



## AH XIAN – CLOISONNE SCULPTURE WINS NATIONAL SCULPTURE PRIZE

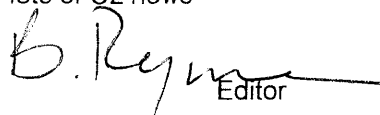
You may have first seen work by Ah Xian when he created a large group of around forty hand-painted porcelain busts. Supported by a visual arts grant from the Australia Council he spent nine months in Jing De Zhen, Jiangxi Province, a prominent area in China for ceramic production. In collaboration with local artisans the busts were cast, decorated with symbolic traditional patterns selected by the artist from porcelain pattern books and fired. The exhibition of this collection was titled *China China* and shown in the RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, the Brisbane City Art Gallery and Sydney's Powerhouse Museum.

Born in Beijing, Ah Xian first came to Australia in 1989 when he had a two-month residency in the Tasmanian School of Art. He returned with his brother in 1990 for a show at the Art Gallery of NSW. The massacre in Tiananmen Square and the restrictions on personal freedoms afterwards made the brothers decide to seek asylum in Australia. "Once I decide to leave China, the country of my birth, where I grew up and was educated and which I both deeply loved and hated at the same time, my soul began a journey to pursue and explore something called freedom"

Ah decided to submit work for the inaugural \$50,000 National Sculpture Prize at the National Gallery, Canberra. His creative journey led him to try something much larger and as an enameller, I would think, something mind-bendingly challenging. He went to work on a life-size copper female figure and decorated it with cloisonné. It was then fired by lowering the form into a pit kiln. It seems he again liaised with artisans in China, in the Hebei Province One can only imagine how painstaking the production was and how many things could go wrong. His first two attempts failed but he tenaciously dug in his heels and succeeded with the third attempt, managing to submit the work on the final day of the prize deadline.

The figure was titled **Human Human – Lotus, cloisonné figure one**. It is covered with designs of lotus leaves and flowers looking rather "like a splendid tattoo". Ah Xian says the figure drew heavily on Buddhism and "the lotus pattern is very much the focus; it's symbolizing peace and happiness".

The year moves on and everyone seems to be flat out as usual. Please let me know what you're doing so I can fill the newsletter with lots of Oz news

  
Editor

Ah Xian - Continued from front page

### Artists Statement

"Australia as a vast continent with such a peaceful and beautiful environment, has given me a most valuable thing I believe I would never be able to get elsewhere – a free and peaceful mind. The distance (both geographical and spiritual) between China and Australia and to the world has created for me a vast spiritual space to develop my own concepts, art languages and idea towards life. I believe my mood and state now is neither Australian nor Chinese but somewhere in a wide free and space.

I'd like to stress the point of a peaceful and meditation-like LIFE state. It is a philosophical commentary, rather than political. I extremely hate all kinds of political struggling, fighting, power gaining and the endless avariciousness and our leftover animal nature. We have evolved technologies on this planet, but once we doubt human nature, doubt ourselves on a spiritual level, a black hole appears. Have we actually become civilized?! My idealized figural works are about human beings, about our culture and civilization, about nature surrounding us, about the exquisite elegance and beauty we appreciate. I say 'I am not an enemy to any one, but I can't be a friend of everyone as well.' In other words, I'm not against anything but I can't agree with everything. It sounds like 'chan ji' but it's close to the truth! I believe when everybody fully understands it one day, then the world will fill with peace.


My works have been deliberately created to combine both art and craft, permanent and fragile, responsive yet closed, lustrous but cold, disturbing but peaceful, rational and emotional, old and new, traditional and contemporary. Craft is never a disadvantage in ART. It is very important how you see it and how you use it. I don't think that 'art', especially 'avant-garde' art has to be with tendencies of abstract, deconstructive, temporary, casual, violent, clamour, give vent, high-tech dependent, wasteful, massive and messy."

Ah Xian, September 2001

I think that many of us would have great sympathy with Ahs' views on the marriage of art and craft; that having skills of the hand is not a crime and beauty and beautiful objects and works can be the vehicle for true artistic expression and exploration.

Ah won the prize over 485 other entries.

by Barbara Ryman

 **The deadline for material** for the next issue is July 23rd, 2002. All articles, comments and news are welcome. Send to Barbara Ryman, 71 George St, Thirroul 2515 NSW.

