

Australian Enamel Newsletter

Issue 13

April 1992

Greg & Nancy Costa



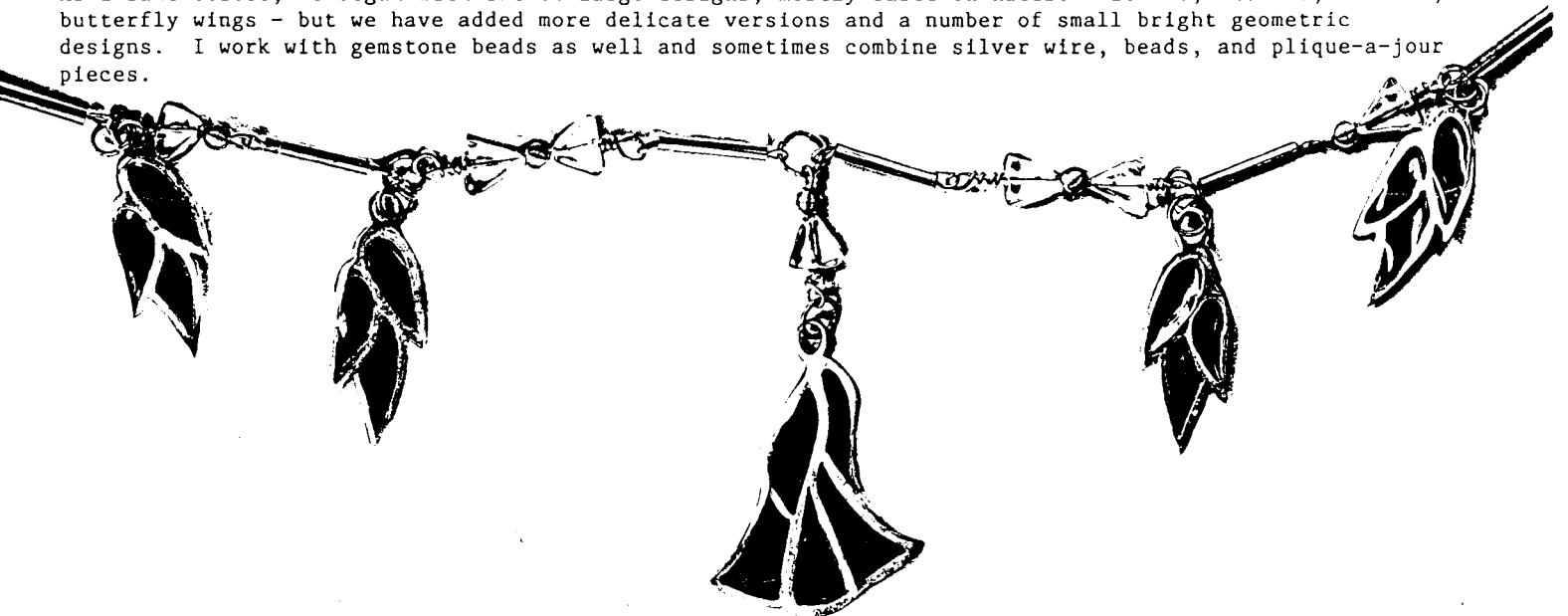
Greg and I make silver and plique-a-jour jewellery. We learned the technique of plique-a-jour while taking lessons in jewellery making from Bob King at the Jam Factory, Adelaide, after studying part-time at Underdale CAE for two Years. We came to jewellery making late in life, after years of interest in antique silver and in the silver work of the American Indians, especially the Navajos. We purchased some pieces of silver and turquoise when we lived in Nevada, but didn't begin to study jewellery making until the 1980's, some years after we came to Australia and settled in Adelaide.

Once we were introduced to plique-a-jour by Bob, we became fascinated by the process. We began making some fairly large pieces, not always successfully, and experimenting with apertures of various sizes and shapes. We began selling pieces to friends and eventually to galleries, adding a line of plain silver pieces, mostly native animals. We do a line of Mayan designs also.

