

WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP REVIEW:

ENAMELLING TRANSGRESSIONS with Sarah Perkins



Sarah Perkins' enamelling workshop for the Seattle Metals Guild was held at Pratt Fine Arts Center on May 22nd and 23rd. Sarah's full-time teaching schedule and her personal studio work prevent her from offering many workshops, so we felt ourselves very fortunate to have had her here. On Friday evening before the workshop proper, she presented a lecture and slide show at the SAFECO Jackson Street Center, which showcased not only her own amazing work--primarily vessel forms which are raised in either fine silver or copper, then enameled--but also a sampling of other enamel artists' work; the slides were a visual feast of varied techniques and amazing skill.

On Saturday the workshop began with Sarah laying out samples of various methods of enamel application. The samples were mounted on matte board and included, on the reverse side, detailed explanations of materials and techniques used...they were a wonderful resource to peruse throughout the weekend. When she began her demos, we of course wanted her to cover everything!! Our group was quite varied in skill level, so Sarah covered some basics such as sifting, counter enamel and fundamental terminology, as well as ensured that we were versed in kiln and enamel safety. In the morning she covered the use of stencils, wet packing, P3 (oil and dry) and rubber stamping; we were then set to work on samples. After lunch she explained how to make a set of enamel sifters, then demonstrated enamel grain sifting to highlight the various effects you can get using different size grains of enamel in different combinations. It's not as tedious as it sounds; she has a very quick and loose way of working, but manages to maintain amazing control. She showed us how to get fine lines, blended edges, and a wonderful salt and pepper effect with different size grains of the same colour, and with same size grains of different colours. She also instructed us on the use of cloisonné both in the traditional format with manufactured cloisonné wire, and with various "homemade" wires. We were shown ways to bend wire for different effects such as straight or dotted lines, and how to saw and/or forge fine silver for use as cloisonné wires. She also revealed to us a wonderful little jig used to bend repetitive cloisonné wire shapes, a jig that Harlen Butt had passed on to her.

On Sunday Sarah gave us an overview of granulation and how to combine it with enameling. She then briefly covered wet packing for vessel forms, and outlined how she attaches rims and bases to her pieces; at this point she talked about the properties and handling methods of IT and eutectic solders. She then moved on to seed beads, how to get them to adhere to a piece, and how to fill the center with another colour. One of the more lovely and simple techniques Sarah demonstrated was the use of fire scale

on copper to extract a pattern using scalex and transparent enamels. An amazing array of methods was explored; the samples that came from the workshop were both beautiful and varied. As a group we were able to produce a large volume of samples giving us something to take to our studios and continue the explorations.

A few of the tips and tricks we discovered:

STENCILS: Sarah uses a variety of things as stencils and of course has some favorites: the plastic doilie, and the cover of the New Yorker magazine (for paper cut-outs)! Elevating the piece so you can pick it up after sifting was a very useful tip, as was the use of a small piece of masking tape to make a stencil "handle" for cleaner and easier removal. Sarah sifts over the stencil either with the standard 60 mesh or with the 200 mesh, which gives a much lighter colour and coating due to the smaller grain size. One final trick was how to clean up stray grains by sweeping them to the center of a "no-enamel zone" and off with a fine paint brush.

MAGIC PEN: Using a fiber-tipped permanent marker (but NOT a Sharpie...it dries too quickly), write or draw on a clean, grease-free enameled piece; sift on 200 mesh enamel within a minute or so and tap off the excess...it only sticks to where you wrote! Magic! Fire as usual.

Overall it was a wonderful workshop; I heard a lot of great feedback from the participants. For those of you who weren't able to take the workshop, Sarah mentioned her next workshop will be at the Mendocino Art Center...it's a week long and will yield even more great secrets! Many thanks to all involved for organizing this great workshop, and thanks to Sarah for her generosity of information and time.

--Jan Smith

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