

15. VASE, JUAN BAUTISTA HUERTA AVIÑÓ. CIRCA 1920-1930 (CE1/17927)

This year the Museo Nacional de Cerámica celebrates the 60th anniversary of its formal re-opening on the 18th June 1954 in its new home, the Palacio de Dos Aguas. Seen in many of the photographs that captured the event for posterity (see box, page 2), Juan Bautista Huerta's lustreware vase has been chosen as the "Piece of the Month" for July to September.

Made up of three sections (foot, stem and body), the polychrome earthenware vase is decorated in a neo-Renaissance style with grotesques (Figure 1) over a lustre ground. The foot presents a band of acanthus leaves and swags and a band of masked heads. The stem has alternating acanthus leaves and breastplates (a motif that together with helmets, shields, fasces and other warlike equipment is characteristic of the theme of the trophy in Renaissance art). The body shows hybrid figures framed by palmettes and acanthus leaves; on the neck, smoking censers and at the mouth, a scrollwork border.

Two styles favoured by the characteristic historicism of late 19th and early 20th century Spanish art are therefore both at play in this piece: the "Moorish", drawing on the techniques of the Middle Ages, and Renaissance

tors and museum curators in hispano-moresque pottery that was to underpin this resurgence was evident from as early as the middle of the 19th century. As well as the publication of studies on hispano-moresque lustreware, this period saw the beginnings of what would become the great collections of this type of pottery: the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Musée de Cluny in Paris, the Valencia de Don Juan collection in Madrid and the Hispanic Society of America in New York, among others. As Pérez Camps (1998: 17) also points out, the beginnings of the taste for lustreware can be traced back to the more distant past: at the beginning of the 18th century and throughout the 19th, European porcelain manufacturers used metallic glazes in the decoration of their wares.

But it was the historicist trend that in truth relaunched classical lustreware. Several Spanish factories produced gold lustreware: Moncloa, Pujol i Bausis (Esplugues), La Roqueta (Palma de Mallorca), Mensaque, Ramos Rejano (Seville) (Pérez Camps, 1998: 20-24). In the region of Valencia, a handful stand out: La Ceramo de Burjassot, which from the time it first opened its doors in 1885 was virtually dedicated to the production of lustreware; Momparler (Valencia) and Amorós en Biar (Pérez Camps 1998: 25).

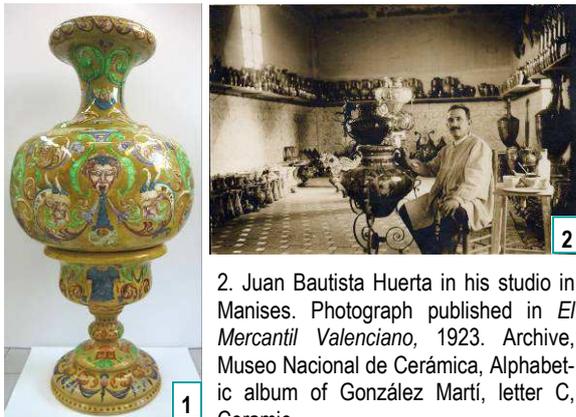
Manises was, however, the most important centre of production of lustreware in the region; in the first 30 years of the 20th century, it boasted more than twenty specialist factories. This revival of the production of gold lustreware in Manises was made possible by the cultural and artistic expertise of the factory owners together with the outstanding craftsmanship of the workforce. Francisco Moreno Gil, Jose Maria Gimeno Planells, Vicente Gimeno Dies, Francisco Valldecabres Muñoz and Justo Vilar were some of the potters who specialised in lustreware.

The factories produced pieces inspired by the shapes and decoration of what was known as "hispano-moorish" pottery. One of the most outstanding pieces produced in Manises at this time was a copy of the Nasrid Gazelle Jar, of which the original is in the collection of the Alhambra Museum. Alongside this historicist impetus, recreating styles from the past, was the production of everyday pottery and of pieces inspired by more innovative, contemporary movements such as Art Deco. Against this background, we can see that Juan Bautista Huerta was an innovator not only in terms of decorative themes but also in the techniques that he used (Figure 4) (Pérez Camps 1998: 76).

JUAN BAUTISTA HUERTA AVIÑÓ (1878-1949)

Born in 1878 in Manises into a long line of craftsmen, Juan Bautista Huerta (Figure 2) was the son of Juan Huerta and Dolores Aviñó. He was educated at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes in Valencia.

In 1920 he showed several pieces in the International Exhibition in Philadelphia, mainly lustreware with that "bronze-like, greenish" colour typical of Huerta's work (González Martí, 1923); most of the pieces shown sold and Huerta was awarded a major prize. He went on to win prizes at several international exhibitions: the Ex-



1. Juan Bautista Huerta, vase, circa 1920-1930, polychrome earthenware on a lustre ground MNC, CE1/17927.

2. Juan Bautista Huerta in his studio in Manises. Photograph published in *El Mercantil Valenciano*, 1923. Archive, Museo Nacional de Cerámica, Alphanumeric album of González Martí, letter C, Ceramic

art in terms of decorative motifs.