Plique-a-jour is our greatest enthusiasm. It is addictive! Generally I design the pieces, Greg saws out the shapes, I pack and re-pack, he toasts them on the bronze blocks, and we share the hack work - diamond filing, stoning and papering - before he pops them into the kiln. I do the final polishing and the findings, and package them. We both mentally cross our fingers and hold our breath during the many steps.

We have begun to switch from lead-bearing to lead-free enamels. It's all a bit trial and error. Each colour seems to have its own properties. The lead-free colours are superbly translucent but tend to stick to the block, so we have been quenching the block after a brief initial cooling and find that helpful. The lead-frees also tend to pick up areas of discolouration from the block side of the piece; these can be filed or ground out - more effort!

As I said before, we began with rather large designs, mostly based on nature - leaves, flowers, the sun, butterfly wings - but we have added more delicate versions and a number of small bright geometric designs. I work with gemstone beads as well and sometimes combine silver wire, beads, and plique-a-jour pieces.



We're both fascinated by the colours of the enamels. We've done some very successful blending of several colours within an aperture. Once we got some opaque colours by mistake and were pleased with how they looked as well, so we bought a few more to experiment with. The whole process keeps calling us and we find it frustrating not to have more time. We are both full time school teachers (English, Special Ed) so most of our jewellery work is done evenings and weekends.

Not every piece works, of course, but we find it satisfying to admire the ones that do, and even more

News —

AEN was inundated with three entries in its tips competition. Many thanks to Wendy Hall, Gillian Palmer and Nick White for sharing work discoveries with readers. The winner was drawn from three bits of paper by a nonplussed but accommodating plumber John who just happened to be there at the right moment fixing a leaking roof.

Tra-la! Congratulations and a copy of 'Pearls and Gems' goes to Gillian Palmer of New Zealand. Those and other tips gleaned from Guild Newsletters from the US appear in this issue. More tips are welcome at any time and will be printed when a page-full have been collected.

The new year is well and truly underway now, and most people are very busy at and away from the kiln. Keep that enamel coming.

Regards,

Carolyn Delzoppo Editor.

Thank you

Thank you to the following people for their help in compiling this issue:

Nancy and Greg Costa, Enamellers Association, Karalee Norris, Sean at Mullumbimby Frameworks, Gillian Palmer and Nick White, Mary Chaduck, Audrey Komrad, Mary Raymond, Hiltrud Blaich

The deadline for material for the next issue, No 14 June 1992, is 22 May. Submissions are very welcome. Send to the Editor, AEN, PO Box 418, Mullumbimby 2482, or fax to Carolyn Delzoppo, C/- Forbes Solicitors, 066 84 1422.

Things are looking very positive for a National Exhibition of Enamels, again organised by the Enamellers Association, to be held in Sydney in the first two weeks of January 1993. Further details as they are finalised.

The Joann Tanzer Screen Printing Workshop has been cancelled as Joann will no longer be coming to Australia. There is a possibility that the Harold Balazc Workshop will be held in October 1992. Enquiries to Heidi Wellings, Secretary Enamellers Association.

The Enamellers Association have passed on to AEN greetings received from Poland. The card reads 'My best wishes to Enamellers Association, in friendship, Maria Proferansoug.' Maria can be contacted at ul Suleistaws 23P/27, — Gelansr-oliws, KO-354, Polska, for anyone wishing to correspond.

Details of the First Lithuanian International Contemporary Enamel Exhibition to be held from 10 - 25 April, have arrived too late for AEN deadline. Work will need to be in Klaipeda, Lithuania no later than April 8.

German enameller Hiltrud Blaich is planning to be in Australia in March/April 1993, and will be giving a workshop in Perth. Hiltrud is no stranger to Australian enamellers, having many friends here from a previous visit. Hiltrud has also been a welcoming stopover point for Australian enamellers visiting Germany. She says that there is always Bed and Breakfast there for enamellers from Australia. AEN will print details of Hiltrud's workshops as they are finalised, closer to the time.



Enamel bowl by Hiltrud Blaich.



