

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

THE MASQUERADE OF VENICE

Polychrome faience

1764-1812, Italy, Venice

H. 18,5 / H. 19 cm

MAH.R.1989.0844 and MAH.R.1989.0845

The practice of wearing masks, meaning, hiding the face by covering it with a mask, took roots, since the 11th century, in the Venice daily habits and could be seen in a wide diversity of religious, politic, and diplomatic ceremonies. Thus, it would not be weird that – in this social environment, where, one by one, every moment of the civic life and all the behaviors would be observed and analyzed by the community as a whole – wearing a mask, in a repeated and recurrent way, invaded the festivities. Therefore, it became a requisite almost mandatory in the Carnival, that highest manifestation of merriment that, for centuries, was extended for around six months, since October until the Ascension celebrations, with just one break, in Lent.

At that time, everybody would go out, from the Doge to the most miserable of the beggars and the *bauta* – a mask complemented with a black silk hood joined by a tricorn – guaranteeing the anonymity, became notorious. The whole Europe was attracted by this Carnival, to the profit of the town: houses and squares were invaded by *bautas*, tricorns, *zendales* (a sort of short shawls), black capes and, also, countless disguises, whose limits would just be the creativity. In the main squares, there were all kinds of tournaments, since bullfights, strength contests, acrobats, magicians, to charlatans and street entertainers. The noble would dance with the people and the monk with the courtesan, behind the *bauta* they hid not just their origin but also their gender, in that enormous social and joyous chaos. The *Sereníssima* tolerance regarding the excesses of licentiousness and permissivity, carried him the papal excommunication, twice, in 1509 and 1606.

The pair of masked figures now presented belong to the Angra do Heroísmo Museum Decorative and Ornamental Arts Management Unit and show the mark of the Cozzi porcelain factory, that operated in Venice between 1764 and 1812.

Founded by Geminiano Cozzi de Modena, associated with the German Friedrich Hewelcke, from Dresden (near Meissen), and already installed in Venice, produced porcelain since 1758. It was the last one of the three porcelain factories that existed in Venice in the 17th century but was the one that made of the Venetian porcelain the most famous of that epoch.