

OBJECT IN FOCUS

Bottle-shape vase



China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen

Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736–95,
or possibly early 20th century

Porcelain with enamels over clear, colorless glaze;
ivory stand

Jingdezhen ware

6 3/4 x 3 3/4 in

Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment. Freer Gallery of Art, F1954.127a-e

Describe

This is a beautiful porcelain vase. It has a rounded body and slim, tall neck. The mouth resembles a bulb of garlic and is decorated with a stylized leaf pattern. The painting on the vase depicts a lady and two children in a blooming garden. The woman sits on a rock, holding a fan in her right hand. Next to her is a dish of pomegranates that symbolize fertility. One of the boys holds a branch of Osmanthus. The Chinese name for Osmanthus is a homophone for “noble.” As the plant blooms during the same month as the imperial examinations in the fall, it also signifies literary success. These two concepts reveal the painting as symbolic for the wish to bear high-ranking sons. The two-sentence poem on the neck of the vase sets an autumnal mood: “The infinite moon is born in the branches/When blossoms are at their fullest, autumn naturally has come.” View this [object online](#) to see the inscription in Chinese.

Analyze

The vase was potted in Jingdezhen where imperial kilns of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties were located. It was then sent north to Beijing to be decorated by court painters. The painting on the vase was minutely drawn in fine enamel (glass paste) colors. The modeling of the figures (especially the faces and hands), as well as the rendering of the shrubs in the background, reveal an awareness of European painting techniques. This reflects the influence of Jesuit painters such as Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) who were active at the court.



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Interpret

The fine quality of the porcelain and delicate painting details both suggest that the vase was made for and used by the court. The four-character Qianlong (reigned 1736–95) mark on the bottom of the vase reinforces this conclusion. During the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, imperial paintings and porcelain frequently shared a palette and similar subjects, as seen in this vase and a painting (F1980.126) by the Qing court painter Ding Guanpeng (active 1726–after 1770). Vases with this type of painting were made in a very small number, so there are relatively few comparisons.



Palace Ladies and Children (detail)

Ding Guanpeng (active 1726–after 1770)

China

Qing dynasty, mid-18th century

Ink and color on paper

6 7/8 x 36 13/16 in

Transfer from the United States Customs Service, Department of the Treasury. Freer Gallery of Art, F1980.126

Inquire

- What Qing dynasty values does this vase communicate?
- What can we infer about attitudes toward gender in the Qing dynasty through this vase?
- What items from nature have symbolic meaning in the United States? What values do they represent?

Resources

View this object online at <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1954.127a-e/>

View this object online at <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1980.126/>

Learn more at <https://asia.si.edu/teachingchina>



