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Enamel encore

Artist Lilyan Bachrach publishes 2nd book at age 90

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Lilyan Bachrach flipped through a copy of her book, "Enameling with Professionals."

In the book, Mrs. Bachrach, a master enamelist, explains the materials and techniques of her art and gives readers a glimpse of the studios of 25 other important enamel artists, who discuss the ways in which they work.

She published the volume herself, she explained, with a print run of 1,000 copies.

"I had to market it," Mrs. Bachrach said with a chuckle. "It was terrible; I had a good lesson in marketing."

Every copy sold, prompting Schiffer Publishing Ltd. to sign a contract with her and produce an expanded version, this one with 550 color photographs. "Contemporary Enameling, Art & Technique" was published last year. For the commercially published edition, Mrs. Bachrach added artists, contacted contributors for additional information, and revised the text.

"I had to learn to use Word," she said. "Know anyone who wants to buy an IBM Selectric typewriter?"

Mrs. Bachrach, it seems, couldn't be a better model for aging well. She turned 90 earlier this month.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Enamelist Lilyan Bachrach applies some finishing touches on an enameled switch plate in her Worcester studio. (T&G Staff Photos/PAUL KAPTEYN)

The other day, she greeted a visitor at her town house in Worcester's Botany Bay neighborhood with a smile and a quip.

"I moved here 14 years ago, and I'm still not settled in," she said.

Her home is filled with furniture, and art covers the walls. Photos of her four children, 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren are scattered across shelves and tabletops. Mrs. Bachrach guided a visitor to a seat at a card table covered with a green cloth. She lifted up a corner of the cloth, caressed the black walnut wood and said a friend had made the table. Too bad to cover it up, she said, but this is where she and her friends play bridge, canasta and mah-jongg.

"The only trouble with turning 90 is everyone thinks you're decrepit," Mrs. Bachrach said, her face crinkling in amusement. "I still think I'm in my 60s."



[Enlarge photo](#)

Lilyan Bachrach uses ceramic overglazes to paint a floral design on the enameled switch plate.

Mrs. Bachrach, who has been an enamel artist for 52 years, was adorned in one of her own creations, a brooch made in a method called cloisonné. The stunning piece of modernistic jewelry was particularly eye-catching against the pink turtleneck jersey she wore under a red print shirt. It sells for \$650.

Along with cloisonné and gold and silver jewelry, Mrs. Bachrach makes wall pieces, plates, bowls, switch plates and mezuzas, all one of a kind. The designs range from floral to abstract. Her Bachrach Art Enamels have been exhibited in museums and galleries across the United States. In 2005, she received the Woodrow W. Carpenter Award from The Enamelist Society.

Enamels are produced by fusing colored and clear powdered glass to metal at temperatures of about 1,500 Fahrenheit. Mrs. Bachrach said that a quality glaze is achieved by the building up of layers of enamel on the metal in many firings. "Each firing is critical and requires the enamelist's judgment for desired effect," she said, adding that her painting "is developed directly on the fired enamel base coat, in the same manner as a painter approaches a canvas." She focuses on the feeling and composition of each piece.

Mrs. Bachrach works in a spacious studio in the basement of her home. She recently agreed to refurbish mosaics for Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 1290 Grafton St. She made or repaired 60 pieces of assorted sizes and shapes. "They must have been pleased," she said. "They paid me more than we agreed to."

Mrs. Bachrach said that she devotes time to enameling "as the spirit moves me."

"It depends if I have an order," she said, adding that she was at the moment making floral switch plates to be sold at the Worcester Center for Crafts. Her work also is sold by Marbeth Schon of Natchez, Miss., on the Web site <http://www.modernsilver.com/lilyanbachrach.htm>

For decades, Mrs. Bachrach and her husband, Dr. Samuel Bachrach, an internist in Worcester, lived on May Street and were fully engaged in the civic, political, social and cultural life of the city, while raising their two sons and two daughters. Dr. Bachrach died in 1988, shortly after their 50th wedding anniversary.

