



The Gilder's Studio

Traditional Gilding of Buddhist Art

For Select Pieces and more information on gilding workshops go to www.gildedbuddha.com

Repoussé is a metalworking technique in which a malleable metal is ornamented or shaped by hammering from the reverse side. There are few techniques that offer such diversity of expression while still being relatively economical. Chasing is the opposite technique to repoussé, and the two are used in conjunction to create a finished piece. It is also known as embossing.

While repoussé is used to work on the reverse of the metal to form a raised design on the front, chasing is used to refine the design on the front of the work by sinking the metal. The techniques of repoussé and chasing utilise the plasticity of metal, forming shapes by degrees. There is no loss of metal in the process, as it is stretched locally and the surface remains continuous.

The process is relatively slow, but a maximum of form is achieved, with one continuous surface of sheet metal of essentially the same thickness. Direct contact of the tools used is usually visible in the result, a condition not always apparent in other techniques, where all evidence of the working method is eliminated.

A famous contemporary sculpture created with this technique is the Statue of Liberty in Upper New York Bay. The statue was formed by copper repoussé in sections using wooden structures to shape each piece during the hammering process.

Another example, and one from antiquity, is the death mask of Tutankhamun. The lapis lazuli and other stones were inlaid in chased areas after the height of the form was completed. The majority of the mask was formed using the technique of repoussé from what appears to be a single sheet of gold.

Vaiśravaṇa (Sanskrit वैश्रवण)

or Vessavaṇa (Pāli वेस्सवण, Sinhala වෛශ්‍රවණ) also known as Jambhala, is the name of the chief of the Four Heavenly Kings.



gilded with 24kt pure gold leaf, 23kt red gold (copper), 22kt black gold (manganese), 18kt green gold (silver), 12kt white gold (zinc)

Vaiśravaṇa in the Nalanda tradition of Tibet

In Tibet, Vaiśravaṇa is considered a worldly dharmapāla or protector of the Dharma, a member of the retinue of Ratnasambhava. As guardian of the north, he is often depicted on temple murals outside the main door. He is also thought of as a god of wealth. As such, Vaiśravaṇa is sometimes portrayed carrying a fruit of the jambhara tree, a pun on another name of his, Jambhala (in Tibetan pronunciation Dzambala or Zambala). He is often represented as corpulent and covered with jewels. Tibetan Buddhists consider Jambhala's sentiment regarding wealth to be providing freedom by way of bestowing prosperity, so that one may focus on the path or spirituality rather than on the materiality and temporality of that wealth.

Newari copper repoussé plaque from Patan



Clockwise from top center: wish-fulfilling gem, apsara, dragon, elephant, snowlion, apsara, kirtimukha (*below right*), apsara, tiger, windhorse, garuda, apsara

height 40 cms by 45 cms (15in by 17in)

weight 1.3 kg

Colored gold

While pure gold is yellow in color, gold can also appear to have other colors. These colors are generally obtained by alloying gold with other elements in various proportions. For example, alloys which are mixed 14 parts gold to 10 parts alloy create 14 carat gold, 18 parts gold to 6 parts alloy creates 18 carat, and so on. There are hundreds of possible alloys and mixtures.

White gold is an alloy of gold and at least one white metal, usually nickel or palladium.

The difference between red, rose, and pink gold is the copper content—the higher the copper content, the stronger the red coloration, as pure gold is yellow and pure copper is reddish. A common alloy for rose gold is 75% gold and 25% copper by mass (18kt).

Green gold alloys are made by leaving the copper out of the alloy mixture, and just using gold and silver. It actually appears as a greenish yellow, rather than as green. Eighteen carat green gold would therefore contain a mix of gold 75% and silver 25%.

Vaiśravaṇa in Theravāda tradition

In the Pāli scriptures of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, Vaiśravaṇa is called Vessavaṇa, one of the Cātummahārājāno, or four Great Kings, each of whom rules over a specific direction. Vessavaṇa's realm is the northern quadrant of the world, including the land of Uttarakuru. According to some suttas, he takes his name from a region there called Visāṇa; he also has a city there called Ālakamandā which is a byword for wealth.

Vaiśravaṇa in Japan

In Japan, Bishamonten (毘沙門天), or just Bishamon (毘沙門) is thought of as an armor-clad god of warfare or warriors and a punisher of evildoers – a view that is at odds with the more pacific Buddhist king described above. Bishamon is portrayed holding a spear in one hand and a small pagoda in the other hand, the latter symbolizing the divine treasure house, whose contents he both guards and gives away. In Japanese folklore, he is one of the Japanese Seven Gods of Fortune.

Bishamon is also called Tamonten (多聞天), meaning "listening to many teachings" because he is the guardian of the places where Buddha preaches. He lives half way down the side of Mount Sumeru.

The Kirtimukha or Face of Majesty



The Kirtimukha image is extremely popular with Indian, Nepali and Tibetan craftsmen. Its serpent devouring form frequently crowns doorways and shrine arches or toranas on stupas and temples. Seen over many entrances Kirtimukhas represent the whole realm of the world and its consumption of itself, opening the portal of transcendence.



This sacred and immensely powerful plaque is one of a series. Others include Shakyamuni, Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, Tara, Padmasambhava, the Wheel of Life and Astrological and meditational symbols.

Other plaques in copper repousse are Astamangala, the 8 Auspicious Symbols, in various different sizes (usually circular, ornamentation either for the inside and outside of buildings) as well as large and small individual plaques of the windhorse, garuda, elephant, snow-lion, kirtimukha and makhara.

Unique and special orders are by commission and all gilding is now completed without mercury or lead, this being the traditional method achieving the most beautiful results for these and other sacred objects.

and more repoussé...



Martin gilding a part of the main crown (called Hti in Burmese) made in copper repousse and installed on top of the Gilded Pagoda, International Meditation Centre, Sunshine, NSW, Australia