

Ceramic Glazes and Underglazes

Johanna DeMaine: Creating Bright Textured Surfaces with Raised Enamels, Lusters and a Sandblaster

Paul Lewing • February 13, 2013 • Read Comments (6)



China painting is a form of ceramics decorating that really opens up the world of clay for those who are interested in painterly surfaces because it is more similar to painting than any other ceramic decorating technique. It's no surprise, then, that many china painters have backgrounds in oil painting or water colors.

*Enamels are a close relative to china paints in that they are also an overglaze decorating technique, but they have more body and leave a raised design. Today, Paul Lewing, author of *China Paint and Overglaze*, and star of **New Directions in China Painting** (on special now in the CAD bookstore!), profiles raised enamel expert Johanna DeMaine and explains her raised enamel technique. Perhaps it will help open new pottery decorating doors for you! – Jennifer Harnetty, editor.*

Australian potter Johanna DeMaine feels she came to clay by default. Early on, a teacher ridiculed her artwork, leaving her feeling she was not artistic. She eventually earned a Graduate Diploma in Visual Arts from Monash University, an M.F.A. and a B.Ed from Queensland University of Technology, and a B.A. in Computer Based Art and Design from University of the Sunshine Coast. In addition, she received a Churchill Fellowship in 2001 to study workplace health and safety issues in Europe and the UK.



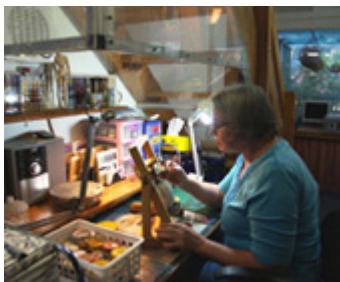
Currently DeMaine's work is thrown using Southern Ice Porcelain, bisqued to 1868°F (1020°C) in an electric kiln, and glaze fired to 2336°F (1280°C) in a gas kiln, with clear or celadon glaze. All of her decoration is done after the glaze firing, using luster, raised enamels and a sandblaster.

The work these days follows three distinct paths. The first involves layers of lusters, with firing between layers. The designs are first drawn with an overhead projector pen, then covered with black luster resist applied with a tjanting (a tool usually used to apply wax to cloth for batik). She then applies lusters using a 3/8" short squirrel shader brush. Each piece may be fired 10 to 15 times to 1472°F (800°C).

In her second body of work, she fires on clear glaze, then luster. She sandblasts patterns into the fired mother-of-pearl luster, then applies gold luster and raised enamel areas. She uses a Roland 15-inch Stika vinyl cutter to apply patterns generated on her computer.

Her most recent pieces involve the vinyl cutter as well, but in these she sandblasts patterns into the bisque, covers that with a celadon to emphasize the texture, and embellishes areas with gold luster and enamel dots.

Raised Enamel Process



Johanna DeMaine with a pot on her easel, working in her well-vented studio.

Though fired to the same temperatures (about 1472°F/800°C), raised enamels differ from china paints in that they have more body and leave a raised line. They are a mixture of low-fire frit, clay and tin oxide. While china paint suppliers carry them premixed, DeMaine prefers to make her own.



When the enamel is exactly the right consistency, it will “string” from the end of the tool.

She prepares enamel and flux in batches of about 20 grams and mixes those with china paint to achieve the primary and secondary colors as well as black and white. When she is ready to apply it, she mixes this powder with a medium.

Traditional china painters use turpentine, but DeMaine uses a mixture of gum tragacanth and glycerin. The enamel must be exactly the right consistency to “string”, or flow off the tool without running. If it is too thin, it will flatten out; too thick and it will leave raised sharp points. Enamel is not brushed on; it’s dribbled in dots or lines. Johanna uses a stylus to precisely apply her dots of enamel. If applied in too large a solid area, the enamel will pinhole. To remove unwanted enamel before firing, she dries it with a hair dryer and scrapes it off.

Potter in the Golden Land



While at a loss to point out unique Australian qualities in her work, Johanna cannot imagine its being made anywhere but “the Golden Land.” She has thought of Australia, with its brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies, in these terms since she arrived at age six from grey, wet, Netherlands.

Symbols such as spirals (chaos to harmony), triangles (male/female), butterflies (rebirth), and mountains (eternity and her beloved Glasshouse Mountains) play a large role in DeMaine’s work. Lusters denote opulence, elevating the work from the everyday, and reflecting the viewer back to himself. Her Churchill Fellowship research makes her respect the lusters enough to always use them with a respirator and fume booth.

To see more of Johanna’s work, visit <http://johanna.demaine.org>.

Paul Lewing is a tile artist in Seattle, Washington, and the author of *China Paint and Overglaze and star of New Directions in China Painting*.