

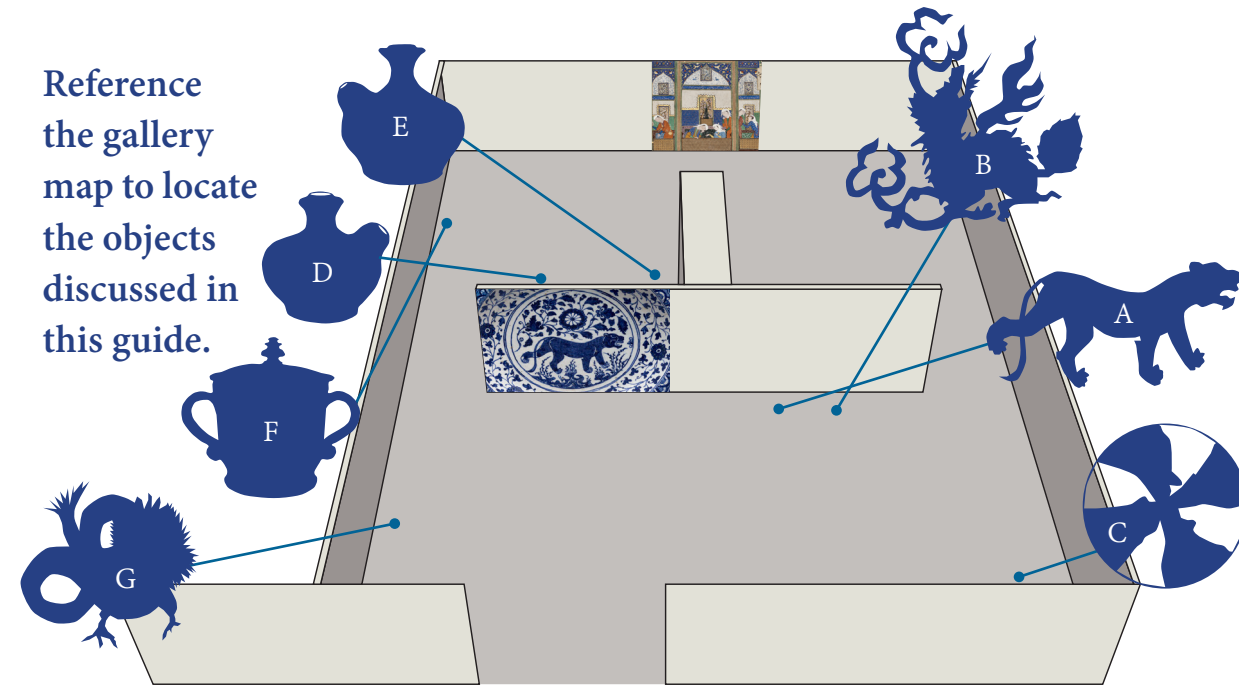


Between Sea and Sky

Blue and White Ceramics from Persia and Beyond

Blue and white ceramics are found across the globe. This is the result of centuries of global trade, particularly between Persia and China. Use this guide to take a look.

Reference the gallery map to locate the objects discussed in this guide.



Majestic Creatures

Images of majestic creatures are seen throughout this exhibition, including on the two dishes at the entrance to the gallery. Lions, dragons, and other mythical beasts have symbolic significance in both Chinese and Persian art. Persian potters often combined these symbols with Chinese design elements, such as delicate floral scrolls, concentric bands, and scalloped edges.



Observe The late 15th-century Persian dish shows a lion encircled by a floral scroll. Notice the lotus flower suspended above the lion, recalling a rising sun.

Did you know? A lion with a sun motif directly above it is an enduring symbol of power and kingship in Persian art.



Observe This 17th-century Persian dish showing a mythical creature is called a qilin.

Did you know? In Chinese lore, the qilin has a single horn and hooved feet, and is associated with the birth or death of an important figure.

Ask Consider a quality or an event that is significant to you. What creature, real or imagined, would you use to represent it?

Persian Blues

Explore some of the blue colors in this exhibition and their origins below.



C

Observe The 12th–to 13th century bowl features alternating bands of dark cobalt, light turquoise, and white.

Cobalt Cobalt is a naturally occurring mineral.

Persian cobalt was used in Chinese ceramics starting around the 8th–9th century. This began a dialogue between Iran and China, with each influencing the other’s use of cobalt and inspiring local ceramic production in both lands.

Turquoise The turquoise color is created using a glaze containing copper and other ingredients. Geographical variations in soil and technique result in different shades of blue-green pigment. For example, the village of Istalif, Afganistan, is known for the distinctive sea-green glaze used to color local wares.

View a demonstration of Istalif ceramic production and turquoise glazing on the touchscreen in the gallery or on your own device at <http://bit.ly/istalifdemo1>.

Form and Function

The global exchange of blue and white ceramics has led to change in the form and function of ceramic wares.



D

Observe These are two kendi shaped 17th-century Persian hookah bases.



E

Did you know? Kendi describes a jug with a bulbous body, long neck, and spout. Originally from South Asia, the kendi form was adopted by the Chinese in the 14th century. Chinese kendis were manufactured for export to Southeast Asia, where they were used as ceremonial drinking vessels. The kendi shape later became popular in the Middle East and Europe.

Explore In the Persian examples here, the kendi form has been adapted as the base for a water pipe. Europeans similarly altered the kendi form by adding metal spouts, handles, and lids.

