



Making Marks

Robin Hopper

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Making Marks is about ceramic surface enrichment, the processes used for achieving it, and the thought concepts, idea development and personal research behind it. "Making marks" is a generalized term used through the visual arts when referring to the alteration of any surface by any of the tools that artists employ. In using this term for the title of this book, Hopper is referring to the huge variety of marks that may be achieved through ceramic decoration processes, at any or all of the varied and various stages that the clay object goes through in its transformation from soft, wet, malleable clay to heat-hardened, impermeable ceramic.

In Part I the fundamentals are covered. Before decoration is done, the stages at which the specific process might be done also have to be considered. Will it be done on wet, leather-hard, bone dry or bisque-fired clay, or as an underglaze or even in or after the glaze firing? There are decorative processes for any stage in the cycle. The surface of a ceramic object can be altered at any time, even hundreds or thousands of years after the object was originally made.

While you can visually enhance or destroy a form by what you do to the surface, managing it and getting it to work with the form is an art. For those who have basic training in art and design, the first section may be redundant. For those who don't, the first five chapters provide a short, basic, art school primer.

Part 2 begins coverage of surface techniques working with plastic and liquid clay processes. The chapters here deal with the process of decoration using graphic tools such as knives, sticks, scalpels, fluting, modeling, sgraffito, expanded spring wires and twisted cutting wires. It then looks at additive and subtractive approaches to surface enrichment, including texture, sprigs, modeling, handbuilding, slip-soaked fibers and washed wax or shellac resist. Additional techniques concern themselves with stamps, terra sigs, texture impressions, Mishima, Hakeme and Onda styles, and colored claywork utilizing Egyptian paste, agateware, neriage, and nerikomi.

In Part 3, Hopper delves into pigment processes. Pigments play a large part in surface decoration, and Hopper covers it thoroughly with chapters on the variables of ceramic colorants and basic suggestions for their use and development, mixing and applications. He then looks at brushes (and sponges) as expressive graphic tools, their various types, the marks they make and their use with pigments. As part of his discussion on pigment processes, he also covers various resists (wax, latex, rubber, petroleum jelly, crayons, candles, etc.) as well as using underglaze pencils pastels, pens and trailers of different types. The section is rounded out with an exploration of spraying, from the simplest spattering of the toothbrush to the complexity of the airbrush.

Most of us think of glazing first when we think of surfaces, and Hopper covers this critical area in depth as well in Part 4. The various processes of glaze application are shown in this extensive chapter, including brushing, dipping, double dipping, pouring, spraying, trailing, multiple glaze application and glaze intaglio. In the final part, Hopper discusses firing and post-firing processes that affect the surface. The effect that various types of firing have on both body and glaze are looked at from the inert atmosphere of the electric kiln through primitive firing, general reduction and post-firing reduction to the flame markings and fluid glaze of wood firing. Other detailed information is also included on salt and soda firing; altering the fired surface in the bisque or glaze state with sandblasting, cutting and acid etching; and taking work through multiple firings to add decals, lusters, china paints and overglaze enamels.

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