

Carpenter



**Enamel
Center**

CEC Newsletter #6 is here!

Spotlight on Josy Trageser:
Artist of Fire, Story, and Imagination

Follow the link in our bio to learn more.



A Life Shaped by Curiosity and Connection

Born and raised in France, Josy Trageser became an energetic presence in the American enameling community throughout the 1980s and 1990s. After settling in the Midwest, she traveled widely, Oxford, Cologne, Fulda, Venice, Palanga, bringing back stories, techniques, and friendships that enriched artists here at home.



Josy Trageser

Her personality, “expansive, curious, humorous, and impossible to confine”, made her a natural connector. Even though she is no longer active in the studio, her writings and artworks from the 1990s continue to illuminate the history of our region’s enameling community.

Oxford: A Voice in an International Conversation



Wadham College

Josy's reflections from her time at Wadham College capture her delight in history, community, and the absurd charm of academic life. On the college, she wrote:

“the traditional square surrounding a central green ... No one seemed to care, we were in Oxford!”

She attended the inaugural dinner alongside June Jason, Nilda Getty, and Vivian Kline; one of several artists representing American enamelists among colleagues from Austria, Denmark, France, Holland, Norway, Spain, and the USSR. Josy's role was collaborative rather than ceremonial; she helped translate, clarify, and connect, ensuring conversations flowed across languages and techniques.

A Rare Pilgrimage: Visiting Sister Lioba Munz



Sister Lioba Munz (Fulda), Enamel Panel



Sister Lioba Munz (Fulda), Enamel Cross

One of Josy's most treasured experiences was her visit to Sister Lioba Munz, the Benedictine artist of Fulda. She recalled:

“When I got the letter with the invitation to visit Sister Lioba Munz ... a long held wish was fulfilled!”

Her description of the St. Michael altar, “an enormous enamel triptych showing St. Michael and angels surrounded by precious gem stones,” reveals her reverence for European enamel traditions and her gift for translating those encounters into vivid stories.



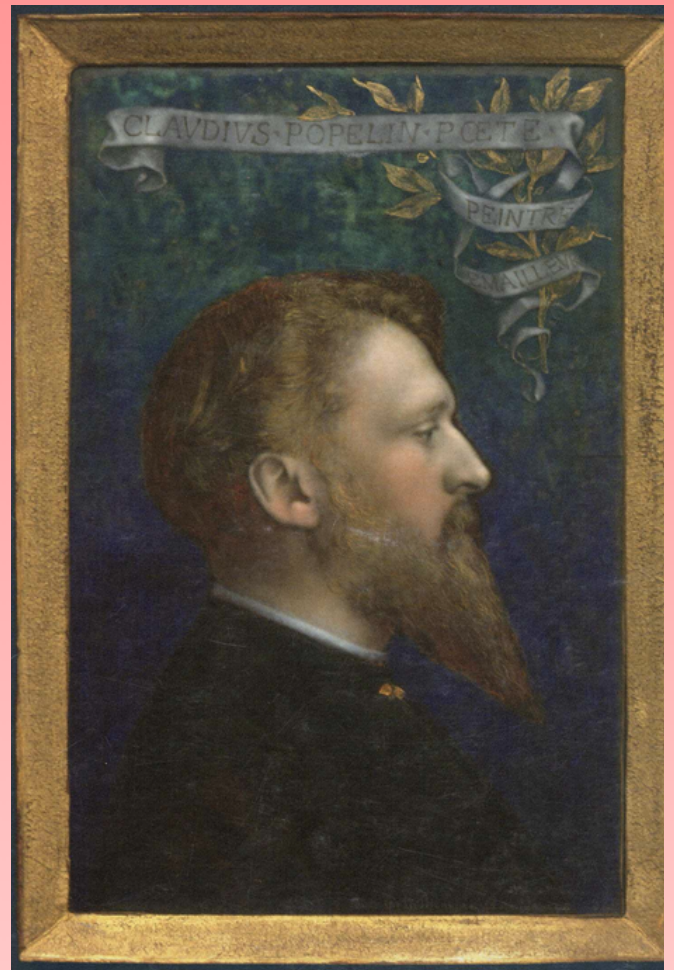
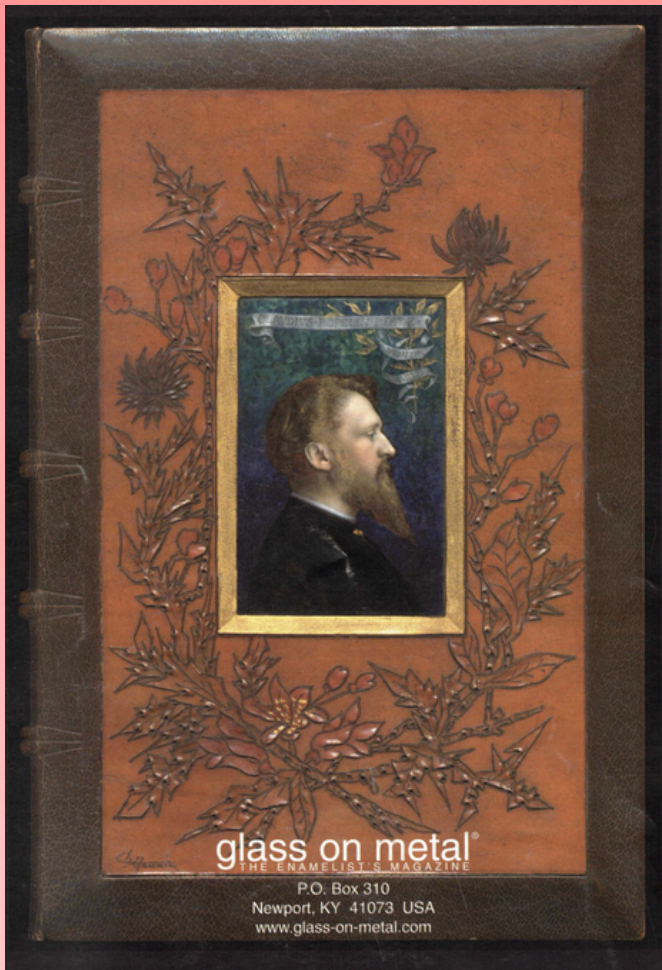
The Connector: Translation, Collaboration & Quiet Leadership