Those were busy years, yet Mrs. Bachrach found time for an artistic outlet. In her youth, she had sewed and had worked in her father's drapery store in Lowell. She took classes in tray painting and jewelry making at the center for crafts. She had moved on to crafting silver when the instructor introduced her to enameling, with the idea that the colorful pieces could be used in the silver designs.

"I lasted two classes. I quit. It was boring," she said. "I like to design."

Then in 1955, a friend asked if she would help form an enameling guild and set up a studio. She was game, she recalled. "I thought, 'Maybe it will be different. I'll try.'" Ten women joined.

A turning point came when Mrs. Bachrach and four fellow guild members took a series of workshops in Boston with renowned enamelist Doris Hall. "She handled enameling as an artist's medium — very freely," Mrs. Bachrach said. "I was hooked."



[Enlarge photo](#)

A cloisonné pendant by Lilyan Bachrach.

The guild disbanded in 1960. Five members had bought their own kilns; Mrs. Bachrach had one in her pantry. With no mess to clean up, enameling fit her lifestyle. It appealed to her inventiveness and her love of color. "It is one field in which nobody ever learns it all," she said.

Even with all of her other pursuits, Mrs. Bachrach wanted to continue her education. She had attended Boston University for two years, quitting with regret so that her parents could afford to send her younger sister to college. She returned to school, and in 1968 completed a three-year course of study at the Worcester Art Museum. Laughing heartily, she recalled that her husband used to enjoy turning down social invitations with the excuse, "I'm sorry. We can't come. My wife has homework."

Enameling took on serious financial overtones after Dr. Bachrach's death. Their youngest child was still in college, and Mrs. Bachrach needed to earn money. She began to wholesale her artwork, which called for developing a style and sticking with it to produce in larger quantities.

"I got a year's worth of orders from Gump's, the California store," she said. "I got friends to help me fill the orders."

As she escorted her visitor around the studio, she noted a favorite paintbrush, opened the kiln, explained the firing process and pointed out her grinding wheel. Amid the clutter on one table, she called attention to a cloisonné brooch of red and black. "I'm going to hammer it off," she said. "I don't like it." She picked up a handful of beads sitting in a container on another table.

"I was into bead stringing at one point," Mrs. Bachrach mused. "I had it all upstairs. Now it's down here. It's waiting for me."

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LILYAN BACHRACH

enamelist / author

by Marbeth Schon



Lilyan Bachrach is a remarkable, versatile enamelist whose oeuvre includes jewelry, wall pieces, plates, bowls, mezuzahs, and switch plates. Her work flows easily between beautiful floral and abstract designs; she is equally adept at both.

Since 1970 her "Bachrach Art Enamels have been exhibited in museums and galleries across the United States. Her commission work has ranged from cloisonné pins to architectural panels and religious objects." ¹ She recently wrote and published her first book on enameling titled *Enameling with Professionals*, in which she teaches the materials and techniques of enameling and takes the reader into the studios of 25 other leading enamel artists who discuss their own techniques.

I found Lilyan's autobiography fascinating and have left it as she wrote it. Within this article, Lilyan's words will appear in blue/gray (italics) and other information will appear in green. All photographs are of work by Lilyan Bachrach except for the Doris Hall plate below.



*Doris Hall
enamel on 18 gauge copper
paisley design plate
6" diameter*

Lilyan credits Doris Hall with inspiring her to become an enamellist. Doris Hall, Kubinyi (1907-2001) was one of the exhibitors at the 2nd Annual exhibition of Contemporary jewelry at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis in the spring of 1948. She, and her late husband Kalman Kubinyi, graduated from the Cleveland Institute 1929 and, during the 1940s, worked mainly in enamels opening a gallery and studio in Gloucester, Massachusetts. They later opened a studio/gallery in downtown Boston and lastly, a studio in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.²

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I was born 1/7/17 New Haven, Connecticut (and) moved to Lowell, Massachusetts about 1921 with my parents and my sister, Elaine, who was born in 1919.

