

## 5005

### Karl H. Müller, *Century Vase*

**Dominic Carter:** This vase embodies the ferocious pride many nineteenth-century Americans felt in the nation's progress. It was made in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, by the Union Porcelain Company, for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia—essentially an international arts and trade fair where American goods were shown with the best that Europe had to offer. You might want to walk around the piece as I describe it.

In the classical world of Greece and Rome, a ceremonial vase would be filled with wine to celebrate a great triumph. This one was meant for display only. The decorations here are packed from top to bottom with American imagery.

Below George Washington and the bison handles are national emblems and scenes from American history—the Boston Tea Party, William Penn making peace with the Indians, a frontiersman next to his cabin. In the small panels in the middle of the vase are scenes showing the innovations of American industry—a sewing machine, tractors, telegraph wires. The imagery continues at the top of the vase with the symbol of American freedom against an electric background of blue and gold.

It may or may not be ironic that the chief designer of the Centennial vase was Karl Müller—a German-born and French-trained artist. Maybe the fact that an immigrant was chosen to design it is grounds enough for patriotism.

If a porcelain company were making a similar vase today, we still might have George Washington front and center, but the scenes of progress would likely change, says curator Barry Harwood.

**Barry Harwood:** I think we might well have a jet airplane, or even a rocket ship, certainly an automobile, maybe even a computer.