

Soup tureens at Royal Ontario Museum

An exhibition of one of the largest and most decorative object, used in the the serving of food during the past three centuries, the soup tureen, has just ended at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

The unique collection from the Campbell Museum, Camden, New Jersey, established by funds from the Campbell Soup Company in 1966, has outstanding examples in silver, pewter and ceramics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from 24 countries.

Among the interesting objects on display was a "Rabbit" tureen, of soft-paste porcelain, made in England in 1755. Originally there were 25 from the same mould, though each varied slightly from all the others and no two were painted just alike. Seven are believed to be still in existence, of which the Campbell Museum possesses two.

According to John M. Graham II, consultant to the Campbell Museum "anything goes" in the fashioning of a soup tureen, "from ship to fish, fowl to animals, vegetables and fruits and flowers, and often a combination of several.... No other part of the dinner service has lent itself to the unusual and bizarre in form and design as have soup tureens.... They may not all be appetizing and they may not all be objects of beauty, but they are often surprising – if not startling – and certainly not dull."

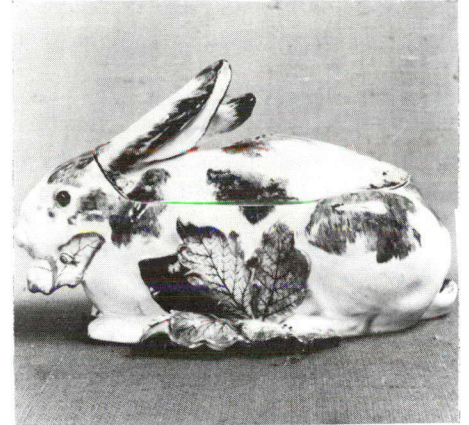
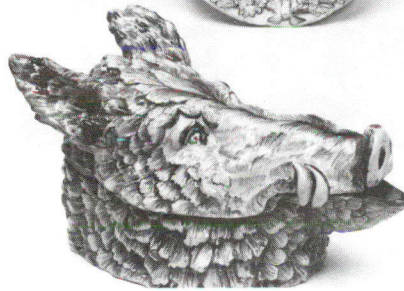
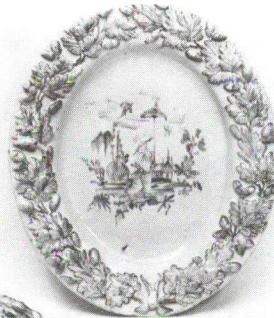
Transportation a problem

The packing and transportation of the tureens is an art in itself. The Campbell Museum hired a sculptor to do a profile of each item in soft foam. The tureen is placed in its foam "mould", then wrapped in another type of foam and encased in steel mesh. The whole is then packed in a cardboard carton, which goes into a wooden case. The tureens are transported by truck and the same drivers are used each time. On occasion, when one tureen alone is being transported, the Director of the Campbell Museum will take it by plane. In this case, it is carefully packed into a bag which then travels at child's fare, resting on the seat next to Mr. Collier.

The exhibition opened on February 20 and was on view until March 25.



This soft-paste porcelain tureen and stand form part of a large dinner service ordered by King George III and Queen Charlotte as a gift to the Queen's brother, Duke Adolphus Frederick of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, in 1763, at a cost of £1,200.



The "Rabbit" tureen, made of soft-paste porcelain in Chelsea, England, about 1745. An entry in a sales catalogue of 1755 describes it as: A Fine tureen in the form of a rabbit as big as life...." The back of the rabbit lifts off to form the cover, the ears serving as handles.



This tureen of hard-paste porcelain, with its stand of ormolu and leather, made about 1823 in Berlin, was part of a large dinner service of more than 350 pieces. Each of the serving pieces, including three surviving tureens is decorated with views of Berlin and bands of mixed flowers.

Tureen with stand, tin-enamelled earthenware (faïence), Denmark, Holstein, Kiel, Tännich or Buchwald period, circa 1770 (left centre).

The rare silver tureen (left) was made in New York by Hugh Wishart about 1795. Engraved in a wreath, surrounded by a motto, is the coat-of-arms of George Washington's maternal relatives.

Photos courtesy Royal Ontario Museum