Exhibitions

Prouds Exhibition Report

Alice Craft Acquisition 16 - 24 May 1992

Entries must be the original work of the crafts person and not been previously exhibited. Helmut Lueckenhausen will be the judge, and \$4,500.00 is available for acquisition purchases. An entry fee of \$10.00 per exhibit must accompany entry forms. The entry form and fees must arrive no later than 22nd April. All entries must be for sale and prices should include 33% commission. Work must be delivered by 1st May. Entry forms are available from Craft Council in your state or Craft Council of the Northern Territory, PO Box 85, Alice Springs, NT 0871. Telephone 089 524417.

AEN has received details of Opening Days and Exhibitions of the International Biennale of Limoges which will take place from July 4 - September 6 1992.

Opening Days and functions are from Sat 4th until Thurs 9th July.

Send stamped self addressed envelope if copies of information is wanted by anyone travelling in Europe at that time.

Around the Magazines

Glass on Metal, Vol 11 No1, February 1992 contains step-by-step notes on Miniature Portrait Painting by Russian enameller Galina Selezneva, also Artist Interview of Queensland enameller Beat Urfer.

Supplies

From Gillian Palmer in New Zealand - Warburtons
PO Box 1727, Auckland.
Suite 701, Four Seasons Plaza,
22 Emily Place, Auckland.
Telephone 09 735 377

Tools, equipment for jewellery making, findings. Very thick, fully illustrated catalogue available, cost \$NZ10.00.

The Tenth Annual Christmas Exhibition of the Enamellers Association was once again held at Prouds Art Gallery from the 5th to the 24th Dec 91.

Attendance on opening night was disappointing when compared with the record numbers of the year before. Fortunately this was not to be an indication of the total sales for the exhibition. This year sixteen members participated achieving sales of only \$500 less than the figure in 1990 which was I think an excellent result in a deeply depressed economy.

The standard of the work on display continues to show improvement every year and it was good to see some of our members trying something different. Particularly noteworthy was Norma Alce's 'Mountain Landscape' with strong influences from Japan, and Millie Baskerville's sculptures which showed great creativity. There was an impressive variety of jewellery which once again proved to be very popular.

Unfortunately, there were also some negative aspects to this years exhibition. After being told that we would have the same areas as last year, we were informed the day before setting up, that we would not be given wall space. The information came only when Heather Calnan arrived with her wall hangings and then had to take them home again. I also had large wall pieces which had to be left at home. The smaller wall pieces that were displayed on plate stands really did not show to advantage.

The other major problems were security and staff procedures. Allan Heywood suffered the worst with the theft of his \$350 Mimosa Plate and Shirley Williams felt the sting with the loss of two strings of beads with a retail value of almost \$100. Helen Parker also lost pieces totalling \$100.

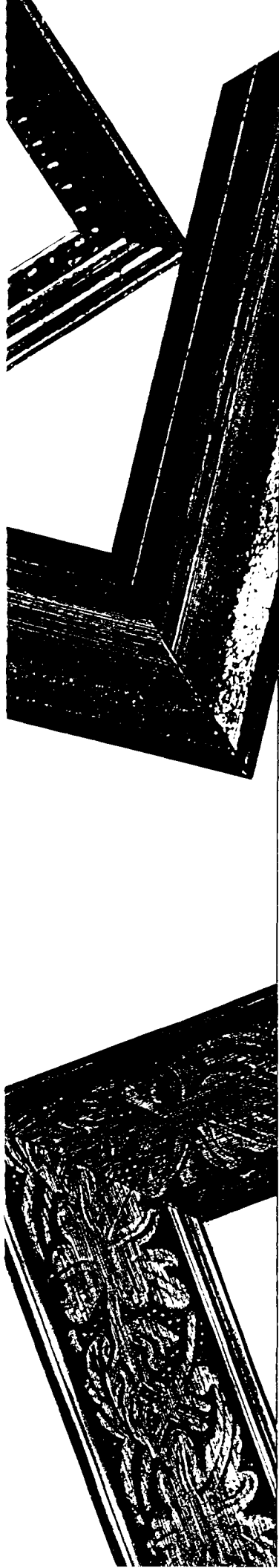
I feel that while we were not on duty there were times when surveillance was non-existent and I think this is when Allan's plate vanished. However, the shoplifters were very quick and Shirley's beads went from right under my nose.

