

## GAGOSIAN

THE CUT

### The Designer Bringing Cloisonné Into the 21st Century

Wendy Goodman

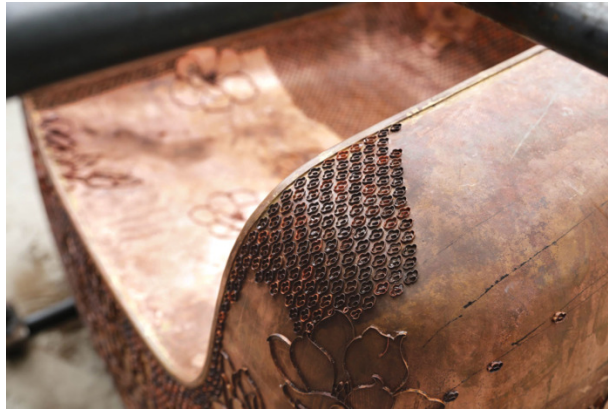


*Cloisonné lounge, 2017. Photo: Xiangzhe Kong/Courtesy Gagosian/© Marc Newson*

There are maybe one or two factories in China that can still do it at this level,” designer Marc Newson says of cloisonné, the ancient technique of inlaying enamel into dainty patterns on metal. Though the style, which originated in the eastern Mediterranean more than 3,000 years ago and spread to China around the 14th century, is traditionally seen on vases, plates, jewelry, and figurines, Newson has borrowed the age-old craft for large-scale updated pieces: the furniture in his new show, opening January 17 at Gagosian’s West 21st Street gallery. After factory scouting in China for the better part of three years, Newson decided that none of the manufacturers he visited would do the trick, so, on Gagosian’s tab, he oversaw the construction of a massive new kiln in a cloisonné factory outside Beijing. It was equipped to accommodate multiple firings of oversize desks, chaises, and chairs.

Newson emerged on the scene in 1986, fresh out of design school, with a galactic-looking metal chaise that would later be finessed into the auction-house-favorite Lockheed Lounge. Although he went on to work with nearly every top brand on the planet — Knoll, Apple, Nike, Hermès, Louis Vuitton — he relishes this project, which reminds him of his early training as a jewelry-maker and silversmith, working in crafts he likens to the intricacies of cloisonné: “Highly decorative, highly labor intensive, highly specific,” he says. But, careful not to forget that he’s technically making furniture, Newson stresses that “the form has to be able to carry the decoration without competing against it.” Though, at the end of the day, he doesn’t seem all that worried: “I mean, I can rest assured that these pieces will not be copied.”

## The Metal Form



*Photo: U-D-I/Courtesy Gagosian/© Marc Newson*

The centuries-old art of cloisonné is a labor-intensive process involving over a dozen steps for just one piece. One of the first steps is creating a pattern on the copper form by applying metal boundaries for the enamel.

## The Floral Pattern



*Photo: U-D-I/Courtesy Gagosian/© Marc Newson*

The patterns Newson has created for the Gagosian show, like this magnolia one, are based on traditional floral motifs but, as he points out, are “completely reinvented.”

## The Kiln Firing



*Photo: U-D-I/Courtesy Gagosian/© Marc Newson*

Each piece is fired six or seven times. The initial firing fuses the metal pattern to the copper form, then the powdered enamel is applied to each different portion and fired multiple times to build up the surface.

## The Finished Piece



*Photo: Xiangzhe Kong/Courtesy Gagosian/© Marc Newson*

The cloisonné technique involves knowing how long each piece should remain in the kiln and gauging the changes in color. Here, a completed piece after what Newson described as “hundreds and hundreds of hours of work.”