

GIVE AND TAKE: USING SLIP TECHNIQUES ON THE SURFACE

by Anna Calluori Holcombe

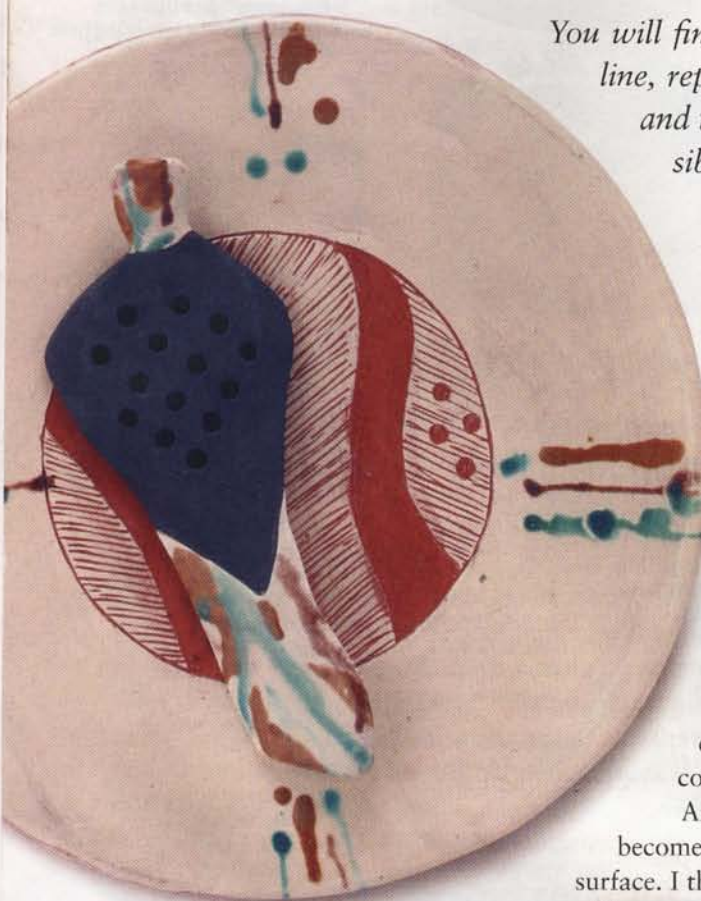
You will find that slip lends itself to an active surface by holding a line, repeating a pattern and filling in areas with color. The clay and the surface come together in an exciting way, and the possibilities and combinations are endless.

In order to learn and progress in a new surface technique, don't invest a great deal of time in each piece, but rather make many pieces, exploring simple building techniques and focusing on the decorated surface.

Decorative slips and engobes are liquid clays formulated to be applied at a particular stage of dryness, whether it be greenware, leather hard or bisque. In his book *Ceramics: Mastering the Craft*, Richard Zakin defines both slips and engobes as having high clay content—engobes 20–50% clay and slips with over 50%. Both need to be of the same firing range and similar shrinkage rates to the clay being used in order to ensure that they will not crack off. Working at this stage allows carving and manipulation of the clay surface. I add oxides and stains to a base slip to achieve colors in an unlimited range. The full color and richness of the slips become evident after they are covered with a clear glaze and fired, although areas can be left unglazed for muted colors and/or a matt surface.

After making a slab, I drape it on a cloth-covered plate. Once it becomes leather hard, I finish it off by trimming the edge and smoothing the surface. I then take an image from my sketchbook and transfer it with a lightly carved line onto the surface.

"Tondo LXXIV," 15 inches (38 centimeters) in diameter, earthenware with low-fire slips and glazes, 2003.



Mishima



Carve lines in the clay with a fine loop tool (wider than a pin tool, yet not too wide and not too deep). Push slip into lines with a full brush, filling all the lines.

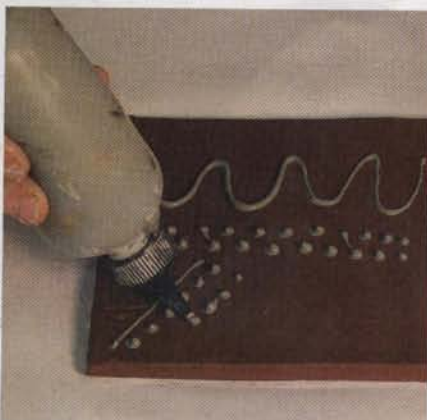


I allow the slip to set until the shine is gone, then I use a sharp, flat tool to scrape away the excess slip, being careful not to go deeper than the clay surface.



Finished example using the Mishima technique. The earthenware tile, fired to Cone 04, illustrates the contrast between the slip and the clay body.

Slip Trailing



Using a soft bottle with a small opening, I squeeze gently and consistently while dragging on the clay surface.



