

SGRAFFITO

This is a technique where you apply a decorating slip which is a different colour to your clay to the surface of the leather-hard form with a soft brush. Never apply decorating slip to dry clay. Use a white or black slip over terracotta clay or terracotta clay over white clay. Once the moisture sheen has dried off the decorating slip it is ready to carve. Use a wire loop sgraffito tool to cut through the decorating slip and reveal the clay colour underneath. The sgraffito carving could be as fine or as wide a line/area as you need. This technique is one of the oldest and most simple decorating techniques – it is used to best effect in Greek figure vases. You might like to visit the Potter Institute (gallery) at Melbourne University near the corner of Elgin and Swanston Streets, Carlton and see the amazing collection of Greek antiquities permanently on show to the public.

TRANSPARENT COLOURED GLAZES

These are most effective on textured clay because they pool (collect) in the recessed areas, and create a darker coloured effect in the texture. This accentuates the texture, and can be used to decorative effect. Common transparent pooling glazes are for the earthenware temperature range (1100°C). The best effect is when a pottery item is dipped into a bucket of glaze, rather than brushed on.

OXIDE STAINING

This technique is applied to bisque fired textured pieces of pottery. A mixture of oxide or carbonate, and water is applied to the piece with a brush or sponge – take care to apply the colorant to the recessed areas as well as the high areas. Once the piece is covered in colourant, take a moist, clean sponge and remove the excess oxide from areas where it is not required. This will leave a staining effect over the piece so that it is tinted (but not covered) in a layer of colourant. The most common materials to use for this are: iron oxide, manganese dioxide, and copper and cobalt oxides. (See *Tip Sheet #8*)

LIQUID UNDERGLAZES

These are the closest products to paints used by a painter. They are pottery materials though, and must be fired in a kiln. Underglazes are excellent for creating detailed, painterly images and effects. They allow the potter complete control over the creation of decoration through blending colours, manipulating space and surface etc. similar to a painter. This is possible because underglazes do not melt and become fluid like glazes, they hold their form. They can be made glossy by the application of a clear glaze over the top of the underglaze. (See *Tip Sheet #12*)

UNDERGLAZE SCRIBBLER

This is another form of underglaze decoration applied with a special applicator. The scribbler gives fine line decoration which is difficult to achieve with a brush. Confidence is the key to using a scribbler – you must work quickly to achieve a fluid line. As with all other underglazes, scribbler decoration is usually covered with clear glaze.

CRAZING IN GLAZES

This occurs when there is a mismatch between the expansion and contraction of the glaze layer and the clay body underneath. Crazing can be developed as a decorative feature - highly prized by oriental potters. Crazing in a glaze can be accentuated by staining the crazing once the piece comes out of the kiln. This involves rubbing a mixture of Indian ink (for black crazing) or very strong tea (for brown crazing) into the crazing marks while the pot is still warm.

CRAWLING IN GLAZES

This occurs when there is a mismatch between the thermal expansion and contraction (the fit of the glaze to the clay body) in a piece of pottery causing the glaze to 'bead up'. This effect is called crawling, and often described as 'orange peel' texture. Crawling can be controlled to create quite decorative and predictable effects. One of the most common crawling glazes is the oriental 'Shino' glaze.

LUSTRE

This is a metallic solution applied in liquid form to an already glazed and fired piece of pottery. Lustres come in many colours, the most popular being gold. Lustres are fired at the third firing stage (800°C) and can be applied at the same stage as decals and onglaze colours. Marbleizing is a common way of creating decorative effects with lustre over large areas. (See *Tip Sheet #21*)

ONGLAZES & DECALS

They are low temperature colours applied to pottery items at the third firing stage (800°C). They can be painted, sprayed or printed onto glazed ceramic surfaces to create brilliantly coloured finishes that may be difficult to achieve at high temperature. A decal is simply onglaze which has been screen printed onto water-slide (transfer) paper to create repeat images for production. (See *Tip Sheet #22*)

MAIOLICA/MAJOLICA

This is a technique involving making oxides, stains or underglaze powders into a liquid decorating mixture which is painted onto an unfired white (tin based) earthenware glaze. Once the glaze (and decoration) is fired, the two will become one integrated surface – the decoration melted into the glaze. This is why maiolica/majolica is often called inglaze decoration. (See *Tip Sheet #10*)

DRY GLAZES

These glazes are high in clay, and very 'dry' rather than glossy in appearance. They are generally only used on sculptural work because, as a surface, they do not wear well or clean easily i.e. in tableware applications. Dry glazes are not far removed from the decorative product, slip, which is entirely made up of clay with a little water. Dry glazes are best applied very thinly, and often give differing results depending on the thickness of the glaze and the colourant used in the glaze. A dry glazed surface is traditionally very rough and abrasive.

