The exhibition “Polished to Perfection” presents approximately 150 works of Japanese cloisonné from the years 1880–1910, the period often known as the “golden age” of cloisonné art in Japan. On show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the exhibition presents a selection of pieces from the private collection of Donald K. Greer and Susan E. Sherry, curated by Robert Singer, head of LACMA’s Japanese Art department. Built over the course of more than four decades, this collection contains works crafted by the most accomplished Japanese cloisonné masters of the time, including Namikawa Yasuyuki (1846–1927), Namikawa Sinsuke (1847–1919), Hayashi Kodenji (1831–1915), and Kawade Shibataro (1856–1911).

The artists represented in this exhibition raised the art of cloisonné enamel to a level of unparalleled technical and artistic perfection. The 1880s marked the beginning of a renaissance in Japanese cloisonné production. Though small objects incorporating enamels were produced in Japan prior to the nineteenth century, a new generation of artisans developed techniques that enabled the creation of three-dimensional vessels, greater flexibility in surface design and a number of different enamelling styles. During the “golden age” of Japanese cloisonné production, intricate decorations, sophisticated use of colour, expanding varieties of form and flawless surface finishes became the hallmarks of Japanese cloisonné works.
La perfecció del cloisonné japonès al LACMA

Els artistes que trobem representats en aquesta exposició van elevar l’art de l’esmalt cloisonné a un grau de perfecció tècnica i artística sense precedents. La dècada de 1830 va marcar l’inici d’un renaixement en la producció del cloisonné japonès. Si bé ja abans del segle XIX es produïen al Japó petits objectes que incorporaven esmalts, en aquest període va sorgir una nova generació d’artesans que van desenvolupar tècniques que permetien la creació de recipients de tres dimensions, una major flexibilitat en el disseny de les superfícies i certa diversitat en els estils d’esmaltat. En aquests anys de l’“edat d’or” de la producció del cloisonné japonès, els trets distintius dels objectes resultant d’aquesta tècnica van ser unes decoracions intricades, un ús sofisticat del color, una diversitat...
Japanese cloisonné works were made through a painstaking process that involved setting fine metal ribbons less than two millimetres wide on edge on a copper core, following the lines of a drawing. The compartments between the strips were then filled in with enamel paste of each chosen colour, a job that was often done by little boys using minute steel chopsticks. The piece was then fired in the kiln, fanned to cool down, and finally polished over and over until the work was considered finished—a process that could take months for each piece. Not surprisingly, these cloisonné pieces were luxury items in their time, and still fetch staggering prices at auctions today.

The exhibition “Polished to Perfection” is also the result of a series of coincidences, all converging on the city of Los Angeles. One of the leading collectors of Japanese cloisonné in the Western world, Donald K. Gruber, lives in Los Angeles. Also, the local museum of this city happens to have the only dedicated pavilion for Japanese art outside of Japan. And if so happens that curator Robert Singer has maintained a residence on the Kyoto estate of the renowned cloisonné artist Namikawa Yasuyuki for forty-four years, thus becoming an intimate connoisseur of this art and its history. The exhibition is on show at LACMA until 4 February 2018.