

Interview with

Center for Enamel Art's founder Judy Stone

By Lauren Puchowski

Judy Stone came across enameling almost by accident, while studying German literature on a Fulbright scholarship in the late 1960s. But her pursuit of the medium has been anything but accidental. Over a lifetime of studio work, she has pushed the craft into the realm of fine art. Her torn and patched enameled vessels, though they come from the craft tradition, are less about function than form and process, and color. If these are vessels for anything they are vessels for color, luminous and evocative, like shredded paintings of the sea.

Stone understands what enamel wants, which is not to decorate a thing but to be the thing itself. In her work, color is an object, tactile, with depth and presence. Her ideas are free and her method is highly technical: it's a rare and productive combination.

Stone is a visionary in other ways, too. As a lifelong teacher and working artist she is constantly advocating for enameling. More than any other medium, enameling is bedeviled by obscurity, misunderstood and often simply ignored. But Stone believes that the time for enameling is now. She wants to establish an enameling center that would build on the work of the W. W. Carpenter Foundation, the Enamelist Society and the Enamel Arts Foundation's goals of education, support of the enameling community, the encouragement of innovation, and the creation of a cultural context for enamel..

Part of the inspiration for such a center came a decade ago, when Stone traveled to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia for an enameling symposium and museum show. Enameling has a rich history and a thriving contemporary practice in Georgia, and Stone was received as a celebrity. On the show's opening night, in bitter winter weather, more than a thousand people lined up to see it.

"I got a sense," she says, "of what it would be like to live in a world where what I did mattered."

Here, Stone talks with writer Lauren Puchowski about her plans for the Center for Enamel Art.

Tell me a little about the idea process for the Center – how you identified the need, how the idea came to you.

I think the seeds for the Center for Enamel Art were planted a long time ago. The more I realized how hard it was to sell my work at craft shows, and how little the public knew about the medium, the more frustrated I became. I began to think about about everything we needed to become a "reputable" craft medium: a separate category at juried arts and crafts fairs; more exhibitions to show the public the variety of enameling work; a partnership between craftspeople and the enamel industry; more scholarly research and articles about enameling and enamelists; a database of potential collectors and a collectors' association. And so on.

The actual idea came to me two years ago on a drive to an arts and crafts show in Bellevue, Washington. I was feeling frustrated by how hard it was for me to sell my work, and how hard it was to instill in my students a passion for the medium. It was a long drive and I had plenty of time to think. That evening, I surprised myself by blurting it out to a friend at dinner: "I want to start an enameling center." She and some of the others I first told were very supportive, and encouraged me to write down my ideas and begin planning. The first thing I did was to craft the vision statement. The decades of gestating the idea must have been productive because the statement came out all at once, as a complete plan, and many other ideas followed in a rush.

*"Burnt Offering: Hermioni 3," Dimensions:
7 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 3 inches deep. Enameled copper
vessel form.*

*The 2014 Niche award winner in the metal
enamel category.*



At the same time, I realized that if such a project were going to happen, I was the person who would have to make it happen. The prospect was both frightening and exhilarating.

So what needs are you seeking to address with this Center?

The entire vision statement is posted on our website, but in short, our mission is to be a worldwide hub for enameling, a place that will nurture a growing community of enamelists and help educate the public about this art. We want to include the following:

- Terrific classroom spaces so that instructors coming into the Center to teach will not have to bring their whole studios with them
- Diverse and ongoing enameling exhibitions in a gallery with state of the art display fixtures
- Designated space for an onsite supply store with a full range of enameling tools, equipment and supplies and a gallery shop
- A space to produce large scale works on steel for artists
- An accessible research library
- An artist-in-residency program for enameling
- Conference and meeting facilities
- Artist studio rental space specifically for enamelists

Is there any analogous center for another medium?

There are several centers that have served in various ways as models for me: the Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia, the Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center, Pilchuk and Pittsburg Glass Center.

The Center for Enamel Art would be the first of its kind for our medium, however.

What has to happen before the Center becomes a reality?

First, we have to fundraise. We hope to secure our first space very soon, though it may just be a temporary rental. Rehabbing a leased space will be the next step. We hope that after 10 years or so, the Center will have the funds to buy a building, or, ideally, build a space to our specifications.

Partnerships with all kinds of organizations, plus skilled people donating their time and energy, will be crucial to the success of the Center. I have already started creating strategic partnerships with other enamel organizations, local and national arts and crafts organizations, educational institutions, and businesses. We are all stakeholders in this project, and we all benefit.

What in your work experience has helped prepare you for this role?

I suppose my chief qualification is that I have somehow managed to gather an incredible group of advisors and volunteers for this project. Their confidence and their support encourage me to see this project to fruition.

Other skills that have been useful to me are as an organizer, big-tent thinker, networker, and beggar for money. In addition, I've run my own business for 40 years, and I've always been active in craft and enameling organizations. I've seen firsthand what makes nonprofits run. I served on the board of the Enamelist Society for six years, and was the founder and one of the advisors for the major fundraiser of The Women's Building in San Francisco, The Celebration of Craftswomen. I am an instructor and enamel department head at The Crucible. I know I want an organizational structure for the Center that is functional and can stick to its goals and mission. I want transparency in all communications. Once the Center is up and running, I will happily leave it in more capable hands.

What major challenges do you foresee?

There have been a few naysayers, but mostly the response has been extremely positive. Fundraising will be a challenge, but that is to be expected. At 69, I do feel that I am in a bit of a race against time to make this happen. Right now I am feeling energetic, excited, passionate about the Center, and disciplined about how I spend my time.

I think I have always been a tad fearful of being too much of a leader. But in this process it is my vision and my lead, and I have learned to own it. So far, that ownership has been incredibly rewarding. It has given me confidence, and connected me to all sorts of people I never would have met if I hadn't had that revelation on the drive to Bellevue.

To learn more about the Center for Enamel Art, visit www.enamelcenter.org. gom



*"Burnt Offering: Bindungen Winter,"
Dimensions: 6 x 6 x 3 1/4 inches deep.
Enameled copper vessel form*