

A Pot, A Drawing

by Molly Hatch

I have always been interested in drawing. As an undergraduate, I focused on drawing for the majority of my time in school. It wasn't until my final year that I was shown surface decoration techniques for clay that are similar to printmaking and drawing processes. It was this marriage of drawing and clay that has driven the development of my current work.

There's something magical in the ability to interpret what I see through my hands. I think of drawing as a visual language similar to writing; both can be communication tools. I am often surprised by the small narratives that appear in the patterns I draw on the surfaces of my pots. Each bird has its own distinct personality and expression A moth will buzz around a peony. The patterns I draw are always my interpretation and representation of an already existing pattern. I sometimes combine elements of different patterns, in turn creating new patterns. I play with the scale of the pattern on the pot. How the pot frames the image often dictates the pattern itself.

I spend a large amount of time looking at historic fabrics as source material and I'm always collecting new patterns to add to my repertoire. I pull out new patterns when I need a challenge and I draw the pattern on paper a few times to familiarize myself with it before experimenting on my pots. I use porcelain for my work for its durability and translucence. I love the similarity of pure white porcelain to a blank piece of paper. My forms are



Finch Cup with Baroque Frame, 13 inches (33 cm) in width.

inspired by contemporary product design, 18th century European factory ceramics as well as the English ceramics of the Leach/Cardew studio tradition.

Throwing a Blank Canvas

When I'm throwing, I think of the pots and their forms as that blank piece of paper. I strive to keep my forms simple, quiet, and uncomplicated. This simplicity allows the drawing to become the major focus of each pot, rather than a competition between form and surface.

The simplest and most popular pot I make is a tumbler form that I refer to as a beaker. I use about a pound of



1 When throwing, use the crook of your finger to shape the lip of a tumbler.



2 Laminated paper template of drawing can help maintain consistency in a design when transferring images to a set.



3 Gently wrap the laminated pattern around the cup and use a quill or pencil to trace the image.



4 Remove the template to reveal the transferred tracing image now impressed into the clay.



5 Use the transferred image as a guide for drawing deeper lines into the surface.



6 Finish off the rest of the drawing freehand, using the template as a visual reference.

clay to make the beakers pictured in this article. When throwing, I use very few tools other than my hands. I use the crook of my forefinger and middle finger to shape the lips of my pots. When I do use tools, my favorite rib is a square rib fashioned after a Michael Cardew design and made for me by my husband who is a woodworker (*figure 1*). I'm careful to use the rib as little as possible because I enjoy the pots much more when there's evidence of my hand in them. When I'm trimming, I usually use a bat dampened slightly with a sponge. I tap the pot I'm trimming on center and then, using the slightly damp surface of the bat, I apply pressure to the base of the

pot, which creates a slight suction and secures the pot to wheel for trimming. When using this trimming technique, it helps to keep one hand on the pot at all times to catch it in the event that the suction gives way.

Image Transfer

Mishima is a traditional Korean slip-inlay technique. The Korean pots you see with mishima decoration typically use several colors of slip inlaid into the same piece. I basically use the same black slip recipe for all of my mishima drawing. I always refer to a pattern when I'm drawing on my pots and sometimes use a template to



7 Apply a layer of stained slip over the drawing using a wide brush.



8 Wipe the excess slip from the surface of the pot using a clean sponge.



9 Use a vitreous engobe mixed with a brushing medium to create color accents.



10 Though it fluxes a bit at higher temperatures, the engobe can be used to fill in color areas on the bottom.



Tumbler, 5³/₄ inches (15 cm) in height, porcelain, mishima slip inlay, vitreous engobe, fired to cone 6.

transfer a detail of the pattern (*figure 2*). In this case, I am using the template to transfer the bird in the pattern onto the cup surface. I make my templates by laminating my own drawing of a found pattern. This is helpful if you are trying to make multiples, but still requires a lot of drawing and interpretation because you're drawing on a three-dimensional surface.