Josy's presence at international conferences was active and hands-on. She translated Alex Raphael's plique-à-jour instructions into French, absorbed demonstrations from Ted Heath, Amal Gosh, Gurevicius, and Valery Kocitchkin, and helped bridge gaps between artists who might otherwise never have met.

During a plique-à-jour class, she made a playful bet with French enamelist Bernard Gonnet: if he completed a full 3½-inch bowl in one day, she'd buy him a glass of Bordeaux. Bernard worked at astonishing speed, even fabricating tiny wire bicycles, but Josy ultimately won the wager and wrote that she now "must go collect a good glass of 'rouge'."

Her role was never about titles. She simply showed up fully, helped where needed, and made people feel welcome; one connector among many who strengthened international ties.

In addition to her conference translation work, Josy also played a key role in preserving enameling history. At Woodrow Carpenter's request, she translated Lucien Falize's 1893 text "Claudius Popelin et la Renaissance des Emaux Peints" into English, making this rare and richly illustrated volume accessible to a wider audience. More about this book appears in a past edition of Glass on Metal.



Claudius Popelin et la Renaissance des Emaux Peints

Josy the Artist: Fire, Glass & Storytelling

Josy's artistic practice from the 1990s reveals her technical curiosity and imaginative reach.



Left

"Anatolya",
Copper Enamel,
3" x 3" x 15"



Right

"Ondine",
Copper Enamel,
3" x 3" x 17"

Sculptural Tubes: Experimentation & Discovery

Her sculptural tube series began in 1993 after helping a student wrap silver wire around an object. She wondered whether the technique might work on copper tubing, and it did. She purchased ten-foot lengths of tubing and began experimenting with:

- custom steel-rod trivets for vertical firing
- a horizontal support designed by Martin Hanson
- variations in flux, firing time, and enamel adhesion

Her first finished tube, Merlin, became a personal talisman during a difficult period.

Color, Texture & Global Inspiration



Left
"Aurora",
Copper Enamel,
7" x 9" x 20"



Right
"Ariel",
Copper Enamel,
3" x 3" x 17"

Josy's tubes pushed technical boundaries. In one piece, Aurora, she applied liquid flux thickly, left bare copper to oxidize, and fired horizontally at over 1560°F.

"Unexpectedly the column was also encrusted with a deep copper blue which I have unsuccessfully attempted to reproduce since," she noted.

Her inspirations are global and eclectic:

- flea markets
- Turkish bazaars
- Venetian and African beads
- carved bone, feathers, plexiglass
- historical art, including the mosaics at Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna

A set of red Murano beads sparked a contemporary homage to the Three Magi, whose dramatic forward motion in the Ravenna mosaics captivated her.



The Letters: Narrative Enamel

Parallel to her sculptural work, Josy developed a long-running series of enamel “letters.” The format emerged in 1989 when a line of liquid flux resembled the flap of an envelope.

She began writing “letters” to family members, then expanded into imagined correspondences between historical figures:

- Rastrelli & Catherine the Great
- Marco Polo & the Doge of Venice
- Diaghilev & Nijinsky
- The Yellow Emperor & Cio Pi
- Contessina & Michelangelo

Her later letters incorporated silks, ribbons, linens, feathers, stones, and tooling copper, intuitive, tactile, and deeply narrative. In La Spezia, Italy, these works unexpectedly stole the show; audiences wanted intimacy and visible messages, and her “play work” became her most beloved.

Community at the Center



Josy Trageser,
Enamel Wall Piece,
CEC Museum,
24" x 15"

Josy believed that the strength of our enameling community came from openness and shared enthusiasm. She quoted Berlin enameler Vera Oswalt: “And now the big enameling family will meet again in Cincinnati!”

Alongside her international work, Josy also taught enameling for several years at Ursuline Academy, where she introduced students to kiln work, color exploration, and the expressive possibilities of glass on metal. Her teaching helped cultivate a new generation of young makers and extended her influence beyond the studio and conference circuit.

Her relationship with Woodrow Carpenter and the Carpenter Foundation reinforced the idea that our region could be both rooted and international; local artists participating in global conversations.



Why Josy Matters



Josy Trageser,
Copper, Gold &
Silver Foil,
Transparent Enamel,
2-1/2" x 1-1/2"



Josy's legacy continues to shape our community. She remains:

- a collaborator who helped strengthen international connections
- a storyteller who preserved encounters that enriched collective memory
- a connector whose humor and humanity made studios feel alive
- a creator whose sculptural tubes and narrative letters expanded the possibilities of enamel

Her impact was relational, intellectual, artistic, and deeply human.



A Closing Reflection

Josy's voice reminds us that enameling is a shared language. Her stories, rooted here yet reaching across continents, capture the joy of learning and the warmth of community.

As she wrote after Oxford: "The thought that we would be together again soon made leaving my family a little easier ... Good show, British Society!"

Her words still resonate—an artist who connected, translated, celebrated, and carried creative spirit into the wider world.



Josy Trageser, Copper Plates, Enamel, 6" in dia x 1/2"