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CHABOLLE



A collection of champlevé vases and cups, by Ferdinand Barbedienne

Gilt bronze, polychrome *champlevé* enamel

France

ca. 1865

h. 11–17.5 cm (4.3–6.9 in.); w. 3.5–15.5 cm (1.4–6.1 in.)



A few pieces of this type, most of them dated to the late 1860s, are preserved in the Musée d'Orsay, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: bowls, cups and tripod vases of gilt bronze, decorated on yellow and blue grounds with graceful foliate and floral motifs. The polychromy of these motifs, achieved with coloured and graduated enamels, imitates the hues of leaves and flower petals. The pieces bear, like the present group, the signature of Ferdinand Barbedienne, who founded one of the largest French manufactories of art bronzes with Achille Collas in 1838. At the International Exhibition of 1862 in London [à vérifier], the firm showed a collection of objects, among them a large tripod vase « en métal dont toute la surface est couverte d'arabesques byzantines » ('in metal, its whole surface covered with Byzantine arabesques'), which was « d'un caractère similaire aux enluminures que l'on trouve dans les manuscrits grecs du XIe ou du XIIe siècle » ('similar in character to the illuminations found in Greek manuscripts of the eleventh or twelfth century'; London 1987, p. 112).

Barbedienne appears to have imitated here the cloisonné enamels of China, not those of Byzantium, with which they are easily confused. Cloisonné is not an indigenous Chinese technique but one probably imported from the West in the fourteenth century, under the Yuan dynasty, by way of Byzantium (New York 2011, p. 8). The form of most of the vases discussed here does, indeed, recall Chinese decorative arts: two have a profile inspired by the *gu* 觚, two others by the *touhu* 投壺, and two more may be compared with the *gui* 簋. They were, in all likelihood, made in champlevé, a technique in which the metal is cut away in the shapes to be filled by each graduated tone or tint of enamel, itself obtained by the low-temperature fusion of a mixture of silicate and feldspar. In this process Barbedienne innovated: advances in casting enabled him to mould the cells directly instead of cutting them with the burin. The technique was also practised in

China—under the name *zantai falang* 錾胎琺瑯—and had been so since at least the Tang dynasty (New York 2011, p. 6), albeit to ends other than Barbedienne's (New York 2011, p. 8). In his work, champlevé takes the place of the method known as « cloisons rapportées » ('attached cloisons'; New York 2011, p. 184, n. 18).

LITERATURE

See *Art & Design in Europe and America. 1800-1900*, cat. exp., Londres, 1987 et *Cloisonné. Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties*, cat. exp., New York, 2011.









