Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings:
Delftware from the Collection of Benjamin F. Edwards III
Long Beach Museum of Art: Gail-Oxford Decorative Arts Gallery
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Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings: Delftware from the Collection of Benjamin F. Edwards III explores the development of tin-glazed earthenware in northern Europe over an approximately 150-year period from 1630 to 1780. Named for the diverse and highly inventive array of subjects used to decorate this 17th- and 18th-century ceramic ware, *Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings* features a wide variety of decorative and functional forms from plates and bottles to posset pots, salt cellars, spittoons designed for ladies, tea pots, and vases for flowers. The exhibition includes over sixty examples of English and Dutch delftware on loan to the Long Beach Museum of Art from St. Louis collector Benjamin F. Edwards III. The Edwards Collection is considered to be among the largest and most comprehensive collections of delftware in this country.

The works included in *Tulips, Pomegranates, and Kings* were produced during a period of extraordinarily wide-ranging international exploration and discovery. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, ships sailing under the flags of Europe's two greatest maritime powers — England and the Netherlands — circled the globe bringing spices and teas, as well as furniture and ceramics, back from Asia to a European market hungry for unusual luxury wares.

Following in the footsteps of Portuguese navigators, the Dutch East India Company began trading with China in the first quarter of the 17th century. Goods imported to Europe through trade with the East — tea, spices, lacquer, porcelain, and other materials — became enormously popular as demand for these rare and unusual luxury items fast outpaced availability.

To meet the needs of the European market, the Dutch began to produce tin-glazed earthenware modeled on the forms and decorative designs of Chinese porcelain. The production of Dutch delft increased significantly after approximately 1620 when civil war in China slowed commercial trade and greatly reduced the availability of Chinese-made goods in Europe.

During this period of maritime exploration and colonial expansion, England and the Netherlands experienced both a close political and cultural relationship and fierce economic rivalry. In 1674, upon the conclusion of three successive Anglo-Dutch wars, ties between England and the Netherlands deepened. The relationship between these two great mercantile powers was further strengthened in 1677, when Mary (1662 — 1694), daughter of the Catholic James II, and heir to the British throne, married her Protestant cousin William III of Orange (1650 — 1702), Stadthouder of the Netherlands. After living in the Netherlands for over fourteen years, the couple ascended to the British throne in 1689 in what was called the "Glorious Revolution."

Their reign solidified England as a Protestant nation and ushered in a period of great prosperity and close cooperation between their two countries.

Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings includes a broad range of Dutch as well as English earthenware forms from early tableware such as sack bottles and cups to decorative forms based on Chinese designs. While early examples of English delftware in the Edwards Collection feature portraits of British royal figures such as King William and Queen Mary (reign: 1689 — 1694; 1694 — 1702); Queen Anne (reign: 1702 — 1714); and King

George I (reign: 1714 — 1727), the earliest example of Dutch delft — a tile dating to approximately 1630 — is decorated with a tulip, reflecting this flower's enormous popularity in Holland during the period of the great “tulip mania” of the mid-17th century.

Thought by scholars to be Near Eastern in origin, tin-glazed earthenware was first introduced to Spain by the Moors in the late 14th century. During the Renaissance, it was imported from the island of Majorca to Italy where it became known as maiolica. Major industries developed in various regions of Italy where this type of earthenware was imitated and produced. Artisans in towns such as Faenza and Deruta developed styles unique to their regions. Throughout the 15th century, maiolica, used mainly for display, was in great demand by the upper classes in Italy.

Historians believe that in the 16th century artisans from Faenza traveled north to France, the Netherlands, and other parts of Europe to pursue their trade. The term faience — named for Faenza, the city of origin for many of these artisans — was adopted in France for this tin-glazed earthenware.

In the Netherlands, the city of Delft became one of the main centers for earthenware production in the 17th and early 18th centuries. From the 1650s onward, the port city of Delft became so well known for its potteries that the English labeled all tin-glazed earthenware “delftware,” even when produced in England. *Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings* juxtaposes examples of Dutch and English earthenware to underscore cross-influences as well as distinct approaches to design and decoration. To distinguish the two, the term “delftware” is used for the British-made ware while “Dutch delft” is used to describe the ware produced in the Netherlands.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Benjamin Edwards for his great generosity in allowing us to borrow so many important works from his extraordinary collection for *Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings*. Janice K. Broderick, Curator, A.G. Edwards & Sons, Inc., graciously provided assistance to the Museum's staff in organizing the details of the loan and Mark Allen of Mark and Marjorie Allen, Amherst, New Hampshire offered extremely valuable curatorial advice and assistance throughout the development of this project.

It seems particularly appropriate that delftware — this highly inventive ceramic ware, reflecting the first point of contact between Eastern and Western cultures — should be celebrated here in Long Beach. At the dawn of the 21st century, Long Beach is home both to the largest port in the nation, catering especially to trade between Asia and North America, and to one of the most ethnically diverse populations in this country, comprised of people of African, European, Hispanic, and Asian, as well as Native American ancestry.

The Long Beach Museum of Art is extremely pleased to serve as a showplace for work which celebrates the long history of cultural exchange between East and West, a history which began in the 17th century with tea, spices, lacquer and porcelain and which continues today in technology, medicine, and research as well as in the visual and decorative arts fields.

— Harold B. Nelson, Director