



Tall ewer. Qing Dynasty, Kangxi period. Cloisonné enamel on copper alloy. George Walter Vincent Smith Collection, George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts, 63.23.84. Photographer: David Stansbury.

The Catalogue

The Bard Graduate Center and the Musée des Arts décoratifs, in cooperation with Yale University Press, have published a full-color catalogue that incorporates advances in scholarship since the publication of the last important work in the field in English more than twenty years ago. Several essays by prominent scholars and catalogue entries are accompanied by reproductions of the exhibition objects, related illustrations, maps, a glossary, and a bibliography. The essays include Terese Tse Bartholomew on “Hidden Meanings”, Claudia Brown on “The Influence of Painting”, Rose Kerr on “The Influences of Form and Decoration from Chinese Antiquity”, Lu Pengliang on “The Role and Function of Cloisonné During the Ming and Qing”, Béatrice Quette on “Form and Decoration”, Odile Nouvel on “Nineteenth-Century French Cloisonné Enamels”, Zhang Rong on “Imperial Commissions”, and Susan Weber on “The International Reception”, among others. This is the only publication that discusses cloisonné of such fine quality from such an extensive number of public collections, and for the first time includes western and Chinese scholars.

Related Programs

Lectures, study days, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition. For further information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu.

Exhibition Tours

Group exhibition tours for adult and school groups are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., and on Thursdays until 7 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. To schedule a tour, please call 212-501-3013 or e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu.

The Bard Graduate Center is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The admission fee is \$5 general, \$3 seniors and students (with valid ID); admission is free on Thursday evenings after 5 p.m. For more information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit bgc.bard.edu.

Support

Cloisonné: Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties is organized by the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture in collaboration with Les Arts Décoratifs-musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris. *Cloisonné: Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties* is made possible in part with support from Mrs. Hélène David-Weill and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange.

Bard
Graduate
Center: Decorative
Arts, Design
History, Material
Culture



Cloisonné:
Chinese
Enamels
from the
Yuan, Ming,
and Qing
Dynasties

Cloisonné: Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties

From January 26 through April 17, 2011, the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture presents *Cloisonné: Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties*. The exhibition, a collaboration between the BGC and Les Arts Décoratifs-musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, is the first to bring cloisonné from this renowned French collection together with objects from important public collections in the United States, including the Brooklyn Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Phoenix Art Museum, and the Springfield Museums, Massachusetts. *Cloisonné* examines the technique in China from the end of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) to the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). The curator of the exhibition is Béatrice Quette of the Musée des Arts décoratifs.

Champion vase. Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period. Cloisonné enamel on copper alloy. Collection of Phoenix Art Museum, Museum purchase and gift of Mr. Robert H. Clague, 1982.209.A-B. Photographer: Ken Howie. Cover: Incense burner in the shape of a dove. Qianlong period. Cloisonné enamel on copper alloy. Les Arts Décoratifs-musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, gift of David David-Weill, 1923. Inv. 23.614. Photographer: Laurent-Sully Jaulmes.



Background

The cloisonné enamel technique was most likely introduced into China during the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). Although the earliest Chinese cloisonné pieces bearing a reign mark were made during the Xuande period (1426–1436), the exhibition will include a few pieces that introduce a new attribution from the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties. This controversial attribution recently documented by specialists and curators from the Palace Museum, Beijing, is a major contribution to Cloisonné scholarship.

