



The Elephant and the Lotus: Vietnamese Ceramics in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Philippe Truong

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For more than 2000 years, using the excellent clays of the Red River Valley, Vietnamese potters have produced some of the most sophisticated ceramic artifacts in Southeast Asia, dovetailing the Chinese ceramic tradition with other traditions--such as those of Cambodia and Champa--in original and idiosyncratic ways. The combination of skilled potting with somewhat "casual" finish, calligraphic painting and certain chance effects in glazing are all qualities typical of Vietnamese ceramics. Today, partly prompted by several recent archaeological retrievals, these qualities are stimulating the interest of a widening circle of collectors and connoisseurs. *The Elephant and the Lotus: Vietnamese Ceramics in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* considers this vital and hitherto obscured tradition by highlighting over 200 examples from the Museum's superb collection. Ranging from earthy and practical stoneware produced over two millennia ago (the earliest Vietnamese potteries date back to the Hung period in 700 B.C.), to the gloriously decorated ewers and bowls created a thousand years later, or to the fine blue-and-white porcelains produced between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (before the advent of French colonial rule), the works gathered here reflect the natural wonders of Vietnam and the ingenuity of its ceramists. With extensive presentations by expert Philippe Truong, including an essay on the natural motifs particular to Vietnamese pottery, *The Elephant and the Lotus* is both the first complete publication of a remarkable collection and an indispensable introduction to a rapidly growing field of study in Asian decorative arts.

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