

BGC

The Bard Graduate Center  
for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture



**Hungarian Ceramics  
from the  
Zsolnay Manufactory.  
1853–2001**

On view from July 17  
through October 13, 2002

## The Zsolnay Ceramics Manufactory: A Hungarian Artistic Triumph

During the last third of the 19th century, an ambitious and innovative ceramics manufactory in southwestern Hungary, operated by the Zsolnay family, gained worldwide acclaim as a leading Central European producer of household wares, one-of-a-kind art objects, and architectural elements of the highest aesthetic quality. Having survived the political, economic, and social upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Zsolnay enterprise remains in operation. The compelling saga of this firm represents a victory of Hungarian applied arts that deserves renewed appreciation.

Who was responsible for the creation of the outstanding masterpieces that established the Zsolnay manufactory's reputation?

What pioneering technological advances distinguished the Zsolnay ceramics from contemporary European competitors? How is the Zsolnay company history intertwined with the political, economic, and social changes that took place in Hungary during the 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries?

These questions are answered in the exhibition *Hungarian Ceramics from the Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853–2001*, the first comprehensive survey of the remarkable 150-year history of the firm, featuring objects, designs, and photographs from 1853 to the present.





## The Zsolnay Family Tale

Miklós Zsolnay (1800–1880) founded the Zsolnay manufactory in the early 1850s in Pécs, Hungary. The company's leadership eventually passed to his youngest son, Vilmos Zsolnay (1828–1900), who transformed the enterprise into a leader in the international 19th-century decorative arts market. Regarded as the one of the greatest Hungarian potters, Vilmos experimented with unusual lustrous and iridescent glazes, originated imaginative forms and decoration, and invented durable ceramic formulas. By 1900, under the direction of Vilmos's son Miklos (1857–1922), the Zsolnay business had reached the pinnacle of its success.

### Zsolnay Emerges: Historicism Appreciated

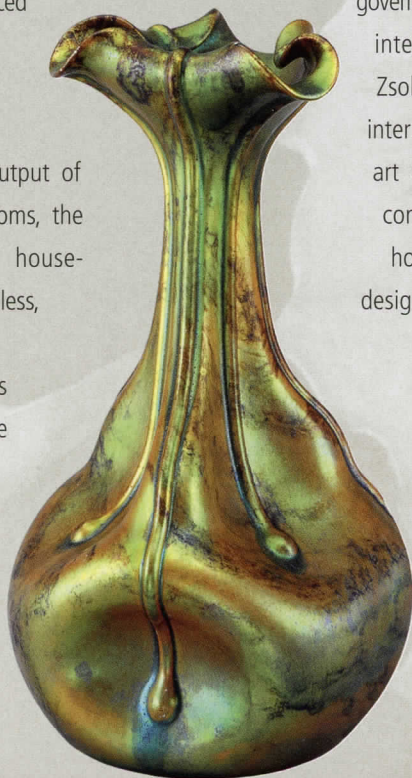
As was typical of late-19th-century European arts, Zsolnay production of the 1880s and 1890s drew on an assortment of motifs and forms from past styles. Befitting the interiors in which they were placed, Zsolnay ceramics referred to sources as eclectic as Persian textiles, European Renaissance arts, Japanese and Chinese porcelain, and traditional Hungarian folk designs. The resulting richly decorated objects won praise and awards at numerous international expositions and became favored adornments of luxurious domestic settings throughout Eastern and Western Europe as well as the United States.

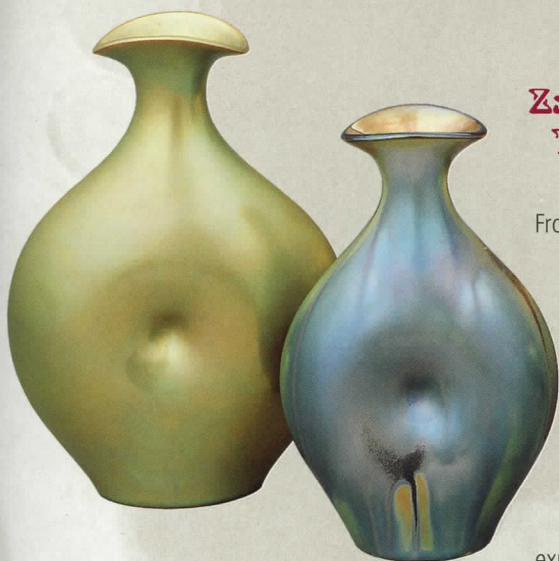
## Zsolnay Victorious: Art Nouveau Masterpieces

The Zsolnay business flourished at the turn of the 20th century, with the production of wall plaques, lamps, and tiles characterized by sinuous forms and brilliantly colored metallic glazes created with the manufactory's trademark eosin process. These eye-catching Art Nouveau works ensured the artistic and financial success of the company. This golden age of the firm coincided with a peaceful political and cultural era in which art and design thrived across Hungary and Central Europe.

## Zsolnay Struggles: Production Difficulties

The turmoil of the interwar period curtailed production at the Zsolnay manufactory, as Hungary experienced governmental and economic crises. With the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Zsolnay lost access to many raw materials and international markets. After a period of limited output of art objects in Art Deco and more restrained idioms, the company shifted to focus on mass-produced household goods and industrial design creativity at Zsolnay. None-the-less, artistic work by independent designers was allowed under a socialist directive following the nationalization of the operation in 1948.

