

# Australian Enamel Newsletter

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## Enameller Profile: Barbara Ryman

Barbara Ryman was born in Sydney in 1956 and studied at Alexander Mackie CAE School of Art where she received an art diploma. Further studies at Randwick Technical College culminated in her Jewellery Design Certificate.

Barbara Ryman's work has been regularly exhibited at a variety of shows since her first student exhibitions at the Holdsworth Gallery and she has taught enamelling in various classes and workshops at Randwick CAE, City Art Institute and Sydney College of the Arts. The last two major shows have been "Four Enamellists" at the Contemporary Jewellery Gallery, Sydney in 1986 with Wendy Hall, Marilyn Bailey and Carolyn Delzoppo and "New Enamel Work - Wendy Hall and Barbara Ryman" at the same venue in 1989.

These two shows displayed a development of ocean and water themes that have been a continuing source of inspiration.

"Surface treatment is an important aspect of my work. Hand polishing or etching produces the soft texture and colours of water-worn objects.

My design uses the wonderful array of patterns and shapes found in rock pools. As well as the worn surfaces, I like the way the broken shells reveal their internal pattern and skeletal structure. In my last exhibition I incorporated fragments of shells in with the enamel.

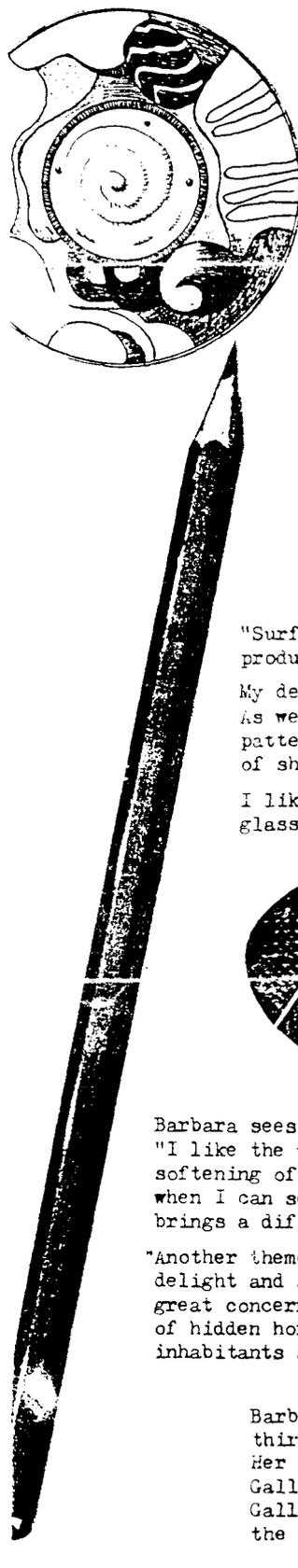
I like to mimic objects with the enamel. Often the viewer is not sure what is glass and what is shell. This tickles my creative sense of humour."

Barbara's interest in the ocean has been fueled by two Voyages, one to South West Tasmania, and a leg of an Australian circumnavigation from Fremantle to Adelaide. These journeys were on a schooner owned by the Oceanic Research Foundation, a private organisation which takes scientists to inaccessible places for research and study. This has provided excitement, inspiration and information.

Barbara sees other levels of expression and understanding in her work, "I like the way nature produces beauty with its process of decay. The softening of hard things. I sometimes relate this to the human aspect when I can see the beauty in the changes age makes in a face. Age brings a different sort of beauty and perhaps some wisdom."

"Another theme which I would like to develop more, along with my delight and appreciation of the sea and all that's in it, is my great concern for how poorly we use it. It is so often an area of hidden horror and destruction, the rights of the ocean's inhabitants are often ignored."

Barbara is currently teaching enamelling during the third semester at Randwick CAE. Her work is available in Melbourne at Makers Mark Gallery and in Sydney at the Contemporary Jewellery Gallery. She will be exhibiting in the Festival of the Pearl in Broome, WA, opening 11 August 1990.



# Enamelling in New Zealand

Some weeks ago, Carolyn Delzoppo asked me to write about the enamelling scene in New Zealand for "Australian Enamel Newsletter". I glibly agreed and am now faced (on this rather terrible winter day of rain laced with a biting Southerly) to come up with some copy. I regret to say that the birth of this said copy is not as easy as I thought it was going to be, nor can I cite writer's block as an inhibiting factor. It's just that there is actually very little enamelling done in New Zealand, both on a professional and amateur hobby level.

