

# CERAMICS

## Introduction

Ceramic objects are numerous throughout the historic sites system. Because of their extremely delicate nature, great care must be exercised when handling them to prevent damage or loss. Since ceramics are made by many different processes, it is of the utmost importance that the handler know the exact condition and composition of the ceramic piece being cared for. If its chemical makeup is in doubt, it should not be treated in any way until positive identification is made. When caring for the ceramics in a collection, the following general rules should be observed.

## Handling

1. When ceramics are received, they should be carefully checked for cracks and imperfections in the glaze. Careful notes should be made about these defects.
2. Always check each piece for maker's marks and copy them carefully or make note of the information for research purposes.
3. If a piece is received poorly mended, never attempt to undo the repair. This is work for a trained conservator.
4. Never separate broken pieces of pottery, porcelain, china, etc., but always keep the various pieces together until a trained conservator can take over. Adhesive tape can be used to hold broken pieces together for measuring or until conservation is begun.
5. Never put ceramic objects near a direct source of heat such as a working fireplace or a radiator.
6. Always make sure that plates, cups, or bowls, etc. are never stacked one on top of the other for any reason.
7. Always be sure that work or study surfaces are well padded with felt to prevent damage to the pieces being worked with.
8. Do not pick a ceramic object up by its handle, rim, or edge. Always handle a piece with two hands and make sure that it is well supported from below.

9. Make sure that the edges of ceramic objects never extend beyond the edge of the work surface or display shelf.

10. Be sure that ceramic objects are always separated for movement within the museum, and never have objects packed together for movement.

### Cleaning and Repair

1. Before starting any treatment of cleaning, the value of the object should be carefully considered against any possible damage that can occur.

2. The repair of porcelain, earthenware, or terra cotta is extremely difficult because the joints must be formed as hair lines, and, if not, the broken pieces can never be properly fitted. This work, therefore, must be done only by an expert.

1. Always be sure to keep all parts of an object together until a conservator can begin work.

4. Never attempt to clean an object that is in need of immediate repair.

5. Never attempt to clean an object that has a painted surface because these surfaces can be very easily removed. Always consult a conservator for these items.

6. The cleaning of hard-fired porcelain, oriental porcelain, or stoneware is a comparatively easy process as these are all non-porous and will not absorb water or other materials. However, before starting, all pieces should be carefully inspected for cracks or imperfections in the glaze.

7. Pieces can be washed in a plastic tub or dish pan in warm water and a small amount of dishwashing detergent. The pieces should be rinsed in clean warm water and dried well afterwards.

8. Never be too vigorous in cleaning ceramic objects. It is always better to underclean than overclean and remove part of a design or otherwise damage a piece.

9. Pottery, in general, should not be fully immersed in water. It should be wiped with a damp cloth to which a small amount of detergent has been added, and then rinsed with a clean cloth damped with clear water. It should then be thoroughly dried.

10. If a ceramic object has metal trim or handles, these should be given special consideration according to the treatment recommended for that type of metal. See metal section for additional

information.

11. Stain removal involves the use of various types of bleach and cleaning solutions. Because some of these solutions can easily remove the decoration on ceramic pieces, this type of cleaning should only be done by an expert.

12. Terra cotta pieces should be cleaned with no liquid. Dust the piece carefully with a soft brush to remove the surface dirt.

### Storage

1. Storage shelves for ceramics should be constructed of wood and should be covered with felt for padding.
2. Shelves should never be too deep. Shallow shelves make for easier access.
3. Smaller pieces can be stored in cabinets or drawers that are lined with felt for cushioning.
4. Ceramic or terra cotta wall plaques can be stored by being hung on a metal screen similar to the ones used for paintings, or against a pegboard screen.
5. Do not pack ceramics into containers for storage or movement within the museum.
6. Take special care with all large objects and make sure they are always moved separately and with great care.
7. Make sure ceramic objects do not touch each other while in storage.
8. Be sure to pad all work or study tables with felt to prevent damage to the objects.