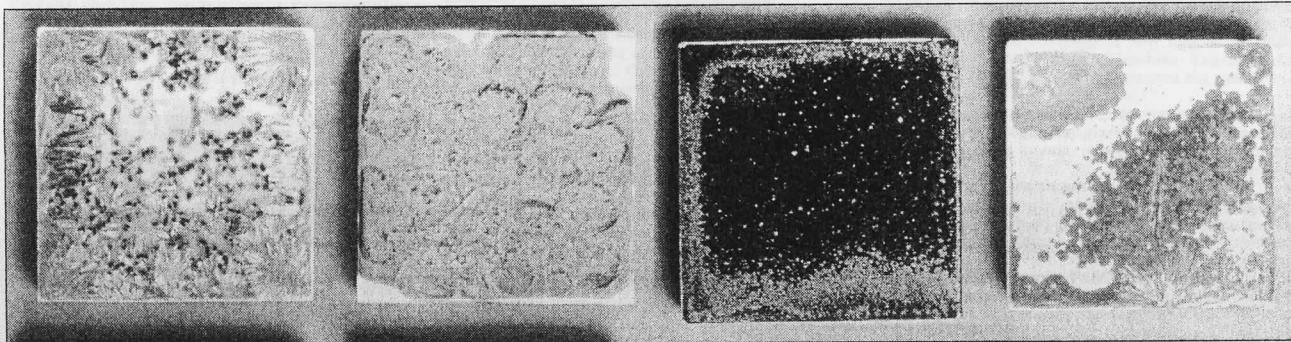




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The Hungarian ceramics factory was also famous for its iridescent tiles, both for architectural use and for furniture decoration. These examples of the latter are about three inches square.

Hungarian Ceramics From The Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853-2001

BY KARLA KLEIN ALBERTSON

NEW YORK CITY — In recent years, the Bard Graduate Center on Manhattan's West Side has presented a series of exhibitions designed to focus attention on important aspects of decorative arts history neglected elsewhere. The current exhibition, "Hungarian Ceramics from the Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853-2001," on display through October 13, reveals a magnificent tradition of porcelain and pottery from Eastern Europe that rivaled and at times surpassed production in the West.

Olga Valle Tetkowsky, Bard's curator of exhibitions who served as project coordinator on the New York end, points out, "One of the things we have done here at Bard is to bring to light some person or, in this case, a manufactory that is not well-known in the United States. Real ceramic gurus know Zsolnay because of the iridescent glazes they used during the Art Nouveau period, but even within these ceramic circles few realize the range of this company's production. Many people don't know that Zsolnay is still a working company."

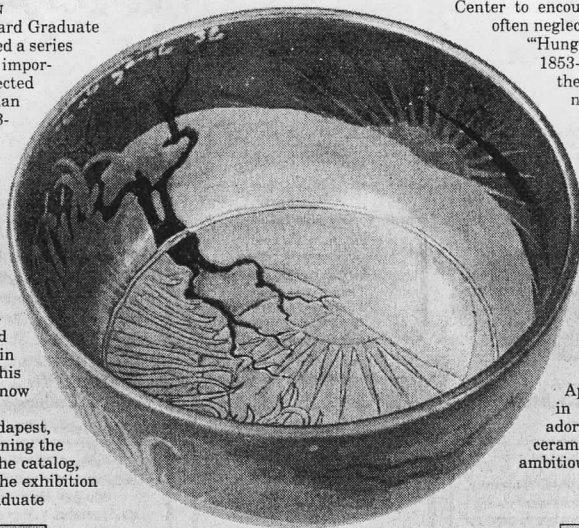
Inspired by what they saw on visits to Budapest, Bard administrators and staff have been planning the Zsolnay exhibition for a decade. Writing for the catalog, Director Susan Webster Soros emphasizes, "The exhibition and catalog reflect the goal of The Bard Graduate

Center to encourage scholarly investigation into valuable, but often neglected areas of the decorative arts.

"Hungarian Ceramics from the Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853-2001" presents for the first time examples from the entire range of the Zsolnay production, beginning with its popular versions of historic pieces from the Nineteenth Century, made as the factory contributed to the development of a national style, and ending with works made specially for this exhibition," she continues. "The manufactory's magnificent award-winning Art Nouveau creations, with their extraordinary, fluid forms and lustrous 'eosin' glazes formulated by the Zsolnay manufactory, represent the peak of the manufactory's art production.... The exhibition and catalog also broaden the range of scholarly exploration by focusing on the factory's architectural ceramics, which have contributed greatly to the beauty of the city of Budapest."

