, from the Tang Period to that of the Qing. This novel survey of the evolution of the techniques and decorations of Chinese ceramic art illustrates the great developments of pottery in China, with very high quality pieces shown in France for the first time, several being authentic national treasures. Far more than a mere art collection, for the Japanese collector they represent a close relation between himself and the Chinese culture that he admires.

The Hôtel d'Heidelberg, that in the past was the exhibition space for a vast "Buddhist Pantheon", could now be called the "Temple of Porcelains", at least during the exhibition the Musée Guimet has organised thanks to Hikonobu Ise's welcome assistance. Shown for the first time in France, the some 75 works he is presenting are steeped in an intense history, a strong relationship between China and himself, and more broadly between the two Japanese and Chinese millennial civilisations. Already in the period of the authoritarian Kamakura shogunate (1185-1333) and long after, even up to our day, the Japanese archipelago imported Chinese ceramics that were used for the tea ceremony, intrinsic to the Japanese culture. This relation between the two cultures is perfectly embodied by Hikonobu Ise, on a more intimate, more personal, and finally more human scale. His relationship with these works is almost meditative. Contemplating one of these objects, he claims he experiences a sort of ecstasy that goes beyond mere visual enjoyment or historical interest. He tells how in front of a Ming ceramic piece representing a cock fight, he was "totally dazzled and almost intoxicated for the next six months". Hikonobu Ise is not simply an expert in Chinese ceramics, he is above all an unconditional votary.

If Hikonobu Ise undertook to engage in such an impressive collection, it is because he is driven by an ineffable desire to preserve these objects. For him, the centralisation he has formed prevents a dispersion, a loss, or a blunder, and ensures the collection's perpetuity. This is the noble task – the preservation and restoration of a millenary heritage – that will be the privilege of the MNAAG and the public to appreciate. Assisted by the Japanese expertise in the protection of art works (notably seismic dangers), Hikonobu Ise presents to us here the objects he has loved, but also protected. During the exhibition the visitor is truly invited to venture into the wealthy Japanese's intimacy and emotion, adopt his gaze, and experience the sensations the objects can arouse. After all, such is the everlasting filiation: Hikonobu Ise is rooted in these works, he is their affective and emotional descent. He thus treats them with respect for the past and protects them against the deterioration of time.

The exhibition will be shown in Japan at the Museum of Oriental Ceramics in Osaka.