

Encaustic ware (Art of Etruria)



After going into partnership with Thomas Bentley, Wedgwood expanded the company and established a new workshop known as Etruria in 1766; it officially opened in June 1769. The name Etruria was in honor of the ancient state in Italy whose Greek Roman arts were coming back into fashion and were a source of inspiration for Wedgwood and his contemporaries. Wedgwood commemorated the opening of the workshop with a series of six vases inscribed *Artes Etruræ Renascuntur* (the arts of Etruria are reborn).

Prior to the opening of this workshop, in 1766-67, Wedgwood was introduced to the four-volume publication of Sir William Hamilton, *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiques*. However, it was not until 1769, after seen the actual Etruscan vases, that an idea sparked in Wedgwood to 'imitate' Greek Encaustic pottery by means of his own invention of paints. Despite eighteenth century writer Count de Caylu's definition of Encaustic as pigmented wax painting, and the Greek process of Encaustic, Wedgwood could redefine the term with the acclamation his practice received.

The Greek method of Encaustic used red-ware clay with the figures depicted in the actual body, surrounded by a slip coating, which would fuse at a lower temperature. The clay would then go through a three-step firing process. In the first firing both the unglazed figures and the glazed body would turn red, and both would turn black in the second. In the third firing, the unglazed figures would turn back to red, and the glazed body would stay black.

Wedgwood and Bentley, who were already working on black basalt wares, used the black body and a matte ceramic paint, of Wedgwood's own invention. The process, which he coined as *Encaustic painting*, became his first and only patent in 1769. Although not truly Greek in production, Wedgwood used this term to describe his paints that so successfully mimicked the matte surface of *Encaustic* pottery; a texture of paint that had not been known to potters who had been using glossy enamel until then.