Appropriately, Bard turned to the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest — an institution opened in 1897 during Zsolnay's heyday and physically adorned with the company's lustrous architectural ceramics — for the expertise it needed to organize the ambitious exhibition. Eva Csenkey, who is in charge of the

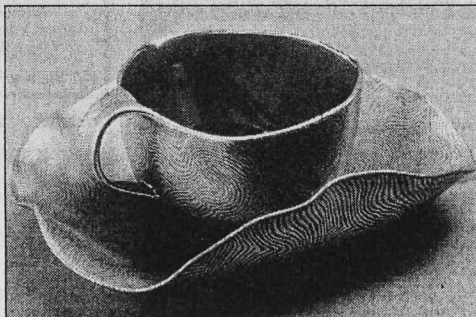
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The interior and exterior painting on this 1899 bowl, adapted from an earlier design by Otto Eckmann called *Small Lake in the Forest*, looks forward to Deco and modernism in spite of its early date.



Zsolnay reached the apogee of its success with the Art Nouveau pieces made during the early Twentieth Century, winning top prizes at Paris, St. Louis, Milan and London. This lidded container with small-shaped feet, 1912-13, is decorated with the shimmering eosin glazes designed to compete with contemporary French luster ceramics and American Tiffany glass.



Using iridescent eosin glazes, Zsolnay artists created a pulled, Tiffany-type overall decoration on this leaf-form earthenware cup and saucer, 1898-99.



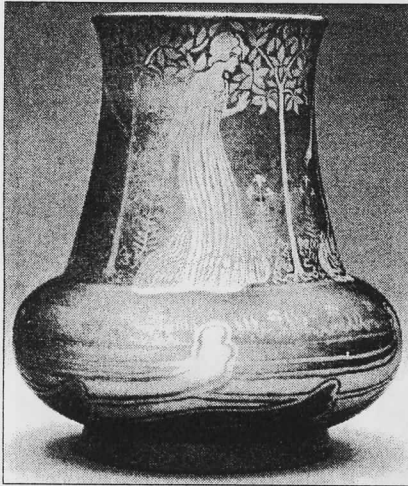
Art Nouveau floral themes were interpreted in various innovative ways by Zsolnay artists. Here a wall plate designed by Henrik Darilek, 1899-1900, shows a female head peering from a forest of fire lilies.

Hungarian Ceramics From The Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853-2001

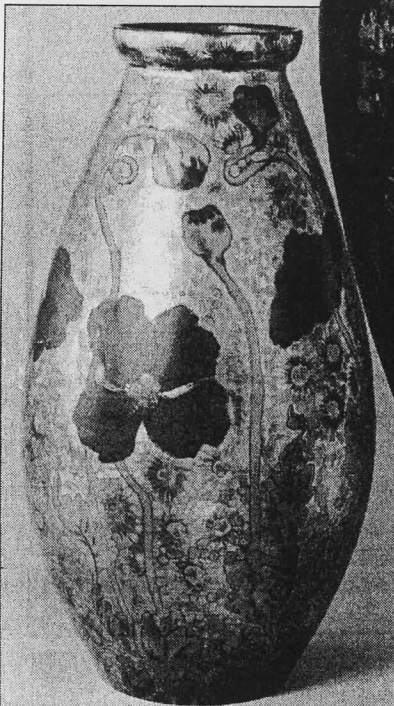
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Zsolnay was very much a family concern. Vilmos Zsolnay, who took over the concern in 1868, had help on the business side from his son Miklos and used the artistic talents of daughters Terez and Julia, shown here in a self-portrait on a wall plate painted in 1882.



After years of experimentation, Vilmos Zsolnay developed a metallic luster glazing technique he called "eosin," which was ideally suited to the Art Nouveau style popular at the turn of the Twentieth Century. This vase, designed and painted in 1900 by Geza Nikelszky in the style of Walter Crane, is decorated with an outdoor scene of trees, maidens, and flowers acid-etched on the base glaze.



The background of this vase with red poppies - perhaps the quintessential Art Nouveau flower - is richly patterned with tiny glaze-painted dots and radiating bursts of iridescence.

museum's ceramics department, became the show's curator and co-authored the scholarly catalog with Agota Steinert. While many exhibits were drawn from the Budapest museum and the Janus Pannonius Museum in Pecs, where Zsolnay had its manufactory, other loans came from American sources, such as the Laszlo Gyugyi Collection in Pittsburgh. In spite of past neglect in the popular antiques press, Zsolnay aficionados are a tight-knit group, and serious ceramic collectors have long been aware of the pottery's importance.

During the Art Nouveau period, the entire design world was aware of the Hungarian manufactory's production, and the catalog includes archival photographs of Zsolnay's displays at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900, where its ceramics won a medal, and at the St Louis World's Fair of 1904. Forms and glazes on display in the exhibition demonstrate that Zsolnay had the design capability and technical know-how to match any firm in existence at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Production was inventive and varied from stylized naturalistic shapes to shimmering abstract landscape patterns to realistic sculptural models.