PIERCING

This technique is very old, and easy to achieve if done at the correct drying stage process. The

leather-hard stage is the best time to pierce – the clay is firm enough to hold its shape, and soft enough to puncture without cracking. A variety of tools can be used to pierce – hole cutters, needle tools, wire drills, scalpel knives etc. Piercing is most effective when used on very fine rather than course clay. Always sponge the form after piercing to remove 'dags' of clay that remain after the process.

RESIST AND MASKING

A variety of resist or masking products can be used in ceramics in order to create designs. One of the most common products is latex resist – a removable liquid resist material which can be applied when underglazing, oxidizing or glazing to create blank areas of no colour (masked areas). Hot wax is another material which can be used for the same purpose but, unfortunately, it is not easily removed. It must be burnt out in the kiln. Textural resisting/masking can be done on raw clay with a liquid shellac mixture. Once this is dry, a moist sponge can be used to slowly wash away the unfired clay around the shellac so that a relief area (shellacked) remains. The shellac is then burnt out in the kiln.

SLIP TRAILING

A thick coloured decorating slip is prepared (not a casting slip) which is applied to a raw, moist pottery body. It is critically important that slip trailing is done onto a moist body because the pot and the decoration must shrink at the same rate. A special slip trailer (a rubber or brush ball with a nib) can be used to apply the decorating slip. A coat of clear gloss glaze covers most slip decoration. (See *Tip Sheet #4*)

IMPRESSING

This can be achieved on moist clay with a wide variety of natural 'tools' (leaves, seed pods etc.), made objects (toys, rubber stamps, kitchen utensils etc.) and purpose-designed stamps in plaster and bisque fired clay. Purpose designed stamps can be made by creating 'fingers' of clay, allowing them to firm up to leather-hard stage, and then carving impressions in them. They are then fired to bisque temperature to make them permanent. (See *Tip Sheet #23*)

INCISING & CARVING

These are best done at the leather hard stage with appropriate tools such as lino carving tools, wire loop tools, needle tools, sgraffito tools etc. Fine clay will give better effects and finer details than can be achieved with coarse clays. (See *Tip Sheet #23*)

MODELLING

Building up a relief surface in pottery is called modelling. This is best done when clay is moist rather than leather hard. Ideally, the base clay form and the modelled addition should be of the same moisture content to ensure a good bond. A thick joining slip and scoring will help join the two together.

PRINTING

The process of screenprinting on clay is similar to other surfaces except for the type of ink used. Ceramic screen printing inks can be made by mixing underglazes/stains/oxides with medium for application to raw or bisqued surfaces prior to glazing. Onglazes can be mixed with medium to print onto glossy glazed and fired surfaces. A flocked lino block can also be printed using a stain/underglaze/oxide ink onto raw/bisqued clay provided the image is covered with clear glaze. (See *Tip Sheet #16*)

SPRIGGING

This involves using a small relief plaster or bisque fired clay mould into which moist clay is pressed or cast. The resulting relief 'slab' is removed and attached to a clay object (with a flat surface) with joining slip. It is critically important that the clay for the sprigg is the same as that used to make the supporting item of pottery. This will ensure even shrinkage, and no cracking or separating. The ultimate example of this technique is Wedgwood pottery where the company uses spriggs of one colour and applies them to vessels/plates of a different coloured clay.

SPRAYING/AIRBRUSHING

This is a technique which involves using a spray gun, atomizer or airbrush to apply a thin mixture of oxide/underglaze/stain to raw, bisqued or glazed surfaces to vary oven or graduated colour effects. Spraying is also ideally used with resist materials such as latex, paper stencils or wax.

TEXTURING

This is without doubt the simplest decorating technique. All manner of tools or found objects can be used to scratch, gouge, scour, pick, score etc. into moist to leather-hard to dry clay surfaces. Texturing then provides an ideal surface for breaking glazes, oxide staining and sprayed colorants due to its strong texture.