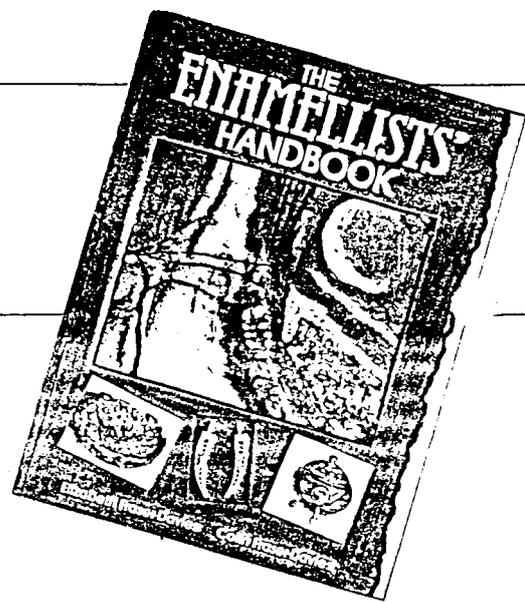
Historically, I understand one of the first artist enamellists in New Zealand was a woman called Dora Gilbert who lived in Nelson in the early 1930's. At that time she was producing small enamel miniature portraits and decorating various items of metal craftwork with enamel pieces in the art nouveau style of the day. She used Schauer cake enamels which she ground herself and stored in a marvellous collection of glass make-up jars and Vegemite pots. Her son Gilbert kept all her enamel powders and kindly gave them to me about three years ago. I have tested some of them and they are still beautiful which says much for their keeping qualities. Her "kiln" was a small clay-bodied vessel which was presumably heated in a charcoal brazier, in much the same way as the medieval craftworkers made their enamels hundreds of years earlier. Also on a historical theme, I noticed, on a recent visit to the Auckland Museum of Transport and Technology, an interesting display of an old badge-makers shop, complete with fly press and die-blocks. Jars of large enamel frit and some modern 'no-smoking' badge motifs made up into bracelets indicated that the display becomes a working one on occasion.

When I first started enamelling here in 1974 the only other artist enameller of any merit was Flora Kelton. Flora is still working hard although she has reduced the scale of her pieces and finds her ambition has somewhat diminished with advancing years coupled with her husband's retirement and the advent of numerous grandchildren. But she is enjoying the unpressurised pleasure of just making what she feels like.

A couple of years ago a workshop run by Helen Aitken-Kühnen in Auckland sparked interest and encouraged established jewellers to try their hand at enamelling, but still very little enamel work is seen in the shops or exhibitions. In Auckland, Robyn Tunstall is finding she has a small steady market for her beautiful enamel buckles. She purchases her enamels directly from Thompsons in America and has no problems with supplies. But the stock market crash and the problems established fine craft outlets like Pamela Elliot's Compendium Gallery, are having with commercial rent increases (125% in the last quarter) together with landtax on commercial premises is not helping a difficult market situation.

Gillian Palmer, who has recently come to New Zealand from Australia, is no longer producing her exquisite bird panels but is concentrating on the commercial production of enamelled earrings. She is finding that she has health problems, possibly associated with enamelling and is trying to keep her firing days down to two or three a week.

by  
Elizabeth  
Fraser-Davies



I myself am doing very little actual enamelling these days as I have become more and more involved with the unrelated field of novel writing. This seems to be quite as unfinancially rewarding as enamelling! My enamelling book "The Enamellists' Handbook" in which many of you figured has been published but not very well distributed by Longman Paul. I understand that Longman Paul will direct sell it to anyone interested (postal address, Private Bag, Takapuna Auckland). In between bouts on my word processor, I teach enamelling on block courses for the local polytechnic and the odd workshop for others in various venues. But Governmental cuts in educational budgets are not making it easy for these institutions to expand into the less common craft areas. Whitireia Polytechnic (where I teach) and Southland Polytechnic are the only institutions with enamelling kilns.

I make my studio available for craft and design students on their work experience units. Gratifyingly, there is some excellent enamel work being done by some of these students and hopefully we should see more of their work in future. But it is interesting that most of the enamelling work done in New Zealand these days seems to be in the small personal adornment area. I imagine that there are good economic reasons for this being so.

Editor's note:

The Enamellists' Handbook is one of the best texts for student enamellers that I have come across. It contains a wealth of information that will also be of value to experienced enamellers. The sparkle and wit of the author's personality is evident in the text which renders the whole book quite user-friendly. Enamellers in New Zealand, like Australia, are sometimes isolated and without access to supplies of specialist tools and equipment - the book suggests ways to make or adapt equipment. Heavy users of enamel will be interested in the simple apparatus for washing larger quantities of enamel. All the standard enamel techniques are covered in detail: champleve, cloisonne (the author uses round cloisonne wire), plique-a-jour, grisaille and limoges, and basse taille. An extra chapter is devoted to experimental techniques. Safety is stressed throughout. The book is well illustrated with b&w photos throughout and there is a six page colour section of the work of NZ and Australian enamellers.

This book fills a great need for a comprehensive but inexpensive text for students of enamelling and is a must for all college libraries.

The Enamellists Handbook by Elizabeth Fraser-Davies and Colin Fraser-Davies is published by Pitman, a division of Pitman Paul Ltd of New Zealand. It can be ordered through any bookshop. The price is \$22.95.