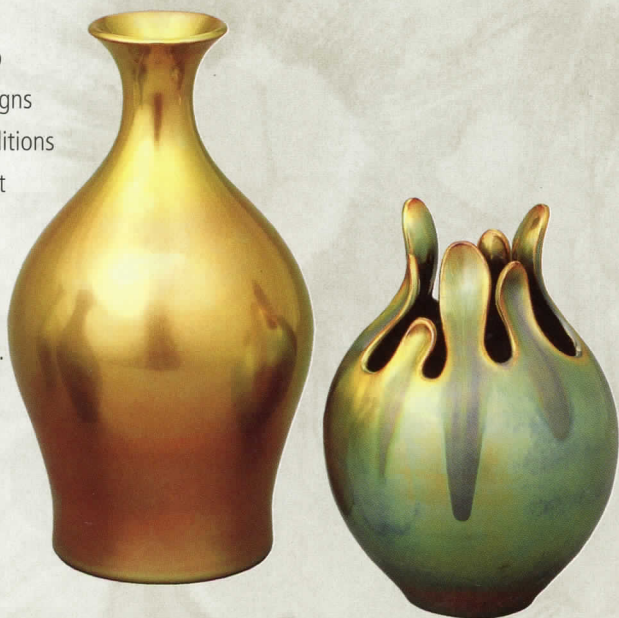




## Zsolnay Today

From the 1950s onward, as the political and cultural atmosphere in Hungary became more open, the Zsolnay company permitted designers to produce work that explored modern abstrac-

tion. Guest artists like Victor Vasarely and Éva Zeisel conceived beautiful pieces that revived earlier Zsolnay organic shapes and metallic glazes. Other designers revitalized the manufactory's architectural ceramic output, referring to the tradition of producing vividly colored weather-resistant tiles and ornamentation, examples of which can still be seen on buildings throughout Hungary. Today, Zsolnay continues to create original designs along with new editions of past products that celebrate the manufactory's technical and stylistic achievements.



## Location

18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, New York City

## Admission

General: \$3  
Seniors (65 and over): \$2  
Students (with valid ID): \$2

## Hours

Tuesday through Sunday:  
11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Thursday: 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

## Transportation

The BGC is easily accessible by public transportation.

Bus: M86 crosstown  
M10 on Central Park West  
M7 or M11 on Columbus Avenue

Subway: B or C train to 86th Street station

## Exhibition Tours

Group tours of the exhibition may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and on Thursday evenings until 7:00 p.m. Advance reservations are required for all groups.

Payment must be made in advance, via check or credit card. The fees for admission and guide(s) are:

1–20 visitors (single guide): \$75  
21–40 visitors (two guides): \$100

## Special Needs

The BGC complies with the provisions of the American with Disabilities Act by making its buildings accessible to those with special needs. To discuss arrangements, please call prior to visiting.



## Public Programs

An array of lectures, panels, and other offerings is presented in conjunction with this exhibition. Special events are held for senior audiences. Please call 212-501-3011 for more information.

## Catalogue

A scholarly publication accompanying the exhibition includes 14 essays by prominent scholars who examine the manufactory's history of production and the political, economic, and cultural contexts in which the manufactory operated.

## Exhibition Schedule

*Le Corbusier Before Le Corbusier: Applied Arts, Architectural Drawings, Painting, and Photography, 1907–1922*

November 22, 2002 – February 23, 2003

*Quiet Beauty: Fifty Centuries of Japanese Folk Ceramics*

March 27 – June 22, 2003

## Website

For up-to-date exhibition-related information, please visit the Bard Graduate Center website at [www.bgc.bard.edu](http://www.bgc.bard.edu).

## Information

For further information, please call the Bard Graduate Center Gallery at 212-501-3023 or TTY 212-501-3012 or e-mail [gallery\\_assistant@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:gallery_assistant@bgc.bard.edu).



## Images

### Cover:

*Vase with meadow of poppies* (detail), earthenware, 1900–01 (Collection of Dr. László Gyugyi)

### Inside (left to right):

*Vase with meadow of poppies*, earthenware, 1900–01 (Collection of Dr. László Gyugyi)

*Alhambra vase*, Tádé Sikorski, porcelain faience, 1884 (Collection of Dr. László Gyugyi)

*Vase*, earthenware, 1898–99 (Collection of Dr. László Gyugyi)

*Vases*, Eva Zeisel, earthenware, 1983 (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs)

### Above:

*Roof tiles with rhinoceros head for the House of Mammals building* (detail), pyrogranite, 1911 (Zoological Gardens, Budapest)

### Back cover:

*Ceramic painting of landscape with Pan figure playing music*, earthenware, 1899–1900 (Collection of Dr. László Gyugyi)



*Hungarian Ceramics from the Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853–2001* is made possible with the support of the Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Foundation, Inc.; Patricia and Peter Nadosy; Jason Jacques Inc., Art Nouveau Ceramic Masterworks; Clara Kellner; Hungarian Cultural Center, New York; MALEV Hungarian Airlines; and an anonymous donor. Additional funding for associated educational programs is provided by the Trust for Mutual Understanding. Support for outreach programs is provided by The Rudin Foundation, Inc.

Designed by Karen Spencer; Printed by Quality Printing ♻️

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