We need to seriously consider the associated problems at future exhibitions.

Mary Raymond



See page 7



Framing

Framing a finished enamel has often proved to be a dilemma for many enamellists, even for those of us who have been enamelling for years. As the owner of a custom frame shop, I have the unique advantage of being able to experiment with framing without investing a lot of money; and I can always change my mind - and the frame - without much effort.

Naturally, expense is understandably a concern for most artists, and to save costs, most artists resort to their own devices. This is great if you know what you are doing but a tragedy if you don't. Furthermore, even most professional framers haven't the foggiest notion of how to deal with an enamel; they may never have ever seen one.

Preferably, you as an enamelist put some foresight into how you are going to display your work. This is a given for most cloisonne artists who make wearable art, or for special projects that require hinging, etc. Even so, many of us get locked into one particular method of framing and forget the numerous options open to us.

What follows are some of those options. (These methods are geared toward wall pieces.)

One of my favourite methods for flat pieces is to put a frame larger than the piece around it, mounting the enamel on the glass with a background colour and a mat cut to show about an inch of the background colour. I actually 'frame' the mat(s), glass and all, then adhere the enamel to the glass. My favourite adhesive is silicone, which clings to the slick surface of the glass and provides a rubber cushion for the enamel. It will also fill any raised or warped areas. It is important not to overuse the silicone since a few small globs will suffice, and excess silicone 'gooshes' out the sides. If this happens, allow the silicone to cure before attempting to clean it up, then simply use a razor blade to cut through the rubber. The main disadvantage of using rubber is that it takes about 24 hours to cure properly, and one has to make sure the enamel doesn't slip when putting it into place. I usually mark the glass with a fine line felt-tipped pen where I want to place the enamel. Apply the silicone to the back of the enamel, press it firmly into place (it can be slid around if necessary), then weight it and leave it. Be sure to protect the piece from the weight.

Framing an enamel this way has several advantages. The enamel appears to float, and the proper use of colours can enhance the appearance. I have used up to five mats on one piece, staggering the distances, etc. It enlarges both the physical and visual appearance of the enamel, and is relatively easy to do. However, I do recommend having the mats cut professionally unless you have an extremely good cutter and know how to use it well. I have seen some sorry looking mats around what would otherwise have been a nice piece of art because the artist was too cheap to spend a few extra dollars. Mats are not that expensive, and as long as you know the outside dimensions and the size of the hole you want, any framer should be able to cut them for you. Keep in mind when measuring that you need to account for both sides - for instance, if your enamel is 9x12 and you want a 1" border, you will need an 11x14 frame. If you want more than just a coloured background, you will need a lot more space than that. Also keep in mind that the lip of the frame takes a quarter inch of space, a total half inch.

Other hints: try off-setting your enamel rather than centering it, cutting the mats to match. This works especially well for square pieces ... a 6x6 square with 3" on two right sides and 1½" on the opposite corner will result in an 11x11 frame, but you can play with your measurements and turn a square enamel into a rectangular format.

When discussing the framing of enamel, perhaps 'mounting' would be a better term, since often there is no frame involved.

I have always loved flanged steel plates for this reason, not framing them at all gives a clean contemporary look. But how to hang them? Again good old silicone comes to the rescue. Cut a 1x2 (or wider) piece of board to fit inside the back of the flanged plate with ½" or more space on either side.

Enamels

by Karalee Norris

Make sure the wood is nicely sanded, clean and free of splits. Remember that craftsmanship is just as important on the back as on the front. It helps to roughen the adhering surface of the wood. Apply a generous amount of silicone, allowing it to squish out the sides if necessary. Mount the wood about one-third down from the top, weight and let cure thoroughly. When dry, use screw eyes and wire across the back as though it were a wood frame. Please note: if the piece is very large (16x20 or more), this method may not work.

