FONDAZIONE PRADA PRESENTS THE EXHIBITION "THE PORCELAIN ROOM – CHINESE EXPORT PORCELAIN" IN MILAN FROM 30 JANUARY TO 28 SEPTEMBER 2020

Milan, 16 December 2019 – Fondazione Prada presents "The Porcelain Room – Chinese Export Porcelain", an exhibition curated by Jorge Welsh and Luísa Vinhais that explores the historical context, scope and impact of Chinese export porcelain, in Milan from 30 January to 28 September 2020. The press preview will take place on 29 January.

"The Porcelain Room" brings together examples of porcelains made from the 16th to the 19th centuries for different markets, religions, and social groups. The project illustrates how efficient the Chinese were in understanding the taste and the demand of each segment of the market, and tailoring their production accordingly.

Although Chinese ceramics were already well-known outside China as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and had reached Europe by the early 14th century, it was only after the opening of the sea routes to the East by the Portuguese in 1513 that the export of Chinese porcelain took its monumental pace, reaching every corner of the world. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) the export market became increasingly important, initially with the appealing celadon and underglaze blue porcelains. Once Europeans started trading and commissioning porcelains to bring back to the West, they quickly became the first truly global commodities.

"The Porcelain Room", on view on the 4th floor of Torre, gathers more than 1,700 individual Chinese export porcelains. The exhibition is part of a wide range of research that the foundation has undertaken, extending its activities to a plurality of expressive languages that cross the boundaries of contemporary art. Without creating hierarchies and distinctions between visual arts, craftsmanship, design and mass production, the exhibition emphasizes the creative value of the Chinese export porcelain by revealing its refined workmanship to a wider audience and not only to experts. The choice to set up "The Porcelain Room" in one of the exhibition spaces of Torre, which houses a selection of works from Collezione Prada, triggers a dialogue between contemporary and ancient art, a confrontation between collections of objects and installations from different cultural universes.

Divided in three sections, the display devised by Tom Postma Design is conceived as a room within-a-room, a brown velvet covered structure, integrating several vitrines and an intimate space decorated in gold. The largest number of early 16th to mid 17th century Ming dynasty porcelains with European iconography ever shown together constitutes the beginning and the core of the exhibition. "First orders" is a term usually attributed to the very first commissions of Chinese porcelains by the Portuguese after their arrival in China. In the early 16th century they dominated the porcelain trade between China and Europe, being the first to order porcelain decorated with western iconography. Early Western orders are extremely rare, with only around 150 having survived to the present day. Over 45 examples have been

selected for this exhibition, on loan from the most relevant public and private collections from all over the world, representing the entire array of "First orders", in terms of typology, iconography, and period of manufacture. This first section also includes a small group of rare examples made for the Islamic market, all showing Persian/Arabic inscriptions and one example of a Safavid bowl copying its Chinese original.

The second part features a wide selection of daily use objects interpreted as natural and surprising forms representing animals, fruits and vegetables, in order to explore the impact and exoticism of Chinese table wares made for Western markets. These were created around the 1760's for extraordinary table sets in order to amuse guests dining in wealthy households. The sources for these shapes were mostly Western ceramic examples that were produced across Europe in factories, such as the Höchst and Meissen factories in Germany, the Real Fábrica do Rato in Lisbon, among others.

The third focus pays homage to the tradition of porcelain rooms, the magnificent installations created in European palaces and aristocratic houses in the 17th and 18th centuries and incorporating Chinese porcelain with mirrors, lacquer panels and gilded carved wood. Extraordinary rooms were created all across Europe, including Portugal, Spain, The Netherlands, England, France, Germany and Denmark. Some of the most iconic cases still survive such as the ceiling of the Santos Palace in Lisbon, realized between 1667 and 1687 and the porcelain room at the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin, built between 1695 and 1705. All these rooms and architectural features have in common the use of Chinese porcelain, not for its original purpose, but instead transported to a different dimension. Each piece contributes to create a special, colourful, exotic, hybrid and unforgettable ambience, where the visitors are transported to distant cultures and lands.

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