# Limoge Report

The "Biennale Internationale de Limoges" — the art of enamel — is the most prestigious exhibition of contemporary enamels in the world. Created in 1971, it allows enamellers from all over the world to make contacts, and, every two years, to review and compare their personal artistic evolutions. For the artists who expose their work, this exhibition is a great point of reference. For its 10th anniversary, the Biennale de Limoges has decided to present to the public a selection of 60 artists of diverse talents. Each one, in his turn, will sponsor a newcomers artist.

The Biennale de Limoges is a unique exhibition in Europe, in a town which has been the capital of the "Arts of Fire" for 1000 years.

The exhibition in Chapelle du Lycee was quite spectacular in its setting. The old chapel had been gutted and pictures, large panels and sculpture were spotlighted on all walls and in the alcoves. Smaller items were displayed on either side of a zig-zag ramp which was built of pipe scaffolding, a slow slope from front door to back wall, then the next level returning the whole length to the front again and on and up almost to the roof. Display was on a two foot high black and white shelf, very well lit in front of the dark ceiling.

There was tremendous variation in the enamel displayed - a few of which appealed to me as follows:

Christian Christel - who also has a gallery/shop in Limoge, showed blended opaques on simple heavy copper sculptures stoned to a satin dull finish.

Ray Rooke from Canada exhibited exquisite free form platters with fine intricate cloisonne and champleve detail with pierced areas like lace or Islamic windows.

The basic metalwork constructions from the Soviet Union were very skilful, the enamel especially so. From Spain, Francesca Vilasis-Capalleja brought compositions of grisaille and repousse portraits included with Byzantine jewels, collage of heavy lace, wood, old drawings and other items. Real show stoppers.

Andreu Vilasis, in five large pictures, added foils to grisaille and repousse in his heads of women. Enamel frames continued the flowing lines of the pictures.

Irving and I joined Hiltrud Blaich and other German enamellers for the banquet at a French chateaux - a huge buffet was loaded with wonderful French food plus cheeses, fruit and wine. I was told 800 people had been catered for and the laughter and chatter in many languages sounded like that number.

The following morning dawned wet and dull after three sunny days. We joined three large buses for a long drive through the green countryside to an island in the middle of a lake where an art centre is being built. Unfortunately it was much too wet to walk through the forests and admire the stone and wood sculpture already installed.

We were cheered and warmed by a fine five course lunch in a large old hotel. Jenny Gore and Jane Hogan joined us. Then the sun came out and we were able to explore the quaint old 13th century Tapestry Town with its many studios and a comprehensive museum.

Other exhibitions in Limoge, particularly that of American master enameller William Harper, with his beautiful rich colours on gold, filled our spare time.

I heard many people discussing the Palanga (Lithuania) Symposium and showing photographs, and felt the sense of friendship engendered there and at other gatherings united the many visitors to Limoge. I made new friends from England, Canada and Estonia. Lots of addresses were exchanged and I'm sure some will turn up in Sydney eventually.

Footnotes for future travellers:

Guldenkien Museum in Lisbon has a good collection of Lalique enamels. Art Deco gold and enamels including Lalique are now on display at Rijks Museum in Amsterdam.

Heather Calnan

Through contact with enamelling with my wife Heather, and having observed the craft in North America, India and the East and Europe, in my view enamelling in Australia has developed a style slightly different from that in Europe, possibly more akin to the American style.

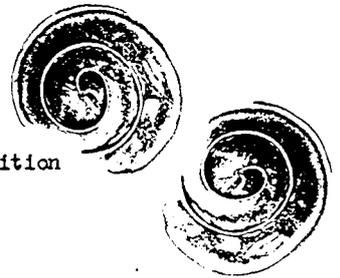
There are many European centres which have contributed to the European style, with Limoge being in the forefront. The link with the porcelain industry is very strong, and enamelling also has strong affiliation with the jewellery trade. These influences have tended to produce a European style of enamelling closely allied to precious items of gold and silver. The work tends to be smaller with many miniature works.

Enamelling in Australia has also been linked with the jewellery trade but in recent times has developed a broader application with larger decorative pieces such as large sculptural forms, panels and tableware which achieve the quality and beauty inherent in the medium of enamel.

Irving Calnan

## Exhibition

Jewellers and Metalsmiths Exhibition  
Miskin Gallery, Toowong, Qld.  
14th July - 18th August



The exhibition includes the work of enamellist Heron Fiedler. The work is the beginning of a range of production pieces, though some are strictly one-off.

Heron says "I have used cloisonne, basse-taille and a combination of both. The colours and theme are tropical marine. A stylized fish brooch is coloured orange, strong blue through to green and red. Oval discs are reminiscent of sea grasses, bubbles and the shades of light as the sun penetrates the ocean depths. Shell forms also carry the theme.

The majority of the pieces are simple in execution, but this has more to do with current economic trends than a lack of skill."

The exhibition has been successful, with a good public response to the work. All pieces remain on display until the 18th August.