LUSTREWARE: THE RESURGENCE OF A TECHNIQUE

The production of lustreware in Manises was at its peak in the 15th century; from the beginning of the 16th century, it suffered a slow decline in the face of competition from polychrome Italian pottery. Technical quality and decorative skill grew weaker over the 17th and 18th centuries. Even so, the restrictive practices of the potters' guild in Manises prevented technical innovation. In the 19th century, industrialisation and the relaxation of restrictions on manufacture greatly reduced the power of the guild and led to the triumph of polychrome earthenware (Pérez Camps, 1998, 27). However, the historicist trend of the end of the century, distinguished by a return to the "roots" of Spanish pottery and to forms and techniques inspired by the Middle Ages, led in the last quarter of the century to the renewed use of lustre. The interest of scholars, collec-

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position Internationale in Paris (gold medal and Coupe d'Argent), and the Exposition Internationale d'Hygiène Appliquée in Anvers, both in 1923. In 1924, he had great success at three international shows: the International Exhibition of Modern Art and Industry in London (Grand Cup, gold medal and member of the jury), the Exposition Internationale in Brussels (gold medal and Palme d'Honneur) and the Esposizione del Progreso Industriale in Livorno. In 1925, he showed 50 pieces and three tile compositions at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels in Paris, considered by many to be the starting point of Art Deco. In 1932, Huerta took part in another exhibition, the 15th Feria de Muestras Internacional, which took place in Valencia.

In 1922 the construction in Manises of "El Arte", the



3. "El Arte". Juan Bautista Huerta's factory in Manises, 1922-1924. Photograph provided by Manises town council.

4. Juan Bautista Huerta, jar, circa 1930-1940, earthenware, silver enamel on a cobalt blue ground. MNC, CE1/04524

building in which he was to live and work from then on, reached its conclusion (Figure 3). The eye-catching façade was decorated with tiles glazed in cobalt blue and lustre over a white ground. The figure of Mercury shown in two tile panels symbolised commerce; the horns of plenty promised abundance and success and finally the quality of the product was alluded to by the depiction of the Alhambra's Gazelle Jar. The band at the foot of the façade was in 'trencadís' – a modernist form of mosaic. Two years later, an extension in a hispano-arab style, inspired by the plasterwork of the Alhambra, was added

The period 1923-1932 saw intense activity as well as national and international recognition for Huerta. It came to an end with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, during which Huerta was imprisoned for two years.

After the Civil War, Huerta worked in the La Cova factory in Manises, which produced glazed vitrified clay pipes. In 1942 he was called on by the Aicart family to restart production at the Alcora factory, where he worked until 1945. From then until his death in 1949 he worked at the new La Hispania factory in Manises, the first factory in the town to produce porcelain. And he participated as noted in the Feria de Muestras in Valencia.

Huerta's work is marked by two major influences: on one hand, a turning back to the past to rediscover not only styles of decoration (Renaissance, Baroque, Gothic ...) but also, as we have seen, traditional techniques for making and decorating the pieces, among which the use of lustre is the technique that most readily evokes Spain's Arab past. On the other hand, his pieces fall full square within the contemporary movement known as Art Deco, in which those "exotic" memories from the past mixed with influences from Japanese, Egyptian or pre-Colombian art. Pérez Camps (1998: 45)

underlines the importance of the time spent in Manises in 1922 by the Paraguayan artist Andrés Campos and his collaboration with Huerta. Huerta also made small sculptures decorated with lustre as well as architectural ceramics.

THE MUSEO NACIONAL DE CERÁMICA CELEBRATES ITS 60th ANNIVERSARY

This year the Museum celebrates the 60th anniversary of the installation of its collection in the Palacio de Dos Aguas, marked with great ceremony on 18th June 1954 with both the Minister for Education in the Spanish Government, Joaquín Ruíz, and the Minister for Education in the regional administration, Blas Pérez, in attendance. The Museum's photographic archive contains many pictures which constitute a visual record of the event. In several of them, our vase appears behind the founder of the Museum during the inaugural speeches (Figure 5). In 1958 the Arab Room was opened and there hung from the ceiling a lustreware lamp, the work of Juan Bautista Huerta (Figure 6). José María Moreno speaks of both pieces preserved in the Museum: "we want to refer to two magnificent works of his in the Museo Nacional de Cerámica, acquired by the founder, Manuel González Martí, who in a conversation that we were honoured to have with him recently, praised Huerta and his art warmly, and spoke also of the challenges that Huerta had overcome to produce those two works; one is a magnificent Renaissance-style vase and the other is the lustreware lamp which hangs in the centre of the Arab Room; in fact, González Martí told us, the lamp was found by pure chance in the *Rastro* flea market in Madrid" (Moreno Royo, 1966).



5. González Martí gives a speech during the opening of the Museum on 18th June 1954. Photographic archive, Museo Nacional de Cerámica

6. The Arab Room as curated by González Martí. Photograph, circa 1967. Photographic archive, Museo Nacional de Cerámica.

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