



TOP ROW FROM LEFT Worcester vase with painting after Boucher by John Donaldson, 1768–69; Chelsea plate with Aesop's fable of *The Fox and the Lion* by Jeffereys Hamett O'Neale, c1755 (and close-up detail above); Derby dish with landscape by Zachariah Boreman, c1790–94. **BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT** Derby dish by John Brewer c1795; Chelsea-Derby plate with cherub by Fidelle Duvivier, c1770; close-up of a cherub by Richard Askew c1785. **FACING PAGE** Derby plate with crocus by John Brewer, c1795.





Meet the Celebrities

Once the recipe for porcelain was widely available, it was time for artists to shine, says **Willa Latham**



In the last few decades of the 18th century, with the porcelain industry firmly established, a new phenomenon took place: the emergence of individual porcelain artists pursuing their own styles. Previously, painters worked in the factory style, often in the shadow of the artistic genius of their founders – usually following an aesthetic inspired by German or French fashion. But the factories at Derby and Worcester were run by astute businessmen, who understood that if they wanted the best artists, they had to give them recognition and the freedom to develop. And this quickly became a selling point for their porcelain. So let me introduce you to a handful of these great artists...

Richard Askew was famous for his chubby cherubs in monochrome puce, first at Chelsea and then at Derby; you can recognise them straightaway with their big jaws and their rather serious grown-up expression, even if smiling, in contrast to, for instance, Fidelle Duvivier, whose cherubs I will come to later.

The Brewer brothers, John and Robert, came from a well-known London family of artists but, finding the 18th-century art scene increasingly crowded, they sought new avenues for their talents. So just as Chelsea factory founder Nicholas Sprimont decided to side-step the crowded market of silversmiths by manufacturing porcelain, the Brewer brothers, both watercolourists, joined the new industry of porcelain decorators.

First the talented John, upon being engaged by Derby, switched to mastering the much more complex process of painting enamels on porcelain. Reportedly he did this within one week, a technically difficult transition that was unheard of in such a short period of time. He became famous for his flowers, which have an extraordinary crispness and realism to them; sometimes he painted them with their bulbs and roots. His brother Robert, who joined him soon after, specialised in richly coloured, dense landscapes.

The king of landscapes, though, was Zachariah Boreman, who painted gorgeously crisp autumnal-tinted scenes and apparently was a very modest and lovely man. He was a watercolourist too and worked for the Chelsea factory until its closure, then coming to Derby. Such is the subtlety of Boreman's landscapes, both on porcelain and in his popular watercolours, that he didn't need to use many colours and sometimes even painted in monochrome sepia or grey. He painted countless landscapes in Derbyshire: flowing hills, stately homes, wild rocks, cottages by rivers... there was no end to the beauty that his eye discovered in the English landscape, and many of his paintings particularly depict its wildness.

Jefferyes Hamett O'Neale was an Irish miniaturist and apparently a very funny man. Alongside his successful business painting miniatures he painted porcelain at Chelsea and, upon its closure, was engaged by Worcester. He became famous for his vivid and often humorous paintings of *Aesop's Fables*; countless cheeky foxes, lions, storks and cockerels can be found in his work. In an era when social mobility became part of public life and people were able to change their status by improving themselves, *Aesop's Fables* became hugely popular, as they taught a common moral and ethical code.

In the detail opposite (top right) you can see an image of *The Fox and the Lion*; when the fox first encountered a lion, he nearly died of fright; the second time he was able to take a good look at the lion, but the third time he was bold enough to go right up to the lion and start a conversation – the moral of course being that familiarity and patience allow us to overcome our fears. Can you imagine the chatter at a dinner party as guests tried to identify the fable painted on their particular plate?

The Scot John Donaldson worked first for Chelsea and then Worcester, and his images are perhaps among the most ambitious of all in their scope and gravity; impressive landscapes with flowing classical Rubens-like scenes, usually containing plenty of human flesh and rich puce colours. There are stunning vases by Donaldson in the Royal Worcester Museum and the Ashmolean in Oxford.

Perhaps the prime example of the wandering artist courted by many factories was Fidelle Duvivier, a hugely talented and versatile artist from Tournai, who excelled in the fine French style. Duvivier painted gorgeous miniature scenes reminiscent of the popular *toile de Jouy* fabrics of the time and was also known for his wonderfully chubby cherubs, who are more like giggling babies with ecstatic grins on their faces. Having trained in his hometown, Duvivier worked in Paris and then England, first at Chelsea/Derby and later for James Giles. Next came a stint in the Netherlands at Loosdrecht before he returned to England to work at a number of Staffordshire factories, most notably New Hall. But that was not all; Duvivier then went to America to paint images for 'magic lantern' shows, a popular entertainment at the time.

If these men sound impressive, wait until you meet William Billingsley and William 'Quaker' Pegg, two of the greatest artists of the age ... but that's for next time!

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