

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gorgeous French faience ceramics, recently donated to the Davis Museum, make debut in *Nevers in the World* exhibition

On view - free and open to the public - from February 7 to June 1, 2025



France (Nevers), Gadrooned Dish, ca. 1700, Faience, Bequest from the Collection of Sidney R. Knafel 2023.3.24

WELLESLEY, MASS. (January 2025) - [Nevers in the World](#) is an intimate exhibition of 11 newly-acquired seventeenth- to nineteenth-century French ceramics that were recently donated to the [Davis Museum at Wellesley College](#). The French faience vessels are highly stylized glazed ceramics, created using a tin-glaze technique that originated in the Middle East, likely around Iraq, as a response to the vibrant white porcelain of China. Over time, this technique spread to Egypt, Spain, Italy, and eventually France, where it evolved into a distinctive art form.

The works will be on view from February 7 to June 1, 2025 as part of three new free exhibitions at the Davis Museum, celebrating new acquisitions. An [opening night party](#) will be held Thursday, Feb. 6 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. and is open to the public.

The *Nevers in the World* exhibition spotlights these beautifully glazed vessels, used mostly for dining tables, and illustrate a cross-cultural migration from their early origins in Iraq to the early iterations of Italian pieces and expanded color palettes and shapes by the French.

“When the generous gift of French faience arrived and our Curatorial team first saw it in storage, we were immediately excited by the many ways we could integrate it into both the permanent collection and a temporary exhibition,” said Nicole Berlin, Associate Curator of Collections at the Davis Museum and the Nevers show curator. “The vibrant colors, whimsical shapes, and the centuries-old ceramic glazing technique open up a wealth of creative possibilities for showcasing this remarkable collection.”

Nevers in the World is a selection of artworks from the generous bequest of the late Wellesley Trustee Emeritus Sidney R. Knafel, who spent decades assembling a world-renowned collection of French ceramics. These objects demonstrate how artistic innovation can flourish through cross-cultural exchange. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a group of artisans in Nevers, France created extraordinary ceramic vessels using the faience technique. Invented nearly a millennium earlier, faience describes a glaze for ceramics that includes tin. In eighth-century Iraq, craftspeople discovered that adding tin to ceramic glaze produced an opaque, white surface suitable for colorful decoration. As the method spread across Asia and Europe, Italians called it maiolica. In France, it became known as faience, after the Italian city of Faenza.

In 1565, French aristocrat Henriette of Cleves married Italian politician Louis of Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers. The couple brought artisans from Italian maiolica centers to Nevers, where they introduced a style of storytelling through images in addition to tin-glaze. By 1600, European demand for Chinese porcelain spurred workshops in Nevers to attempt imitations in faience. Nevers artisans quickly developed a distinctive style that reached its zenith in popularity under King of France Louis XIV (1638-1715), when it featured in his elaborate dinner parties at Versailles. Today, these objects continue to tell stories about the people who made and used them.

Curated by Nicole Berlin, Associate Curator of Collections with Alicia Bruce, Friends of Art Curatorial Project Manager and Researcher, and Yuhua Ding, Kemper Curator of Collections and Academic Affairs. This exhibition is supported by the Sandra Cohen Bakalar '55 Fund, the Judith Blough Wentz '57 Museum Programs Fund, and Wellesley College Friends of Art at the Davis.

The Davis Museum is free and open to the public Tuesdays to Sundays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, please call 781-283-2051 or visit <https://www1.wellesley.edu/davismuseum/visit/directions>.

ABOUT THE DAVIS MUSEUM

A vital resource for communities on the Wellesley College campus and beyond, the Davis Museum is one of the oldest and most acclaimed academic fine art museums in the United States. Its signature Rafael Moneo building houses collections that span the history of art worldwide, from antiquity to the present. Guided by commitments to diversity and inclusion, excellence and innovation, and access for all, the Davis is at the core of Wellesley's liberal arts mission of educating women to make a difference in the world. With exceptional encyclopedic holdings, rotating special exhibitions, and enriching public programs, the Davis warmly welcomes all visitors, including scholars and students of all ages. For visitor information: <https://www.wellesley.edu/davismuseum/visit/directions>.

ABOUT WELLESLEY COLLEGE AND THE ARTS

The Wellesley College arts curriculum and the highly acclaimed Davis Museum are integral components of the College's liberal arts education. Departments and programs from across the campus enliven the community with world-class programming—classical and popular music, visual arts, theatre, dance, author readings, symposia, and lectures by some of today's leading artists and creative thinkers—most of which are free and open to the public.

Since 1875, Wellesley College has been a leader in providing an excellent liberal arts education for women who will make a difference in the world. Its 500-acre campus near Boston is home to some 2,400 undergraduate students from 49 states and 58 countries.

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