

The Illustrated Credenza  
Proposals for  
Lecture Presentation and/or  
Museum Study Day

Valerie Taylor, PhD, Pasadena City College  
valeriesusy@gmail.com

Lisa Boutin Vitela, PhD, Cerritos College  
lisa.boutin@gmail.com



**ITALIAN MAIOLICA IN THE RENAISSANCE STYLE**

## Research Objective

Our goal is to understand Isabella d’Este’s narrative-painted, tin-glazed earthenware service (*credenza di maiolica istoriata*) from the creation of the dishes through their display.

This splendid set was commissioned from master designer Nicola d’Urbino in a golden age of Italian ceramic production. In the sixteenth-century, tableware ensembles allowed viewers to see the multiple pieces arranged on a stepped sideboard and performing in concert during banquets.

Currently, the surviving twenty-three original dishes cannot be displayed together since four are in private collections and the rest are in twelve different museums around the world. Studying the original set one dish at a time in isolation is problematic and not unlike staring at still shots from a motion picture rather than seeing the entire film. Thus, we cannot visualize or experience the *credenza* in the style of Isabella’s dining protocols.

## Project Background

This project brings together replicas of the twenty-three surviving dishes from Isabella d’Este’s *credenza*. Ceramicist Ester Mantovani at the recommendation of Mantuan scholar Mariarosa Palvarini spent two years training with master-painters in Urbania to fashion these wares. Isabella d’Este (1474-1539), daughter of the Duke of Ferrara and consort of the ruler of Mantua, was the most important female art patron and collector of her day. Her *credenza* is a key element of Renaissance visual culture and embodies rhetorical strategies of self-representation. The project directors have produced a film about Mantovani’s working methods. An online component in coordination with “IDEA” (The Isabella d’Este Archive: [isabelladeste.ucsc.edu](http://isabelladeste.ucsc.edu)) is in development.



## Lecture and Discussion

### “The Illustrated Credenza”

- Screening of film “The Illustrated Credenza” by Valerie Taylor and Mario Piavoli
- Maiolica production in the Italian Renaissance
- Isabella d’Este’s *maiolica istoriata* service
- Ester Mantovani’s working methods
- Renaissance banqueting: gastronomy, etiquette, and display

## Museum Study Day

### Maiolica: History and Design Seminar

- In-gallery discussion of maiolica: materials and production techniques
- Ester Mantovani’s working methods
- Isabella d’Este’s credenza and Italian Renaissance *maiolica istoriata*
- Credenza “building”: participants contribute ideas for setting up a maiolica credenza
- Envision how maiolica narratives communicated stories in various display formats

## Publications by Project Directors

Lisa Boutin Vitela, “Inscriptions and the Dynamic Reception of Renaissance Maiolica,” *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry* 30.2 (Jun., 2014): 168-176.

Lisa Boutin Vitela, “Dining in the Gonzaga Suburban Palaces: The Use and Reception of *Istoriato* Maiolica,” in *Le Banquet de la Renaissance: Images et Usages*, ed. Diane Bodart and Valérie Boudier (Pisa: Predella, 2013), 103-115.

Lisa Boutin, “Isabella d’Este and the Gender Neutrality of Renaissance Ceramics,” *Women’s Studies: An inter-disciplinary journal* 40.1 (Jan., 2011): 23-47.

Valerie Taylor, “From Sketchbook to Princely Table: Giulio Romano’s Silverware Designs,” in *Atti di Giulio Romano* (2014): forthcoming.

Valerie Taylor, “Silver and Gold: A Case Study of Material Culture in Renaissance Mantua,” *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 39 (UCLA, 2008): 155-198.

Valerie Taylor, “Art and the Table in Sixteenth-century Mantua: Feeding the Demand for Innovative Designs,” *The Material Renaissance*, ed. Michelle O’Malley and Evelyn Welch (Manchester University Press, 2007), 174-196.

Valerie Taylor, “Banquet Plate and Renaissance Culture: A Day in the Life,” *Renaissance Studies* 19.5 (Nov., 2005): 621-633.