

Judy Stone: Using Enamel to Integrate Surface and Form

Starting with a spun bowl, Judy Stone employs a range of silversmithing and enamelling procedures to create vessels that are unique and evocative - perhaps of the Native American cultures in the southwestern United States, where she grew up. Here Judy discusses her techniques.



Burnt Offering XVI by Judy Stone
Spun copper, vitreous enamel, copper rivets and wire, silver foil
6.5" diameter, 3" deep
Photo credit: Ralph Gabriner

When designing a piece, Judy first thinks about the form. She is striving for a balance with a bit of tension in certain unresolved places. She writes: 'I know I will be letting the form move with the heat as it is fired, so my construction always takes that movement into account. On the other hand, I also want to make sure that the construction will not allow for movement after the vessel is enamelled. Once the idea for the form of the vessel is settled, Judy works mainly with the copper, using the techniques of raising, spinning, and/or working with a hydraulic press (she finds that she can press form 16 to 18 gauge copper). Judy does some hand raising, but she has a friend who spins bowls to her specifications: she hopes to learn to spin her own in the near future. She finishes the shape by deconstructing it (taking it apart) with a plasma cutter, (<http://www.plasma-cutter.com/>) and by drilling holes. She then re-constructs the form with copper wire and copper rivets.

Judy shapes the form as she goes and does no drawing until after the form is complete.



Burnt Offering XIX by Judy Stone

Cut, riveted, and sewn enamelled copper vessel form

Vitreous enamel, spun copper, copper rivets, copper wire, silver foil

8" diameter, 6" deep

Photo credit: Doug Yapple

The base coat for Judy's vessels is liquid white Thompson 533, into which she carves her sgraffito designs. This is followed by a sifted layer of lead free transparents over all the surfaces. Next follows several layers of many different enamels, floated into place with water: leaded and unleaded, hard and soft, and with different particle sizes. A sifted covering of Blythe flux C10 acts as 'an evener' for what, as Judy says, could be very disparate colours in any given layer. Judy often uses 325 mesh Thompson opaques because they are very translucent when applied thinly.

Judy writes: 'When I begin the enamelling, I have already considered how the drawn lines and colours will coordinate with the metal form. In fact it is the form that suggests the enamelling, although sometimes I have to wait for months before I receive the right feel for the totality of a piece. I don't succeed every time, which makes for an interesting life!'

Discussing the concept behind her work, Judy says: 'The imagery is always self-referential and I refuse to deconstruct or interpret it. By 'self-referential' I mean that the imagery comes from somewhere inside me and is something to do with my reality. But I let the imagery develop by itself, which it tends to do; I just feel like an enabler.

I always begin with a line, which leads to more lines, which in turn lead to negative space. After the piece is finished, I name it. The name can refer to the process I went through during the making, or refer to a place that the vessel evokes. When I am enamelling, although I am adding a surface, I feel that I am peeling away layers of form to get to something that I feel I have exposed. In a hundred years, long after I am gone, perhaps someone

may 'discover' these pieces and figure out what they mean and meant. But for the present I struggle constantly with the feeling that everything I do and hence all that I am is inconsequential.'

When Judy first started enamelling, she was only enamelled sporadically while she pursued another career. During this time she began seeing the forms she uses now in her dreams, but she had no idea how to make them. Then, as her career in enamelling developed, she realised that sculptural vessel forms would serve her well with exhibition juries. As she began to consciously design for this purpose, she realised that she was making the pieces that she had dreamed about thirty years previously.



Less is More by Judy Stone
8 inch diameter, 3 1/4 inches deep
Cut, riveted, enamelled copper vessel form
Vitreous enamel, spun copper, copper tube rivets, silkscreened silver foil
Photo Credit: Ralph Gabriner

After the enamelling is finished, Judy glass etches the entire piece with Etchall, made by B&B products (www.etchall.com). This gives a matte finish, which she then thoroughly cleans, taking special care around the sewn parts. Then she starts to work toward her desired surface. She starts with 800 grit diamond cloth (usually as an impregnated rubber form so as not to make deep scratches in the enamel). Then she works with 800 grit silicon carbide paper, moving through incremental grits to either 1800 or 2000, depending on how the surface looks and feels. For Judy, the tactility is more important than the look of the piece. She works only by hand so that she can feel what is happening beneath her fingers and, at this time, she has a very intimate relationship to the piece. Sometimes, in order to get into the wire areas, Judy uses 3M radial bristle discs mounted on a flexible shaft, but this is the only occasion in which she employs anything mechanical when finishing her vessels. Judy knows that will always be areas of depression in the enamelled surface that are not polished, but this is all right with her because ever since she has been enamelling she has been fascinated with texture and finds she abhors perfectly flat surfaces.

Judy Stone first began enameling in 1968, while studying in Germany on a Fulbright scholarship. She began enameling professionally in 1972 and has studied with some of the United States' most prominent enamelists including Bill Helwig, Margaret Seeler, Jamie Bennett, William Harper and Martha Banyas. The late Fred Ball's experimental techniques have been a very important influence. Her enamels are shown in the United States at crafts fairs and galleries specializing in fine crafts and she has exhibited in enamel exhibitions both in the U.S. and in Europe. Judy also teaches enameling throughout the

United States. She is a member of the Northern California Enamel Guild and The Enamelist Society, currently serving on the board of trustees, managing the Society's web site and is active in organizing Society exhibitions and conferences. She has written technical chapters for 2 books: *The Art of Fine Enameling*, ed. Karen L. Cohen; *Enameling with Professionals*, ed. Lilyan Bachrach. Her work is currently appearing in the book, *Craft of Northern California*, published by Alcove Books.

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