Working on newspaper until the flow is consistent is good practice. Try making lines and dots of various weights and shapes.



After firing, the slip will remain raised. Glazes will break over the texture and pool between the lines.

Painting



I draw a design and paint with a charged brush in one direction.



Let set until the shine is gone. Apply a second coat, brushing in the opposite direction.



Loop tools can be used to define and clean up edges when using this technique.

Anna Calluori Holcombe is professor of art at Kansas State University. She can be reached by e-mail: ach@ksu.edu.

I use the following techniques interchangeably:

sgraffito—applying the slip then scratching through to the clay, which lends itself to linear and repeat patterns.

mishima—carving lines, then applying slip. Let set and then scrape down to the clay surface, leaving the slip in the lines, thus achieving a thin graphic line like an etching.

slip trailing—squeezing slip out of a nozzled container, such as a soft plastic bottle, which leaves a raised line or pattern.

painting—applying slip with a brush, which works well for broad areas and beneath slip trailing.

These techniques are best used while the clay is leather hard. Each produces a different visual effect and experimentation will prove what is best for your work. It is important that there is a contrast or color difference between the clay and the slips in order for these to work visually. In most cases, the slip should be the consistency of sour cream or yogurt. Slips are opaque, but can be watered down for painting. More water can be added for a watercolor effect. In my opinion, it is best to work starting with the lightest color and progressing through the range to the darker ones. When applying the slip, avoid brushing back and forth over the same area because the clay starts to come through the slip. Apply a couple of coats and allow the slip to dry in between. Be sure the brush is full of slip when painting. An inexpensive bamboo brush or other soft-bristled brush is recommended.

Pinnell's Best Clear Cone 04–03

Gerstley Borate (or substitute)	4.4%
Spodumene	29.4
Frit 3289 (Ferro)	36.8
Kaolin	29.4
	<u>100.0%</u>

Kendall's Slip Cone 06 and higher

Frit 3124 (Ferro).....	20.47%
EPK (Edgar Plastic Kaolin)	28.40
Ball Clay	28.40
Silica (Flint).....	22.73
	<u>100.0%</u>

Add: Zircopax

For use on leather-hard clay. Stains, as well as oxides such as cobalt, copper, etc., can be added for color.

Experimentation will be necessary to achieve the color and intensity desired. I have been as casual as adding 1 teaspoon to 8 ounces of slip and as precise as running a test with 1–10% of colorant to 100 grams of base.

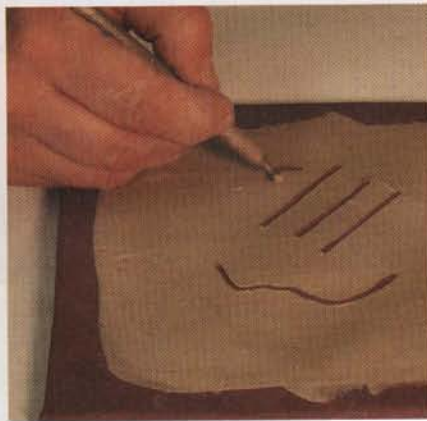


"Assiete XV," 8 inches (20 centimeters) in diameter, earthenware with low-fire slips and glazes, 2003.

Sgraffito



Apply one coat with a charged brush, let set until the shine is gone, apply second coat in opposite direction.



Once the slip is matt and set, I use a loop tool to scrape away the layer of slip, exposing the clay beneath.



Sgraffito is typically used for distinct, graphic or linear designs. The slip will contrast with the clay.

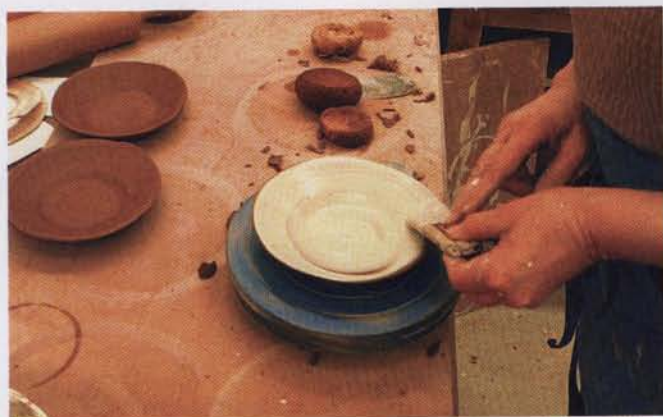
LOW-FIRE SURFACE DECORATION

by Gail Kendall

In my work I want to counter the tendency low-fire gloss glazes have to look like plastic or patent leather. Even though the surface is shiny, the transparency of glaze allows one to see through the layers and down to the red-brown clay and black stain. Even the brushstrokes, which sometimes show in certain glaze combinations, add to this feeling of depth.