Through High School, I worked on Saturdays and summers in my parents' curtain and drapery store in Lowell, MA. My father manufactured curtains and draperies in the basement of that store. From him I learned to appreciate good fabrics and figure out how many yards of fabric were needed to make a certain number of pairs of ruffle curtains. In time I became the designer of the curtains and draperies we made for the three stores that they owned. From my father I learned to inspect what we made, always looking for any faults. His favorite question was, "Can you make it better?" I still look at my own work in almost the same way. If there is a fault, it is the first thing I spot. If the piece holds together, then I know it is acceptable.

After High School, in 1934 I enrolled at Boston University because my father said I had to live at home. A group of us commuted by train five days a week into North Station and shared a taxicab to school. I was studying to be an Interior Decorator. In my second year I made a new school friend from Maynard, MA. She fixed me up on a blind date with her brother's friend, Sam Bachrach, who was at Tuft's Medical School. On our first date he bought me a coca-cola and watched me drink it. I didn't know he didn't have enough money to buy one for himself. It was later that I learned that he would buy a quart of milk, transfer the milk to a pitcher, take the bottle back for the deposit so he could buy a can of beans. It was still depression days. At the end of my second year, my sister, who was two years younger, was ready for college. Because my parents could not afford to send both of us to school and I was planning to be the decorator for the stores, I offered to leave college. My father let her live at school at the University of Vermont. There she met her future husband and left school after her first year. I continued seeing Sam and we drifted into marriage plans in 1938 when he graduated from medical school. We had two daughters and two sons, born from 1940 to 1959. Sam died in 1988, just after our 50th anniversary.

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*Pink flower plate
18 gauge copper
overglaze painting and fine black line*



*Orange flower plate
6" diameter
18 gauge copper
overglaze painting and fine black line*

Enamel is actually a layer of glass fused to metal. To create an enameled object, powdered glass is dusted on the metal, or mixed with liquid and painted on, then fired in a kiln for a short time to fuse the enamel to the metal surface. ³

In the early 1970s Lilyan produced a series of enamels with fine black pen drawings and overglaze colors added with small brushes. Later she used watercolor brushes first to paint the flowers and then adding the black pen line. ⁴

For floral painting, Lilyan starts by painting the various shades of green leaves with a watercolor brush. She next paints the "imaginary" flowers, usually making the color of first flower the predominant color in the overall painting. When the painting is developed to Lilyan's satisfaction, it is fired to just below maturity. Then she makes any additions to color or design with further glazing (you'll have to see her book for technical details) and later often delineates some of the shapes with a fine line black enamel material. ⁵



*Yellow flower plate
18 gauge copper
overglaze painting and fine black line*

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In 1936 my parents had moved to Worcester, Massachusetts. I lived at home with my parents while Sam was a medical resident and then an intern. Our first child, Barbara, was born in September 1938 just before Sam was called into the Army Medical Corps as a First Lt.. He had been in ROTC in college. He thought he would do his year of service and then be a civilian again. Pearl Harbor changed that and his tour of duty stretched to five years. Our son, Robert, was born in June 1940. The four of us traveled first to Fort Adams, then to Fort Dix, to Mitchell Field and to Orlando, FL where Sam set up the medical school for the Army. At that point he had been to flight surgeon school and was a Major in the Army Air



pin
2" x 2-1/2"
fine silver, 28 gauge domed, fine silver wires
fabricated sterling setting

Lilyan uses pure copper and fine silver for her enamels. She says that fine silver is primarily used for jewelry "because of it's cost, color, and the advantage of not producing a firescale coat like copper does when it is fired."