The manufactory's history is very much a Zsolnay family affair. The real run to glory began when Vilmos Zsolnay took over the stumbling factory in Pecs from his brother Ignac in 1868. At that time, Hungary lay at the center of the extensive Austro-Hungarian Empire, which would survive until 1918. Vilmos and his son Miklos apparently had the management skill that earlier family members had lacked, and fortunately his daughters had artistic talent to contribute to the family concern.

Olga Tetkowsky notes, "A lot of the artists who worked at Zsolnay were family members, especially early on. Vilmos Zsolnay was not quite the founder, but really the person who established the factory, and his son Miklos was involved with managing the company. Both his

daughters, Terez and Julia, were very much involved in designing and later their husbands were involved in creating new glazes. Eventually they began inviting artists to work on certain things at the factory, including Eva Seisel."

In a surprisingly short time, the efforts of Vilmos Zsolnay met with international success. The manufactory sent a first consignment of 365 objects to the Exposition Universelle de Paris in March 1878 followed by monthly shipments during the course of the exposition for a total of more than 5,000 pieces. After exhibiting ceramics on the other side of the globe in Melbourne in 1880, Zsolnay began exporting ceramics across the Atlantic to Herman Trost and Company in New York in the same year. At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Vilmos Zsolnay first presented the special iridescent glazes he had named "eosin."

The company was a pioneer in developing new art pottery clay types, iridescent glazes and decoration techniques. The firm's founder also made important contributions to the field of architectural ceramics, developing a unique material called "pyrogranite" that could be decorated with glazes but was superbly weather-resistant. Tetkowsky admits, "Most difficult to convey in a gallery exhibition is the wonderful architectural work that they did. It's amazing to go to Budapest and see the buildings covered with Zsolnay tiles. I had a chance to see some of the interiors in the Parliament Building and they're quite spectacular."

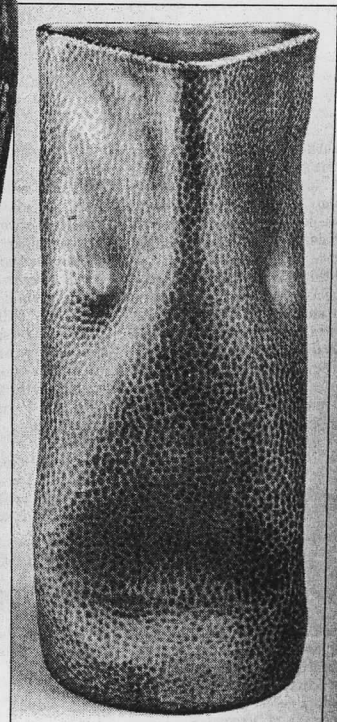
Through photographs, the exhibition and catalog devote special attention to this architectural work, much of which has miraculously survived the vicissitudes of time and political fortunes. In addition to decorating the turn-of-the-century House of Parliament - recently restored down to the specially designed furniture set with Zsolnay tiles - and the Museum of Applied Arts, the firm's tiles appeared within and without the Hungarian National Academy of Music, Geological Institute, and Zoological Gardens. Private and commercial uses included house facades, office buildings, baths, tombs and exposition pavilions.

An in-person visit to "Hungarian Ceramics from the Zsolnay Manufactory, 1853-2001" is a must for the collector, if only for the off chance that one of those examples shipped long ago to an American World's Fair might turn up unexpectedly for sale. As always, Bard has provided a "keeper" catalog (\$65, hardcover only) with every ounce of information one could hope for on the manufactory and its production.

The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture is at 18 West 86th Street. For more information or catalog orders, 212-501-3000 or www.bgc.bard.edu.



Designers at Zsolnay drew on the legends and history of the Hungarian people. This porcelain faience vase, 1882-83, is covered with decoration in colored enamels depicting a triumphal procession of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor from 1493 to 1519.



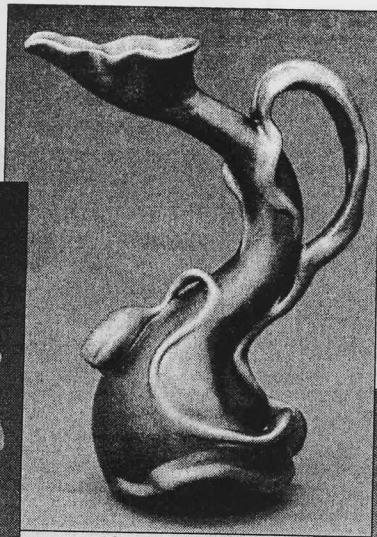
A simple cylinder vase, 1900, is enlivened with a gleaming iridescent surface fashioned to resemble hand-hammered metalwork.

