



*J.E. Horvath*

In mid-October 1990, the Museum of Anthropology will open its new European Ceramics wing at the University of British Columbia. It will house the Koerner Collection of ceramics which was virtually unknown to the public until now.

Dr. Walter C. Koerner does not need introduction. Indeed, Vancouver would be a poorer place, fiscally and culturally, without his many contributions. The Museum of Anthropology already displays in its main hall the Walter and Marianne Koerner Collection of West Coast Indian artifacts. An equally important contribution will be the exhibition of European ceramics of the 16th to 19th centuries, in a new wing which artfully preserves the striking Erikson design of this unique museum building.

Why ceramics? A ceramic vessel is always a form of art, regardless of how utilitarian it is. It is also one of the oldest of the arts. Studying ceramic art history is not just a study of styles, but also of development of technique, social behaviour, and political and religious history. And something more. Jean Fahrni, well-known Canadian potter, expressed it best, quoting from an unknown Japanese source: "In international relations we should be represented by potters, since among potters there is universal understanding. Pottery is a universal language."

And why European ceramics? The Museum of Anthropology is a teaching institution and a very good one at that. It is rich in West Coast Indian art and it has some good examples of Oriental decorative art, but it is sadly lacking European material. Until now, that is.

The Koerner Collection of European Ceramics is extensive, but selective. It includes outstanding examples of one of the oldest of the ceramic arts, lead and tin glaze pottery, as opposed to the more recent porcelain. Glazing makes the clay capable of holding food or water. The glazed surface at the same time offers itself for artistic expression.