

Exhibition *Art nouveau - Art déco. Marseille au cœur des styles*

Marseille, Château Borély – Musée des Arts décoratifs, de la Faïence et de la Mode

8th MAY 2026 – 25th APRIL 2027

Room 22 – LIBRARY

Introductory text

Exoticism in Faïence : Aubagne and the 1930s

At the beginning of the 20th century, Marseille established itself as a major colonial metropolis : by 1920, nearly one third of French colonial trade passed through its port. Maritime links with the Mediterranean, as well as with India, China and Japan, encouraged the circulation of distant images and goods.

The colonial exhibitions organised in Marseille in 1906 and 1922, and later in Paris in 1931, greatly contributed to this fascination. The Exposition coloniale de Marseille de 1922, which welcomed three million visitors, left a lasting impression with its Indochina Palace inspired by Angkor Wat and its displays of art and craftsmanship.

This context stimulated the production of the ceramicists of Aubagne. From 1927 onwards, under the direction of Jacques Bourdillon, the Société des Faïenceries d'Aubagne—later the Faïencerie Nouvelle de Provence and subsequently Proceram—opened its workshops to regional artists and encouraged the creation of small series, particularly within the Section d'Art (1934–1937), led by Henry-Ann Guibert.

Among the notable collaborators was the sculptor Félix Guis, creator of advertising objects for the Thé Elephant teas and of bookends inspired by Hindu imagery, finished with either matt or glossy glazes. Simone Jouglas, better known for her santons, revealed her talent in a striking head of a young Asian woman beneath a “granulated honey” glaze. More enigmatic still, the artist J. Tomé signed vases decorated with luxuriant jungle scenes, a theme emblematic of the exoticism then in vogue.

Produced by slip-casting, these works demonstrate both the technical mastery and the quality of the glazes that established the European reputation of the Faïencerie Nouvelle de Provence / Proceram.