



Cloisonné Vase

This blue vase is an example of Chinese cloisonné. Cloisonné is the technique of creating designs on metal vessels with colored-glass paste placed within enclosures made of copper or bronze wires, which have been bent or hammered into the desired pattern. Known as *cloisons* (French for “partitions”), the enclosures generally are either pasted or soldered onto the metal body. The glass paste, or enamel, is colored with metallic oxide and painted into the contained areas of the design. The vessel is usually fired at a relatively low temperature, about 800°C. Enamels commonly shrink after firing, and the process is repeated several times to fill in the designs. Once this process is complete, the surface of the vessel is rubbed until the edges of the cloisons are visible. They are often then gilded, often on the edges, in the interior, and on the base. This particular vase shows a flat style, as opposed to concave or round, meaning the wires are not raised above the glass filling or vice versa.

Cloisonné objects were intended primarily for the furnishing of temples and palaces, because their flamboyant splendor was considered appropriate to the function of these structures but not well suited to a more restrained atmosphere, such as that of a Scholar’s home. During the early Ming dynasty (1368-1644) cloisonné was dismissed as being suitable only for lady’s chambers. However, before the close of the Ming dynasty, this ware came to be greatly prized at court. The cloisonné of the Qing Dynasty are considered to be the most beautiful and intricate since the technique had been developed over centuries.

History

Cloisonné originated in the region that is now the Middle East, where it was generally used for jewelry-making. The style that developed in the Byzantine Empire most likely reached China between the 13th and 14th centuries, during the Yuan Dynasty. It was also brought to Europe, where French artisans developed their own form of cloisonné. Trade routes connected these regions to each other, allowing unique cloisonné

techniques to be developed in different cultures. Chinese artisans also adapted the technique to their own style, which became increasingly intricate and started being used to create large decorative objects.

Sources

Department of Asian Art. "Chinese Cloisonné." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-.

Power and Beauty Connections

Room 2

Censer 76.72.109.1-c

Drum-Shaped Box with Lid

Cloisonné Altarpiece 95.53

Pair of Cloisonné Pricket Candlesticks,
96.97.19.1&2

Cloisonné Box with Cover, 2014.136.5a,b

Censer in Form of an Elephant Bearing

Treasure Box, L35.4312

Vase – Room 2

This vase derives from the bronze hu vessel but is made in cloisonné. The cloisonné technique reached China from Byzantium (present-day Istanbul) between 1200 and 1400 CE, but Chinese artisans made it their own. The general stylistic trend was toward bigger, more complicated and luxurious creations. During the Qing dynasty reigns of emperors Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) and Qianlong (r. 1736–95), cloisonné was perfected and reached its artistic summit. Colors were more delicate, and filigrees more flexible and fluent. Previously used for religious paraphernalia, cloisonné now embellished secular objects. This vase is a typical product of the 1700s.

Supported on a straight foot ring, the globular body rises to a long, cylindrical neck and terminates in a lipped rim. The vase is decorated in colored enamels on a turquoise ground. Surrounding the neck are upright leaves; below on the shoulder is a band of interlocking Ts. Farther down is an elaborate band of cloud patterns, each resembling the head of a ruyi scepter, and a narrow frieze of small lotus scrolls. The main body, below a band of C-scrolls, is decorated with scrolling, stylized lotuses. The foot, base, and mouth rim are gilt.

Vase, Enamel, copper alloy, 2012.22.2

<https://collections.artsmia.org/search/cloisonne%20vase>

Collection Connection

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