One of the problems I've encountered with steel flanges is that most have holes in the sides. To cover these, I've found that purchasing paper fasteners, painting them black (or corresponding colour) and inserting them through the holes gives a nice finished look. Add a touch of silicone on the inside to prevent them from jiggling.

Holes can, on the other hand, be an advantage when joining enamels together. I like to create large pieces using flanged plates that will fit in my kiln. To attach them, I simply run a threaded bolt through the holes, securing nuts on either side. Wire can be attached in a like manner, or the bolt itself can rest on large hooks.

Perhaps my favourite method of displaying enamels is the most involved, and that is the use of cut shapes settled in wood. My husband is quite proficient in routing, and after I have completed my sawn shapes he traces the pattern on a thick piece of wood at least 2" thick. He then routs out the area for my enamel to sit in. We are currently experimenting with the endless possibilities of various levels, using several pieces and overlapping. Usually I have one straight side which lines up with the edge of the wood for a portion of the length or width, so there is no border. Naturally this takes a good deal of foresight and planning, not to mention hours of sawing copper!

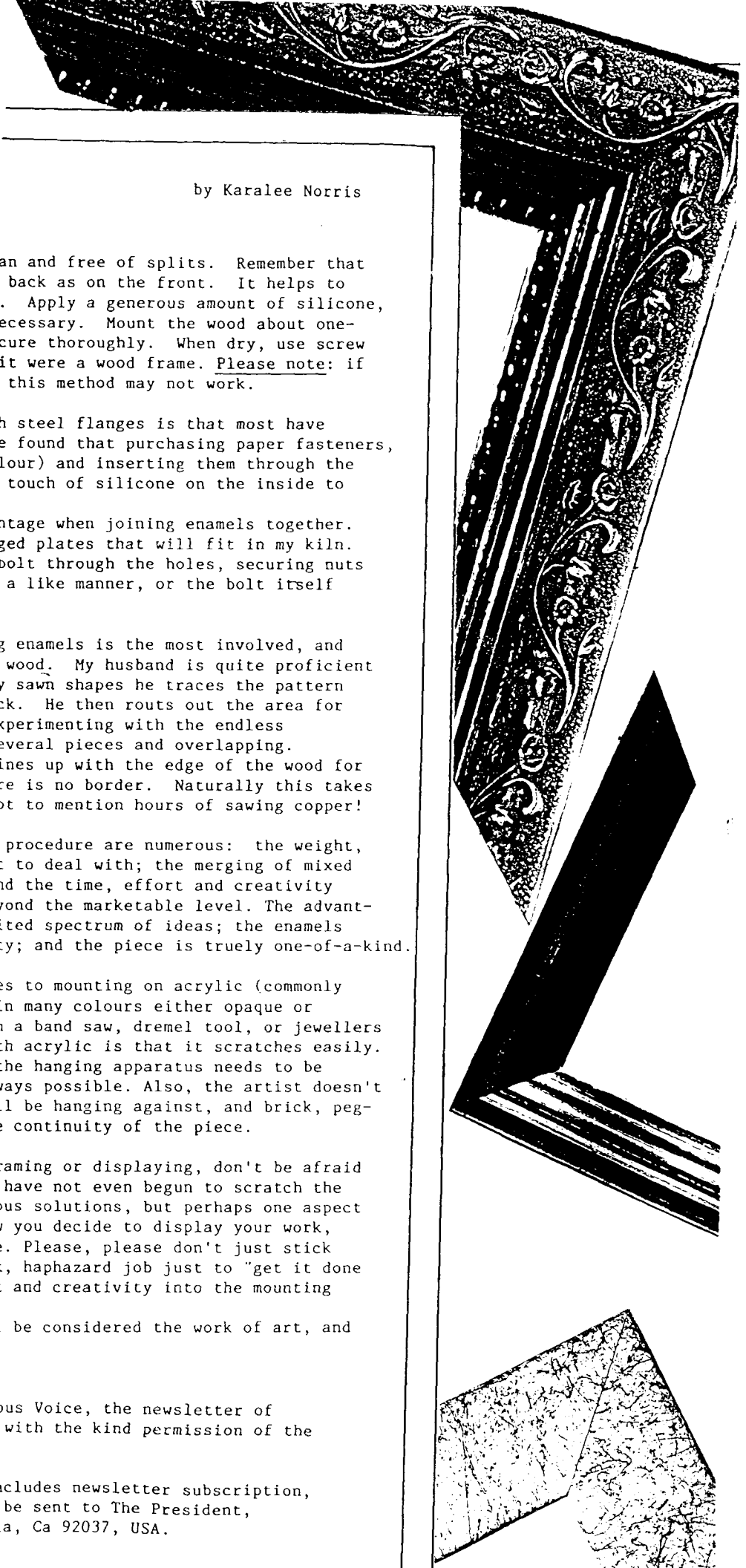
Obviously the main disadvantages of this procedure are numerous: the weight, both physical and visual can be difficult to deal with; the merging of mixed media must be conducive to the design; and the time, effort and creativity involved require pricing that may be beyond the marketable level. The advantages come from within: there is an unlimited spectrum of ideas; the enamels take on a sculptural 3-dimensional quality; and the piece is truly one-of-a-kind.