View a Chinese example with English silver embellishments on the touchscreen in the gallery or at <https://bit.ly/AICdemo1>.

Across MFAH Collections

Continue exploring blue and white traditions from around the globe through objects in the exhibition from the collections of Bayou Bend and Rienzi. These include objects from China, Japan, England, and the Netherlands.



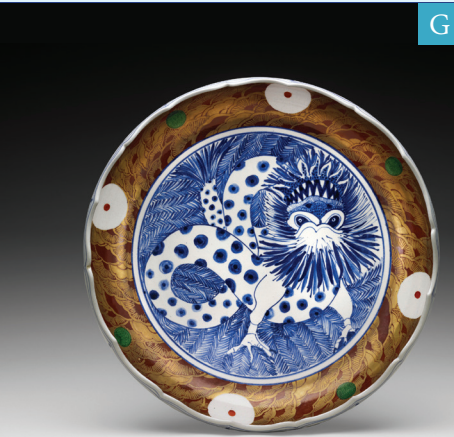
F

Did you know? 18th-century Europeans and Americans collected and were inspired by East Asian porcelain, combining the blue and white aesthetic with local fashions, and developing new ceramic techniques.

Observe This Posset Pot from the Bayou Bend collection includes floral and bird imagery which may have been adapted from Chinese porcelain designs. Posset pots were popular in middle-class English homes where they were used on festive occasions.

A Lustrous Tradition

Contemporary artists respond to the global legacy of blue and white.



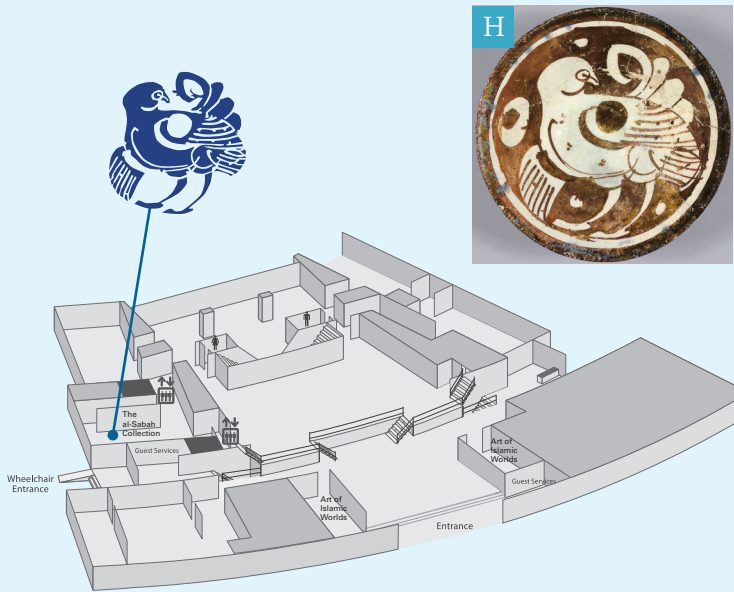
G

Observe Ralph Bacerra’s 1979 *Dragon Bowl*. Bacerra was interested in traditional ceramic techniques. Notice the iridescent luster-painted border.

Did you know? Luster painting was used to decorate ceramics in Iraq by the 9th century and can be found in Persian ceramics around the 11th century. As Middle Eastern pottery spread across East Asia and Europe, new methods of luster glazing were created to emulate the aesthetic.

© Estate of Ralph Bacerra

Explore The Museum also houses several examples of historic lusterware, such as this *Bowl* with a bird design. Keep an eye out for objects like this as you continue exploring luster-painted ceramics in the Art of the Islamic Worlds and The al-Sabah galleries, located in the Law Building and indicated on the map below.



H

Related Programming and Offerings

The Museum offers a variety of programs to complement its exhibitions. For a full listing and more details, visit mfah.org/calendar.

Visit the MFAH gift shop where the September–October 2020 issue of *Arts of Asia* is available for purchase. This issue accompanies the exhibition *Between Sea and Sky* and includes articles by MFAH curators.

Illustrations

A Persian, Timurid or early Safavid, *Disb*, 2nd half of the 15th century, stonepaste, painted in blue on white slip under transparent glaze, the Hossein Afshar Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

B Persian, *Bowl with Qilin*, 17th century, stonepaste, painted in blue and black under transparent glaze, the Hossein Afshar Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

C Persian, *Bowl*, late 12th–early 13th century, stonepaste; painted in blue and turquoise under transparent glaze, the Hossein Afshar Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

D Persian, Safavid, *Kendi-shaped Qalyan (Hookah) Base*, early–mid 17th century, stonepaste, painted in blue and black under transparent glaze, the Hossein Afshar Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

E Persian, Safavid, *Kendi-shaped Qalyan (Hookah) Base*, mid–17th century, stonepaste, painted in blue and black under transparent glaze, the Hossein Afshar Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

F English, Pickleherring Pottery, *Posset Pot*, c. 1630–35, tin-glazed earthenware (delftware), the Bayou Bend Collection, gift of Katharine Prentis Murphy.

G Ralph Bacerra, *Dragon Bowl*, 1979, Porcelain, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Learice S. and Melvin B. Eagle Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund 2010.2032 © Estate of Ralph Bacerra.

H Persian, *Bowl*, late 12th century, stonepaste; luster-painted on opaque white glaze, The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al Islamiyyah, Kuwait LNS 406 C.

This exhibition is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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