

Enamel Champlevé – Enamel Art in France (Limoges)

The enamel Champlevé technique

The history of Enamel in France has started since the 10th century. Both the Saint Martial monks and the Grand Mont priests studied the cloisonné method from the Byzantine people, and then launched the Champlevé skills.

Since then, enamel champlevé has become the specialty of French enamel art, it was used especially by the goldsmith masters, during the XII and XIII centuries in Limousine region (France). Many religious shrines, crucifix, holy vases of this period are our today's witnesses

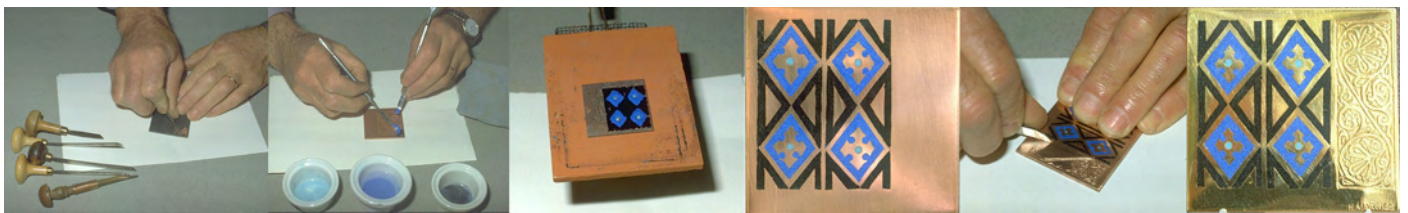


The skills and techniques of “enamel champlevé” are usually applied as follows: the artists use cold chisel and scoopers to cut grooves into the surface of the metal. In general, the metal mainly used is copper. Afterwards, the artistes fill the wet sand-powdered enamel into the grooves, either with spatula or pencil or feather, and undergo a series of firings.

Then the following steps are lapidary, polishing and gilding.

Once finished, the marriage of flaming enamel colours and finely-worked metal gives the whole richness to this handcrafted work and fine art according to the desire of the artist.

To discover : illustration of the steps of “champlevé enamelling”



<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/emolimo/techniqu.htm>

The difference between “Cloisonné” and “Champlevé”

When the metal parts are shown off as thin and regular lines, the results of “cloisonné” and “champlevé” are very similar. According to the enamelling principles, a tank is necessary in order to receive the enamel. There are two possibilities to create such cavities: either to build up wire fences as partitions on the copper plates (from which the French “Cloisonné” word comes), or to take off the material (i.e. meaning of “Champlevé”).

For timing perspective, engraving and clearing away the material from the plate takes much more time than folding and gluing the metallic wires. Since Chinese masters have discovered and applied the vegetable glue to improve the soldering process, such giant Chinese vases with magnificent motifs realized in cloisonné enamel were able to be produced in large quantities thanks to this time-saving discovery. This cloisonné skill became almost the emblem and the highlight of the Chinese enamel art.

Regarding the style, the enamel cloisonné expresses an extraordinary fineness and a wonderful suppleness in the bent shape of partition. While for the champlevé, the metallic partition can be of different thicknesses and its unique charm is emphasized by the marriage of engraving on the metal surface and the various enamel colours.

Industrial Champlevé

In the watch-making industry, according to the new CNC machine developments, it's possible to shorten the time for creating the cavities in keeping a high precision. After the mechanical preparation, the artistes can apply their engraving skills and stress the traditional spirit of enamelling, by giving artistic life to their work.

"Eau forte" Champlevé

In the contemporary art field, the precision is not always the first worry for some artists. Some of them are very skilful in using the acid liquid to create the cavity on the copper plate. The grooves created by this method are less deep; the borders are less sharp, even not regular. Under the watch-making precision principles, this "eau forte Champlevé" technique brings unacceptable defects; however, in a liberal artistic composition, it can be used for styling and harmony.



To discover : Limoges, a city of " art du feu "

http://www.tourismelimoges.com/arts_du_feu/email/histoire.htm

<http://www.enamel-house.com>