

Marilyn Druin

Freehold, New Jersey

The first time Marilyn Druin tried enameling back in college, “that was it,” she says. The rich colors, their permanence, the sense of depth, the exciting tension between metal and glass captivated her. She has now been exploring the art for 30 years, is a trustee of the International Enamelists’ Society; yet she still feels like a beginner, for the medium is eternally complex.

At the core of each cloisonné item she creates is a silver vessel. Druin covers it with an intricate pattern of wires to create little dikes. Into each little pool or cell formed by the wire boundary she applies a series of glazes made of ground glass and minerals. Each layer of clear or colored glaze is fired to melt it into glass. Then the next layer is applied and fired, and then the next. An intricate work may be fired as many as 40 times. The process of making one goblet takes weeks. With no modern convenience except the electric kiln, enameling is done essentially the same way now as it was done in the thirteenth century BCE.

The process of this art is complicated by physics. With each firing, the metal core expands and then tries to contract as it cools; but the glass hardens first, refusing to let the metal shrink to its former size. The stress on the metal core creates a technical challenge for enamelists—how to prevent warping? Druin puts a reinforcing ring around the top of a vessel to strengthen it. She also plans the design in such a way that it helps support the structure. Then, she must take care in applying the glazes to inside and outside of the

vessel to balance the tensions. No wonder so few people do enameling. Druin says, “Sometimes you finish a piece and a week later: ‘ping’ and you see a piece of glass jump free.” But dealing with what she calls “the strength of the opposing forces” glass and metal—so similar in mood to the elements of water and rock—creates the challenge.

Other complexities arise in trying to combine glazes to create a diaphanous swirling blend and not granulated mud. Only experience enables Druin to take advantage of the differences in melting temperatures of different chemicals, so an earlier glaze can be made to bubble up like cumulus clouds into one laid on over it. Sometimes she will include bits of embossed gold under a clear glaze so it seems like autumn leaves are drifting in clear October air.



Marriage Cup and two Kiddush Cups, by Marilyn Druin. Fine silver cloisonné enamel, 24 k gilded sterling silver, 24 k gold, 6 to 8" h. Photo by Bob Barrett. A blank metal area is left on the bottom of each goblet for future generations to engrave milestone events as the piece is passed down through the family.