These of sawn shapes also lend themselves to mounting on acrylic (commonly called plexi-glass), which is available in many colours either opaque or transparent. Acrylic is easily sawn with a band saw, dremel tool, or jewellers saw and is light weight. The problem with acrylic is that it scratches easily. Also, when hanging transparent colours, the hanging apparatus needs to be hidden behind the enamel, which isn't always possible. Also, the artist doesn't always know what background the piece will be hanging against, and brick, peg-board or panelling, etc could destroy the continuity of the piece.

No matter what the method of mounting, framing or displaying, don't be afraid to experiment. The examples cited above have not even begun to scratch the surface of possibilities. Some are obvious solutions, but perhaps one aspect will give you an idea. Regardless of how you decide to display your work, craftsmanship is of the utmost importance. Please, please don't just stick some bought frame around it or do a quick, haphazard job just to "get it done and up on the wall". Put as much thought and creativity into the mounting of your piece as you did in creating it. The entire, finished product is what will be considered the work of art, and it has your name on it.

"Framing Enamel" first appeared in Vitreous Voice, the newsletter of Enamel Guild West, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the author Karalee Norris.

Membership of Enamel Guild West, which includes newsletter subscription, costs \$US 20.00 annually. Enquiries can be sent to The President, Paula Jones, 8635 Cliffridge Ave, La Jolla, Ca 92037, USA.



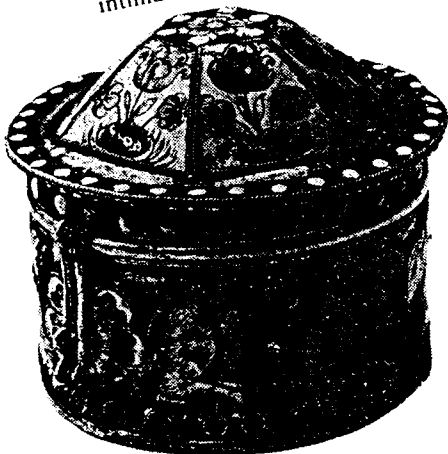
SECRET TREASURES OF RUSSIA

AS SYMBOLS of immortality, objects in gold and silver, enamel and precious stones have long provided a focus of world history. They capture and hold our imagination as treasure and loot, as a testimony to extraordinary human skill and creativity and the tangible evidence of an ancient cultural heritage.

Traditionally, such objects were made and used to glorify the monarchy, church or state, to commemorate momentous events and to represent the pride and wealth of nations. Decorative metalwork included personal ornaments made for the body, elaborate utensils for the table, sacred artifacts for the church and unique items used for interior display.

The saga of Russian history is of epic proportion. It links the volatile political events of Russia today with the rich culture of an ancient and tumultuous past. The exhibition *Secret Treasures of Russia: One Thousand Years of Gold and Silver*, which opens at the Art Gallery of NSW tomorrow, holds an impressive mirror to Russia's greatness.

This magnificent collection of 364 precious objects dating from the 10th to 20th century offers a rare opportunity to experience some superlative examples of Russian decorative arts in the intimate atmosphere of the old courts.