Several factors, ranging from the unreliability of reign marks to a dearth of information about Chinese workshops, make it very difficult to date cloisonné works with accuracy. Therefore, three aspects of Chinese cloisonné production have been selected as guidelines for the exhibition—decoration, form, and intended function—since an object’s decoration and form tend to indicate the purpose for which it was intended, whether it be ritual, decorative, or utilitarian. The motifs that occur most often are considered in all their various meanings within the context of the period during which the objects were produced. The exhibition attempts to answer such questions as how, why, and for whom these enamels were produced, and how attitudes toward this technique changed during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

In 1368, after the Chinese had reclaimed power from the Mongol “barbarians” and founded the Ming dynasty, Cao Zhao wrote “Essential Criteria of Antiquities,” (*Gegu yaolun*) a guide for collectors of “antiquities” in which he made it clear that cloisonné enamels originating in the Frankish Lands (Folan or Falan), were not suitable for study by members of the scholar class. Their gilded surfaces and brilliant colors put them at odds with the austere criteria of the scholars’ aesthetic inherited from the Song dynasty (960–1279), which the Ming revived after the humiliation of the Mongol invasion. This classical Chinese aesthetic is exemplified by ink-wash paintings and by ceramics with sparse or no decoration in which form and surface enhance one another. According to Cao Zhao, cloisonné enamels were really appropriate only for the apartments of women. Some scholars undoubtedly followed the guidelines of Cao Zhao, however it is interesting that in the same period cloisonné pieces were being commissioned for the court.

From the late Yuan dynasty to the early Ming dynasty, Buddhist temples were the primary patrons or intended recipients of cloisonné. Indeed, the lotus flower, a Buddhist symbol of purity, is the motif most often encountered on Chinese enamels. For example, some bowls and mandala bases have scrolling lotus designs into which the eight Buddhist symbols have been integrated. Because these objects were intended for ritual use, they have traditional Chinese forms that derive from archaic bronzes of the Shang dynasty (ca.1700 BCE–1050 CE) or from Neolithic jades.

In the late fourteenth century and the fifteenth century, the schematic scrolling lotus designs of Buddhist origin were joined by more naturalistic depictions of flowers and fruit—chrysanthemums, grapes, camellias, hibiscus,

peonies, and lotuses—which were often used as symbols of the four seasons. Archaic forms were now supplemented by other, newer forms deemed appropriate for use in domestic rituals and at the tables of the scholar class.

Objects from the reign of the Jiajing emperor (1522–66) display forms and decoration specifically characteristic of this period. For example, the presence of the character for longevity (*shou*) and depictions of cranes in the clouds indicate that an object was intended for Taoist ritual use. Other pieces combine Buddhist, Taoist, and even Confucian decorative motifs. In addition, this period saw a diversification of themes and motifs, including two mandarin ducks, a carp in a pool, and seahorses, among others.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, in the reign of the Wanli emperor (1573–1620), there was a marked increase in enamel production as well as a decline in craftsmanship. This trend would continue through the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, although the diversification of decorative motifs continued and the repertory of forms increased.

Under the Kangxi emperor (1662–1722), the first ruler of the Manchu Qing dynasty, significant decorative arts production resumed and imperial workshops were established within the Forbidden City. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, there was a resurgence of enamel production.

The last sixty years of the eighteenth century, the reign of the Qianlong emperor (1736–95), were marked by a growing interest in the arts in general and the decorative arts in particular. Advances in cloisonné technique and additions to the available palette of enamels fostered an unprecedented increase in cloisonné production. The Manchus, fervent followers of Tantric Buddhism, commissioned many ritual objects for Buddhist temples, and there were numerous commissions for the imperial palaces and private residences. The unprecedented variety of forms and decoration that resulted was accompanied by a resurgence of the taste for hidden symbols prevalent in the Ming dynasty.

The influence of the Qianlong reign remained strong through the first half of the nineteenth century but was accompanied by a decline in workmanship and aesthetic quality. During the reign of the Guangxu emperor (1875–1908), a renewal of production was sparked by widespread Western interest in the technique, as a result of Chinese participation in international exhibitions of the time. Equally important political events, such as the sack of the summer palace during the Second Opium War in 1860 by British and French troops, prompted a rediscovery of cloisonné in Europe, especially in France. To illustrate the impact of these various influences and the renewal of the technique in late nineteenth-century France, the exhibition will conclude with cloisonné enamels produced by Ferdinand Barbédienne and James Tissot.