Inlaying the Color

All of my mishima is done when the pots are a firm leather hard. Usually they are ready to draw on just after trimming is finished. To follow this technique, start

Drawing Tools

There are many tools you can use to incise the surface of the pot for mishima. I have gone through stages of preferring particular tools—pencil-style X-Acto knives, commercial stylus carving tools (sold in ceramic supply stores), African porcupine quills (available at Santa Fe Clay) among others. My current drawing tool of choice is a calligraphy pen with interchangeable metal tips. It's the same kind of pen that you dip in ink and would use to do traditional calligraphy; I just use it on clay instead.

the transfer by gently wrapping the laminated pattern around the cup, taking care to position the image exactly where you would like it to be on the cup. Then, using an African porcupine quill (dull-tipped pencils work well too), transfer the image by tracing over the lines on the template with enough pressure to draw into the surface of the pot underneath (figure 3). Remove the template (figure 4) and use the transferred image as a guide for drawing deeper lines into the surface of the pot (figure 5). You don't need to draw very deeply into the surface for mishima to work. I often feel as though I am just scratching into the surface of the clay. After going over the tracing, finish off the rest of the drawing freehand, using the template pattern as a visual reference (figure 6).

Just before you apply the slip to the surface of the pot, use a soft-bristled brush, such as a shaving brush, to get rid of as many crumbs as possible. If you don't remove the crumbs, they can often stick to the pot and create problems when removing excess colored slip from the surface later.

Using a wide brush, apply a layer of stained slip to the drawing (figure 7). I tend to use a thinner slip so that it has an easier time getting into the small details of the drawing. Thicker slips tend to only partially fill in the drawn lines in the surface. Once the pot has dried back to the dry leather-hard state and any sheen on the slip has disappeared, begin to wipe away the excess slip from the surface of the pot using a clean sponge (figure 8). You need to clean the sponge often during this process to avoid leaving streaks of color on the surface of the pot. As you work, you'll see your design emerge. The slip remains in the recessed lines of the drawing, creating the inlaid design. Tip: If you are using a clay with a lot of grog, it's a good idea to alternate between using the sponge to remove the slip and smoothing the surface with a rubber or metal rib. At this point let the pot dry completely and then bisque fire it.

Adding Color

On many of my pots, I add color accents to the mishima pattern through painting. I do all of my painting after the pot has been bisque fired and before I do any glazing. For the color, I use a cone 04 vitreous engobe that I mix myself, but commercial underglazes also work well. If you use an engobe, combine it in a 1:1 ratio with mixing-medium using a palette knife until it is well mixed (figure 9). The mixing-medium helps make the engobe more brushable and thins it out so that you can build up color in layers, similar to painting on canvas. This layering makes for more solid colors with less visible brush strokes.

The engobe recipe that I use tends to flux a bit at cone six but it can still be used to fill in the line drawings on the bottoms of pots (figure 10). After I finish adding the color, I use a clear glaze over everything except the bottom of the pot, then fire the work in oxidation to a hot cone six. ■

Molly Hatch is a full-time studio potter in Northampton, Massachusetts. She studied ceramics as an undergraduate student at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and received her MFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder. To see more of Hatch's work, visit her website at www.mollyhatch.com or her Etsy shop at mollyhatch.etsy.com.



Molly Hatch working in her studio while she was a resident at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Photo Credit: Jeff Machtig. Courtesy of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

Recipes

Andrew Martin's Brushing Slip

(up to cone 10)

Ferro Frit 3110.	30 %
Ball Clay	20
Mason Stain 6600 (black)	50
Total	100 %

Add: CMC 2 %

This is the slip I use for the mishima inlay areas on my work. Be sure to mix it thin enough that it fills in all of the fine lines. If using a coloring oxide (like iron oxide, manganese dioxide, chrome oxide, cobalt carbonate or copper carbonate, for example) instead of a commercial stain, the amount of colorant needed may be less than in the above recipe.

Vitreous Engobe

(Cone 04-6)

Talc	15.3%
Ferro Frit 3110.	18.4
Ball clay (Kentucky #4 or OM 4)	15.3
EPK Kaolin.	5.1
Glomax (Calcined Kaolin).	25.5
Silica	20.4
CMC (dry)	1.0
Macaloid (dry)	1.0
Total	100.0%

I substitute OM 4 ball clay for the Kentucky #4 ball clay in this recipe and it works well.

Add stains to the above base at a ratio of 1:1. I use this on bisque ware.

To make a brushing medium for use with this engobe, use a 50/50 Macaloid/CMC mix that is first slaked in hot water and then blended until smooth. When combining the engobe with the brushing medium, start with a small amount of each and use a palette knife to mix them together. Add more mixing medium or engobe until you get the right consistency for brushing.

Val Cushing Clay Body

Cone 6

Nepheline Syenite	23 %
EPK Kaolin	35
Tile 6 Kaolin	15
XX Sagger Ball Clay.	5
Silica	22
Total	100 %

Add: Bentonite 3 %

I use a commercial cone six porcelain from Sheffield Ceramic Supply, however, Julia Galloway's cone 6 body (above) is great.