Ph/Fax 02 4267 2939  
Email: bryman@ozemail.com.au

### THANK YOU

Wendy Hall, Lorraine le Plastrier, Catherine Large

### AROUND THE MAGAZINES

**craft arts** INTERNATIONAL, no. 54

- Multiple idioms in metal and glass; Johannes Khunen and Helen Aitken-Khunen – includes some enamel work
- Through the Window; jewellery by Carole-Anne Fooks
- National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition
- Standing up for Jewellery, glass and silver rings by Kathryn Wardill

ORNAMENT, Winter 2001

- Diane Field, Enchanted Works. Sculptural objects including enamel
- Tim McCreight; Multithreat Master

### NEWS

 **ADVANCED JEWELLERY – Rex Steele Merten**  
McGreggor Schools, Winter School, 8 – 13 July 2002

Rex is an acknowledged master jeweller who is delighted to share his wide experience in classical as well as contemporary jewellery making. The course is structured around each participant's level of skill and will include expert advice and tuition in such areas as joints and catches, multi-functional jewellery, setting gemstones, decorative engraving, and guidance on individual projects.

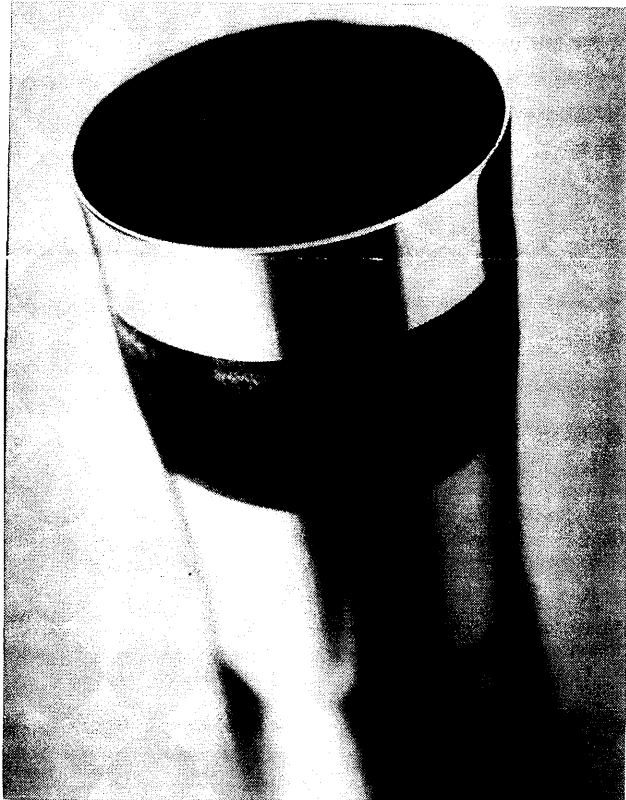
Ph 07 4631 2755, Fax 07 4631 1606,  
Email: [mccreggor@usq.edu.au](mailto:mccreggor@usq.edu.au)  
Web site: <http://www.usq.edu.au/mccreggor>

### LETTERS

 Dear Editor,

I read with interest in the last newsletter about enamelling on vessel forms and wondered if you

would be interested in my thoughts, and actions! Well, for what it's worth here they are. I enamel regularly on vessel forms. I begin with sheet sterling silver, between 1.4 and 1.6mm thick, and take it to the metal spinners. The spinners I use have an enormous range of moulds, and I can usually find something that matches the design I have. This saves time and money as you don't have the added expense of having a mould made. The reason I use quite thick metal is I don't counter-enamel-I hate it!



Once the spinning is complete, I will create a "cell" on the metal in which to enamel, or at times have the piece engraved. If I am doing a vessel like the one pictured, I begin by making 2 grooves with my flexi, with a burr, and then dig out enough metal to create walls, about 0.5mm in depth. I use gravers, files and the flexi to achieve this, and finally smooth the surface with Moore's discs. At this stage I also finish the interior of the vessel, usually with a "scratchy" finish achieved with 600 grit wet and dry paper. The next step is to gently heat it in the kiln, before putting it in the acid to create a good fine silver layer. I may repeat this a couple of times, depending on the type and colour of the enamel I will be using.

When I begin enamelling, the first coat of flux or a pale colour from my intended palette is sifted on with the aid of Klyr-Fire. I only ever fire to orange-peel with this first firing. Next is gold or silver foil, held on with water or spit, and luck. Once that is fired, I build up colour and texture using a combination of wet and dry applications of enamel. When firing straight-sided vessels I alternate between right-way up and upside down in the kiln so the enamel doesn't "slump". Once

the enamelling is finished-often 20-25 firings altogether - the enamel is stoned back and flash fired, I begin polishing using a felt buff, fine pumice and water, then finish by ripping through the fire-scale with tripoli and rouge.

Next step is off to the platers to have the interior gilded. The platers I use mask the enamel before immersion, and I have never had any problems. A last buff on collection and the vessel is complete.

Catherine Large

**PS.** Enamels Art Rite customers can order from me on Tel/Fax: 07 3371 8670, or e-mail me at [cathlarge@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cathlarge@ozemail.com.au). Thanks

☞ Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my delight with the newsletter. I appreciate the sharing of info as well as the conviction of members who obviously love their craft and the crafting of it.