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Hungarian Ceramics



As Art Nouveau waned, later creations from the factory were simpler and more geometric. This pitcher with a stylized dove handle, 1909-10, designed by Sandor Apati Abt, has an ancient Greek look to its form and decoration.



This writhing ewer in the Art Nouveau style, 1899, features tulip bulbs and leaves in relief colored with two types of opaque eosin glaze. A period photo, circa 1900, shows other vases and goblets with similar fluid forms displayed for an exhibition.

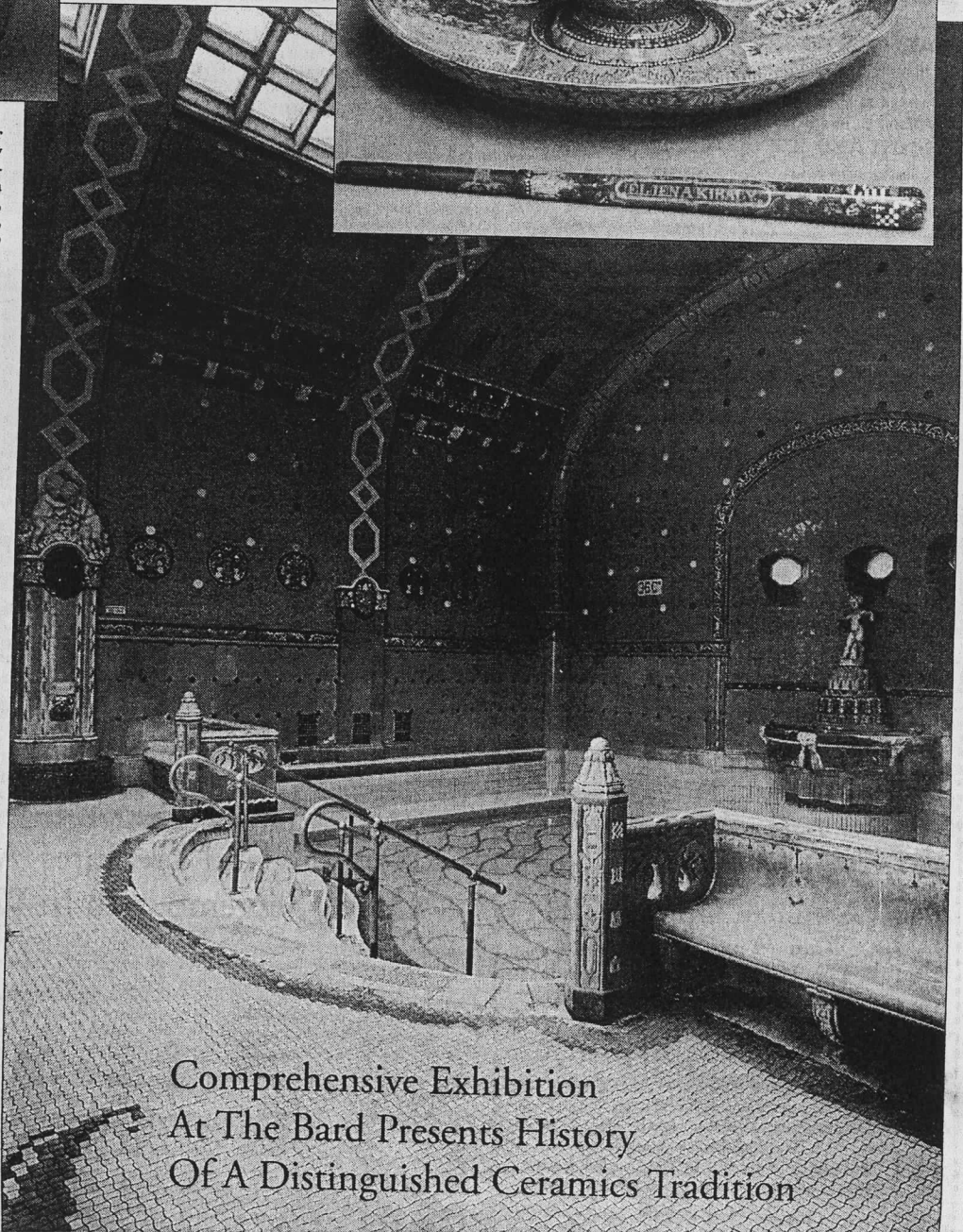
At The Bard



This covered inkwell, underplate, and pen were created for the use of King Ferenc Jozsef I during the inauguration of the Museum and School of Applied Arts at Budapest in 1896.



Twentieth Century production at the factory included some small ceramic sculptures, such as this woman holding a staff.



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