

**NORTHCOTE POTTERY SUPPLIES**  
**TECHNICAL TIPS AND PRODUCT INFORMATION #25**

## **DECORATING TECHNIQUES FOR POTTERY 1**

**SGRAFFITO.** Apply a decorating slip which is not the same colour as your clay to the surface of the leather-hard form with a soft brush. Never apply decorating slip to dry clay. Try using 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** are most effective on textured clay because they will pool (collect) in the recessed areas, and create a darker coloured effect in the texture. This helps to accentuate the texture, and can be used to decorative effect. The most commonly available transparent pooling glazes are for the earthenware temperature range (1100°C). They give the best effect when a pottery item is dipped into a bucket of the glaze, rather than being brushed on.

**OXIDE STAINING.** This technique is applied to bisque fired textured pieces of pottery. A mixture of oxide/carbonate and water is applied to the piece with a brush or sponge – taking care to apply the colorant to the recessed areas as well as the high areas. Once the piece has been covered in colourant, take a moist, clean sponge and remove the excess oxide from any 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 materials are the closest products to the paints that a painter would use. 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 just like a painter would. This is possible because underglazes do not melt and become fluid like glazes, so 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** 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** 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, and was highly prized by oriental potters. Crazing in a glaze can be accentuated by staining the crazing the moment 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** 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 which causes the glaze to 'bead up'. This effect is called crawling, and is 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** 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 and DECALS.** These low temperature colours are applied to pottery items at the third firing stage (800°C). They can be painted, sprayed or printed onto already 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 technique involves 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*