Thank you to those contributors who share their experiences and skills. Some of this information is unique and helps me to extend my own skills as well as challenging me to explore different techniques. Thanks in appreciation.

Lorraine le Plastrier, Perth. W.A.

☞ Dear Editor,

I saw Human Human - Lotus by Ah Xian during the National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia on 2 March 2002. The Exhibition judges said "It is about a meeting place between something permanent and fragile, between art and craft, the traditional and the contemporary." Ah Xian's work was chosen for its "haunting, quiet, humble presence".

Although I wasn't moved by the piece, I was very impressed by the technical virtuosity needed to make it. Apparently Ah's first two attempts at the work were destroyed during firing. The piece is a life-size figure of a woman, cast in copper. The figure is covered from head to toe in cloisonné enamel, which has been gold plated after firing. Pink lotus flowers, representing happiness and peace, rise out of a pale green background dotted with clouds to cover the figure's torso and face. The enamel appears to be opaque and the piece has been polished to reveal the minor pits and imperfections of a fired enamel surface. I wondered about the process, particularly how the wires were attached in tricky places, eg between the figure's legs, and how they were then enamelled and polished. Although the face and body were beautifully finished, I was disappointed that the tips of the fingers were quite rough - a missed opportunity to convey expression through the piece's hands.

I was very happy to see an enamelled work winning such a major award in a contemporary exhibition. I have always liked the idea of using traditional techniques in a contemporary way, or using what's called a craft to create art (how controversial!).

Wendy Hall Former enamellist (sigh)

 Dear Editor,

Who said " you can't put a book down "? -----WHO REALLY CARES-----but surely all who read "Issue 71 Feb 2002" must have hung on every interesting word to the end of page 4. Congratulations to our Editor Barbara Ryman. Admiration and thanks to her for hours of research and correspondence to say nothing of setting up the contributions so carefully placed within the contents of social, educational, opportunities for brave exhibitors and Tips for beginners to the very experienced addict to enamelling.-----The enclosed portion of information is "set out on a platter" for all to see at a glance, Enamels and General Supplies, Safety equipment and URL's and e-mail addresses in U.S.A. west area'.

Another question-----"has anyone reserved a copy of THE Book"? sounds great to me!!!!!!!!!!!!.

Doreen J. Sinclair.

## SUPPLIES AND RESOURCES

- New Tools - by Angela Wojciechowski

Non-Metallic Pliers (the extra fingers you never know you had). Angela Gleason told me about these "fingers." After working with them in her mechanism class, and in Carol Holaday's chain making class, I am convinced that these nonmetallic pliers are a lifesaver. They are soft extensions of your fingers. They will access small places too big for your fingers. I was able to tightly squeeze the links on a Byzantine chain without leaving marks. Use your imagination on how to benefit from these handy tools.

There are four different kinds: chain nose, round nose, flat nose and stone setters. They are \$8.25 each. Available from Jim Wilson at I-V Product Inc., PO Box 16153, Seattle, WA 98116. (206) 463-9830.

### On-Line Resources

Two very important web sites have emerged during the past year which have brought substantive enameling information to English-speaking enameling communities. One site is actually from the Netherlands and is the site of the Society of Dutch Enamellers ([www.enamellers.nl/english](http://www.enamellers.nl/english)). The site's English section has recently added detailed and

informative articles about specific aspects of enameling as well as a complete glossary of terms. j

A new enameling book entitled The Art of Fine Enameling will be appearing this summer, but the web site for the book, designed by Karen C. Cohen, who is the book's editor, is already online at [http://kcenamels.com/enamel\\_book/](http://kcenamels.com/enamel_book/). Several NCEG members have projects in this book: Aileen Geddes, June Jasen, Diane Almeyda, Judy Stone, and Roxane Riva. The web site has a ton of information not found in the book

Reprinted with permission from the NCEG newsletter, March and April 2002

- NEW STYLE MILLEFIORRE BEADS

Available from Anna Margot Originals in Brisbane. Ph: 07 3367 3266

- New Source for Schauer Enamels

Good news from the Coburg, Germany newsletter. Schauer enamels can be purchased from Wilhelm Hiller, Emailhandlung, Werner-Siemens-Strasse #28, 75173 Pforzheim, Germany. Phone 07231-2 34 23, Fax 07231-2 28 4. They will carry Schauer enamels for many years to come as they have purchased several tons of about 220 different colors. Most are in chunk form so they won't deteriorate. When that runs out, they have the original formula to manufacture more.

- TIP

#### Dilute Klyr-fire

Several of us were talking about how most sprayers, even those with a fine mist, project larger drops of Klyr-fire and water that are undesirable. Steve Artz suggested using rubbing alcohol to dilute Klyre-fire instead of water. It eliminates the large drops when spraying!

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