Back in the 1960s, only the low-fire process afforded access to a broad range of saturated colors. With various encapsulated stains that have come onto the market in recent years, a whole range of reds and oranges have become reliable at high temperatures. I still work with low-temperature materials for philosophical reasons as much as anything else. My goal is to align my work aesthetically to its peasant-ware ancestors from Europe and Great Britain.

One of the aspects of peasant pots that I love is the casualness of construction and glazing that is common to the finished object. Village potters collecting scant remuneration for their labors could not invest huge amounts of time in their work. It's likely that more basic and less controlled firing technologies also contributed drips, splatters, blurring and other variations that add to the overall feeling of freedom that I admire.



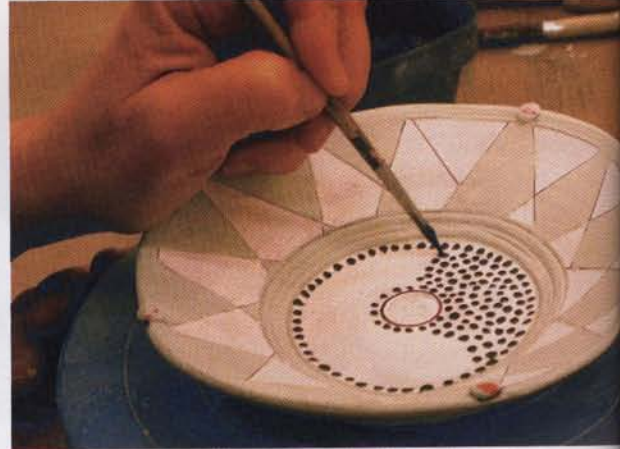
Greenware is painted with White Slip. I use brushes with either coarse or soft bristles, for the desired surface texture. Small areas missed are allowed to remain.



I draw through the slip on the surface. I use a sharp knife to trace through the slip to create the shape of an edge, or create a design or texture.



I also may use sgraffito techniques to texture areas with a stick or pencil, or draw other patterns onto the surface revealing the red clay under the slip.



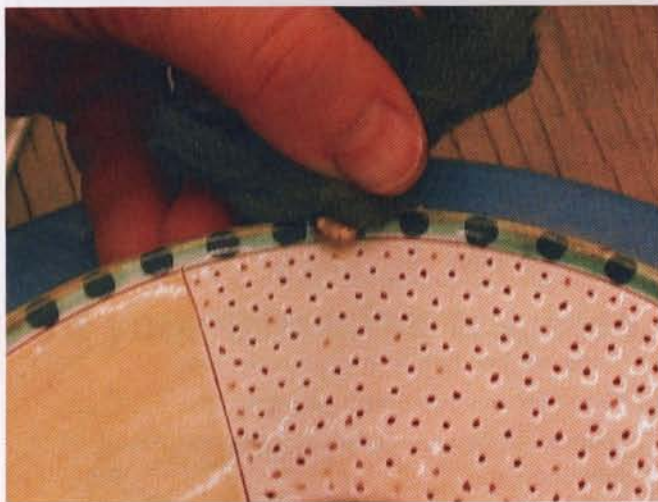
After bisque firing to Cone 03, black underglaze is applied to the surface, then washed off. I let the piece dry thoroughly and then begin applying fields of small, black underglaze dots.



I apply four or five coats of Gerstley Borate Base Glaze in the remaining unglazed areas. I enjoy the subtlety of commercial gloss next to my own gloss glazes, which have a softer appearance. I then fire these pieces to Cone 03.



After the work comes out of the glaze firing, I may add some 24K burnished gold luster to handles, small buttons of clay, or other details. This luster is formulated with small amounts of yellow ochre that rises to the surface during the final firing to Cone 017.



The luster is then burnished with extra fine steel wool to reveal the beautiful shine of 24K gold.



Finished plates, approximately 8 inches (20 centimeters) in diameter, with glazes and luster, fired to Cone 03.

The final appearance of any pot is affected by every stage of the creation process, beginning with forming. I allow joins, scrapes, scratches and other imperfections resulting from handbuilding to remain on the surface of the finished greenware.

Prior to the bisque firing, I carefully brush or smooth away the little bits of piled up slip that accrue on the surface due to the sgraffito techniques. Tiny bits of slip, if allowed to remain through all the firings, can become sharp enough to cut or scratch the user.

Once the pot is bisque fired to Cone 03, I paint the entire surface with a black underglaze—watered down as much as possible but still opaque when applied. After it dries briefly, I wash it off with clean water and a sponge, retaining the black in the recessed details.

I always use a food safe commercial clear glaze on the interior of all soup tureens and teapots, or any other form that may hold liquid. Fashionable or not, I am pleased with my work when it displays a lustrous gloss of just the right thickness and juiciness.