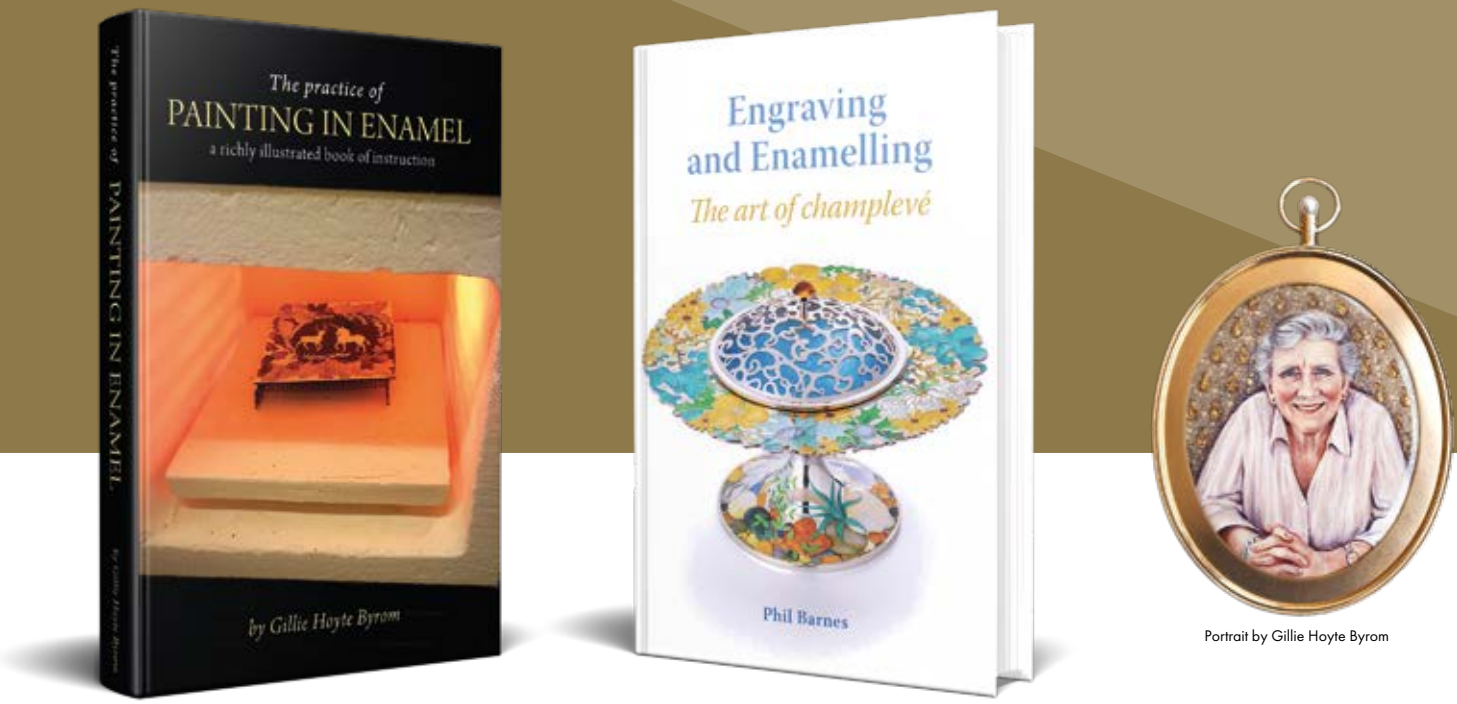
The Art of Enamelling

If our feature on enamelling (p52) has whet your appetite to learn more about the art, two recently published books on the subject should satisfy.



Portrait by Gillie Hoyte Byrom

The Practice of Painting in Enamel
By Gillie Hoyte Byrom
(£45 plus p+p, enamelpainting.co.uk)

Gillie Hoyte Byrom, a member of the British Society of Enamellers, is, in the view of V&A curator Richard Edgcumbe, 'a virtuoso' of vitreous enamel painting, 'a teacher of exemplary clarity'. She's won numerous awards for her work, including several Goldsmiths' Craft & Design Council top prizes, such as the extremely prestigious Jacques Cartier Award.

This richly illustrated book is the only one devoted to her art. After a brief introduction and history of enamel painting, Gillie offers a comprehensive run-down of the practicals – tools, health & safety, materials and setting up of a workshop. In great detail she covers the palette, the two categories of onglaze painting colours and adds her own personal views and preferences, advantages and disadvantages.

With very clear photographs to illustrate, the instructions go on to cover mediums and tools, before looking at the various enamelling techniques. For those interested in taking up this art, the unstinting attention to detail is invaluable; for collectors, enthusiasts, art lovers... it's simply awe-inspiring. The author herself admits that it's 'a difficult and complex subject'. Miniature portraits being her speciality (she's made around 600), Gillie offers in-depth instruction on techniques, before showing beautiful examples of her own work, including incredible advanced portraits.

Engraving and Enamelling – The Art of Champlevé
By Phil Barnes
(£18.99, Crowood Press)

This book offers a further insight into an ancient art by another award-winning master craftsperson. Drawing on his 50 years of experience in enamel work, Barnes gives a background to the history of enamelling before explaining champlevé itself. Literally meaning 'raised field', it involves the creation of a cell, which is then filled with enamel. While there are many ways to make the cells, Barnes creates his by hand-engraving, which adds textures and refracts the light.

Bringing the subject to fascinating life he then goes on to describe one of his pieces in particular (the bowl on the book's cover), starting with design inspiration (a seashore walk in this case) and leading us through the very many processes until it reaches its completion. Step-by-step images take the would-be practitioner through everything from cutting tools to suit different needs (one size definitely doesn't fit all hands) and which tools are used for different effects, to transferring designs, making the first cuts, testing and working with enamels (so very much more complicated than the lay person might imagine) and even how to prepare a quill.

Running throughout, alongside the sequence photos, are images of Barnes' beautiful work – some his own private pieces, some show pieces created for jewellers such as Elizabeth Gage and De Vroomen Design. Inspirational as well as informative.