Secret Treasures of Russia.

Art Gallery of NSW until 31 May

Art Gallery of Queensland 17 June until mid August

National Gallery of Victoria 26 August until 25 October.

Enamel is glass. It offers the jeweller and metalsmith a resilient, often painterly surface treatment for metal with a wide palette of colour. Traditionally, enamel is manufactured as lumps of opaque or transparent coloured glass, ground to a fine powder, washed of impurities and applied as a wet paste to gold and silver (and other metals such as copper). The object is then dried and fired to high temperatures in a furnace to melt and adhere the glass to the metal.

Like filigree, enamel is an ancient technique and various applications of glass to metal have evolved. Cloisonné employs a filigree of wire-walled cells on the surface of gold or silver objects that can be filled with coloured enamel. Once fired, the wire traces linear patterns on the surface of the coloured glass. Russian cloisonné is distinctive in its use of fine twisted wires, bold colours and painted detail on opaque enamel.

Transparent enamel was used to great advantage in the 19th century when applied to the wire skeleton of open filigree objects in the *plique-a-jour* technique. The fragile beauty of such objects was infused with an ethereal glow as light passed unhindered through the coloured film of glass. Between the 12th and the 20th centuries, other enamel techniques were employed to enhance the decoration of all manner of articles.

These included champlevé enamelling into carved or stamped depressions in metal surfaces, miniature enamel paintings and the use of single colour transparent enamel over the geometry of machine-incised guilloché textures so characteristic of many Fabergé objects from about the turn of the 20th century.



Heather Calnan and Mary Raymond had work accepted into the accompanying 'Russian theme' exhibition of Australian crafts.

Excerpts from 'History on a Grandeur Scale' are reprinted here with the kind permission of the John Fairfax Group and the author Robyn Tudor.

The article appeared as part of a three page feature on Secret Treasures of Russia Exhibition in the



Tips

When mixing overglaze powders or pen black with water and fixative, air bubbles often appear in large quantities making the lines drawn with a pen unsatisfactory. To overcome this, mix the powder and medium and leave it stand for a few days before use - the bubbles disappear. Use an airtight container. - Gillian Palmer

If the edges of an enamel develop a bubbly or honeycombed effect, this can be due to pickling solution affecting the edges at an early stage. Although the enamel seemed to the naked eye unharmed by the pickle, it was definitely causing problems in later firings. - Nick White.

To sift perfect circles, squares, triangles and other shapes use plastic artists templates available in art supply shops. - Audrey Komrad, from Enamel Guild South Newsletter.

Clean brushes easily of oil of lavender using a commercial brush cleaner. It doesn't have an oily base as other solvents do. - Mary Weber, from Arizona Enamelist Guild Newsletter.

By tipping a piece hotter than 900C over on its face on a clean steel surface, a lustre or 'mirror' surface will occur from the oxygen reduced atmosphere. - Bill Helwig

Use of press plates can cause stress and cracking. If necessary, use only briefly. - Bill Helwig

When stoning back cloisonne, I use a thick piece of board to which perspex has been glued. The perspex gives an even, flat surface over which various grades of wet and dry papers can be spread. I set the whole shebang up under the tap over the laundry tub, tilted slightly so the water runs off. I then stone the enamel back upside down, starting with 320 wet and dry, and if hand finishing, down through the grades. This is much faster than carborundum stones for flat or slightly curved surfaces. The counter enamel surface may have to be roughened slightly to give your fingertips grip, wet flash-fired enamel is slippery. Obviously care must be taken when stoning back enamels with foils. With curved enamels, work around the rim first, then towards the middle to ensure an even finish, using a circular motion. You can even do two earrings at once! (The old two-handed method). - Wendy Hall.

Working with fine-line black and a drawing pen is much easier if the fine-line black is slightly heated by placing the (glass) bottle on top of the kiln, or by holding the loaded nib over a warm lamp for a couple of seconds. It will flow more easily, but be sure to stir well before using. - Sandra Bradshaw, from Northern California Guild.