She usually domes the jewelry which she fabricates from 26 gauge or 28 gauge fine silver or oxygen-free copper. "Doming the thin gauge metal gives it added strength and keeps the piece of jewelry, especially pins, from being too heavy. " ⁶

Lilyan uses both fine silver and fine gold wire to create her intricately beautiful abstract cloisonné enamels.



pin
2 1/2" x 2-1/2"
fine silver, fused fine silver wires
fabricated fine silver and sterling frame



pin
2 1/2" x 2"
cloisonné
28 gauge copper domed and planished
24k cloisonné wire
fabricated gold plated sterling frame

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To go back before 1955, I had been studying silversmithing at our Worcester Craft Center when my instructor decided to teach enameling. My friend, Bernice Morse, and I signed up. I assumed it would be like the oil painting I had been doing. She loved the class. I didn't. They were copying small pictures or making solid color pieces to set instead of stones. I went back to silversmithing but she stayed with it. Then the craft center raised their classroom fees and my friend thought it would be less expensive to get a group together to set up a workshop in one of our homes. She asked me to help her organize a group. We easily found 8 other housewives, put in \$40 each, ordered equipment and supplies and set

up a workshop in Miriam Casdin's basement. Her house was the nearest to Bernice who didn't drive so that was why we chose Miriam's. We soon had to add another \$40 each to be able to have a larger selection of enamels and copper forms. Miriam lived on Lenox Street, so we called ourselves the Lenox Enamellers. Our husbands thought it was funny and that we would not last together more than a year. We lasted for five years...and by then five of us had our own kilns and workshops in our homes. My first one had an 8" kiln in the pantry off the kitchen.

We were lucky. When the studio was all set up, Doris Hall announced that she would give demonstration lessons. Five of us signed up and drove to Boston to her studio once a week for I think 6 weeks. During the week, we practiced in our workshop and showed the other members what we had learned. Because she handled enamels as a painter's medium, I fell in love with enamels because of the infinite range of colors and their tactile quality. Shortly after that, Joseph Trippetti arrived at the Craft Center to teach enameling. I studied cloisonné with him for two years. At his urging, I taught enameling for four years to the adult classes at the Worcester Trade School. At that time, physicians were not under Social Security and I assumed that as a teacher there I would be. I was wrong. The city employees were not under Social Security. However, I enjoyed the teaching. The school required that I take the course in Methods of Teaching Adults at the Fitchburg State College. To my surprise, I did very well even though it was a good many years since I had been in a classroom. The first two years I taught beginners and the second two years the advanced group. By then I had had enough even though it was just one night a week.

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Lilyan says that copper is the most used metal for enameling because of its malleability, color, availability and cost. "In addition, it usually maintains its shape in the firing process. The appropriate thickness of the metal depends on what is being made. Most plates and vessels are usually 18 gauge while jewelry can range from 28 gauge for a repoussé piece to 14 gauge for champlévé. The smaller the gauge number, the thicker the metal."⁷



*18 gauge copper bowl
4-1/2" x 5-1/2"
copper
overglaze painting
black enamel interior*



*Footed bowl
8" x 10"
raised 18 gauge copper with pewter rim
wet stencil
Design on the outside mirrors the design
on the inside.*



*18 gauge etched copper bowl
4-1/2" x 5-1/2"
with thin strips of silver foil between
layers of transparent enamel*

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When Elizabeth our fourth child, was six years old, I had lots of help at home so I applied and was accepted as a full time student at the School of the Worcester Art Museum. My portfolio consisted of my enamels that the director liked. Sam used to get a kick out of saying that we couldn't go out on a certain evening because his wife had homework to do. I loved art school even though I was the oldest one in the class. There were two other women who were also mothers in that class. I thought I was going to learn to paint like Rembrandt. It was the wrong time in art history. When at the first painting class the instructor told us to just express ourselves, I asked him if he was kidding. To my disappointment, he was serious. However, I had many good teachers and along with learning to see I also learned the vocabulary and the language. I called it shooting the bull, which I couldn't do then and I still can't do it.

Throughout the years I studied enameling and/or silversmithing with Bill Kurwacz, Fiometta Shieh, Mary Kretsinger, Charles Jeffrey, Curtis LaFollette, and Tim McCreight in addition to short workshops with Kenneth Bates, June Schwarcz, Earl Pardon, and Margaret Seeler,

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Lilyan also enamels on steel, sometimes using flat 12" squares. Steel needs a special undercoat that is applied and fired.

The photo to the left is of the Temple Emanuel Portable Ark. The enamel plaque consists of six 12" steel squares which were done in dry and wet stencil. The wood structure was custom made of black walnut by Anthony La Rocco. The enameled doors slide apart and the section with enamels lifts off for transporting. ⁸



*Mezuzahs
1" x 5"
overglaze painting
fine black enamel mounted on custom made walnut
and cherry cases*

Lilyan uses 24k gold foil, fine silver foil and heavier fine silver foil known as "clutch silver" silver. The piece to the right is a Limoges-style enamel pin on copper with silver foil.



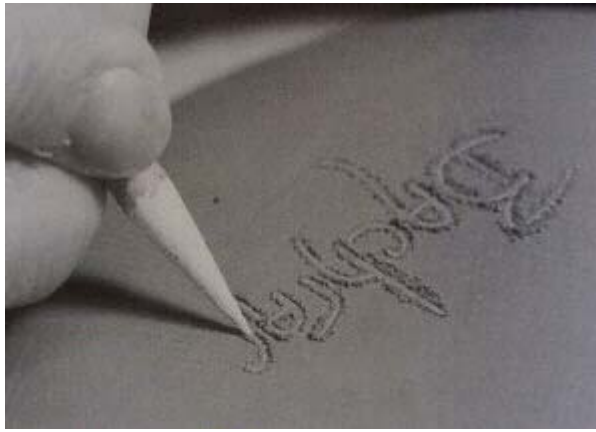
*Limoges pin
2" diameter
18 gauge copper
enamel, silver foil, wet packed*

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Over the years, my enamels were exhibited at the Worcester Center for Crafts, the Worcester Art Museum, Danforth Museum, DeCordova Museum, Fitchburg Art Museum, the Palo Alto Cultural Center – among others. The shops and galleries that handled my enamels included Gumps, Skera, Appalachian Spring, Voltaires, etc. Commission work ranged from cloisonné award pins to processional crosses, doors for an ark, chalice cups and 10ft architectural panels. My records were never up to date for I just didn't have the time to do them. My husband was active in the community and whenever he served as President of an organization, I became the gal Friday behind the scenes. He started the Worcester County Poetry Assn, The Age Center of Worcester Area, and The Worcester Forum for the Study of Values.

I was fortunate that I grew up in a family with the work ethic and loved to be working at something. My husband, Sam, was my biggest booster and my best critic. I was also fortunate that I was able to purchase whatever I needed or wanted in my workshop. It was an ego trip when I received a check for my work. When Sam had a severe heart attack in 1977 and had to retire, I learned how different the time in the workshop felt when you knew you needed to sell your work. For most of us, it is a difficult way to make a living while doing what you love.

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Lilyan Bachrach, a veteran enamellist for over fifty years, continues to write about and teach workshops on enameling.

Her beautiful new book, *Contemporary Enameling, Art & Techniques*, is an enlarged and expanded edition of her very successful book, *Enameling with Professionals*. The book discusses techniques and materials for using vitreous enamels and has "how I work" chapters by over 30 enamel artists as well as photographs of the work of over 55 individual enamellists.

To read a review of her book or to order a copy, please [click here](#).

¹Frontpiece, *Enameling with Professionals* by Lilyan Bachrach

²*Enameling with Professionals*, pg. 96

³*Alluring Enamel* by Alan Rosenberg, *Modernism Magazine*, Spring 2003, pg. 68

⁴*Enameling with Professionals*, pg. 59

⁵*Enameling with Professionals*, pg. 63

⁶*Enameling with Professionals*, pg. 33

⁷*Enameling with Professionals*, pg. 33

⁸*Enameling with Professionals*, pg. 120

⁹*Enameling with Professionals*, preface by Woodrow Carpenter

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