To get a 'marbled' effect, sift on a layer of enamel and spray very well with kiln fire and water, or just water. Do not dry completely. When this base coat is semi-dry, drip on liquid enamel in a contrasting colour. The edges of the drops will 'feather'. Tap the edges of the piece with a tool and the effect will really be most interesting. - Audrey Komrad, from Enamel Guild South Newsletter

Some aids for working with colour:
- colour swatches from paint departments of hardware shops are free and available in a wide range of colours (though leaning towards pastels). Cut up, mix and match.
- the Pantone Colour Overlay Selector by Letraset as used by graphic designers is a great help in visualising colours. The pages are transparent plastic in an array of tints, tones, hues and colour saturations. Simply flip out a page of the swatchbook, lay it over your existing transparent enamel colour and get an idea of how another layer of the same or different colour would affect it, without actually enamelling it. - Mary Chaduck, from Arizona Enamelist Guild Newsletter.

Use folded over masking tape as a pickup tab to neatly remove stencils from work surface. - Bill Helwig



OC95 is a marvellous colour oxide containing gold trichloride. Depending on how you grind and/or dilute it with flux or white enamel, many colours can be achieved, including pinks, reds, purples and browns. Experiment!

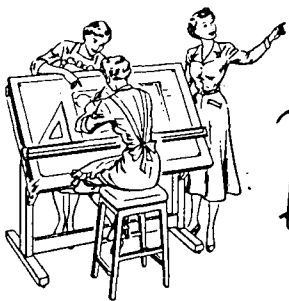
CLOISONNE plus

I've had a few enquiries regarding my article on Cloisonne in the previous issue, and mainly about the diamond files I use to level the surface of my enamels.

Diamond-coated needle files are available at most jewellers tool suppliers, though some types are not good value. Generally with diamond files you get what you pay for, and cheap ones don't last very long. It's better to pay more and have them for longer. They come in two grades, a coarse and a fine. I use coarse to remove most of the surplus enamel height and then a fine when wires are exposed. The files leave a rough surface on the cloisonne wires which needs to be smoothed with a fine carborundum stone before the final firing.

I have a jeweller friend who uses the diamond-coated bunion files (like nail files) available from chemist shops, but I have never used these and don't know how good they are. I get my files custom made, a little wider and longer than needle files. An engineering tool company makes the file and sends it off somewhere to be coated. They aren't cheap, my custom ones cost around \$80.00, but as I use them so much and they save so much time on production work, they're well worth it. The last file I had kept going for almost two years.

In my article I also mentioned that I use blue counter enamel because 'if it was good enough for the Chinese for hundreds of years then its good enough for me'. The current issue of Glass On Metal discounts this theory/observation saying that there is no scientific basis for such a claim. Pigments do not affect tenacity or elasticity of enamel. What is important in counter enamel is that the thermal expansion should be close to that of the enamel on the front side. Perhaps the success of the use of Sapphire 111 as a counter enamel is due to it having an expansion of 285, similar to other colours I was using. I wonder then why the Chinese did use blue so much. An aesthetic or symbolic choice?



Diary

- April 22 Deadline for entry form and fees, Alice Craft Acquisition Award. See this issue for details.
- May 1 Deadline for delivery of work, Alice Craft Acquisition Award.
- May 16 -24 Alice Craft Acquisition Award exhibition.
- June 19 Deadline for delivery of work, 'Neckworks Award Exhibition' and Graduate Metal V, JMGA Conference, Perth.
- July Entries due, 'National Craft Acquisition Award, Northern Territory craft Council'. Details in later issue AEN, as they become available.
- July Entries due, Seventh Annual International Exhibition of Miniature Art, Toronto, Canada. Details as they are available.
- August 14 - Sept 13 Neckworks Award Exhibition, Perth.
- August 15 - 16 Conference JMGA, 'Connections 92', Perth.
- August Deadline delivery of work, 'National Craft Acquisition Award', NT. See above.
- Sept 11 - 15 1992 Pacific Enamelling Symposium, Seattle, Washington. See Issue 12, and details of exhibition as they become available.

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