

## Masterful Mishima

Creating intricate drawings on clay is easy with the help of a little wax

(art + social studies)

Mishima pottery is named after the Japanese island of Mishima, but it first came from Korea in the 16th century. The technique of decorating in the style of Mishima was originally done by carving into a leather-hard ceramic piece and then overlaying the carving with a colored slip. The potter would then scrape away all the slip to reveal the color, which remained only in the carved lines. This was a labor-intensive and exacting process.

To simplify the technique, instead of scraping, cover the clay with wax and then carve through. Many tools can be used to carve, from mini-loop tools, pencils, or sgraffito tools to toothpicks or small sticks. When colored underglazes are brushed on, the wax will resist the underglaze and it will fall only into the carved lines. A quick swipe of a damp sponge will reveal the drawing beneath.

This method is beautiful because it gives the artist a way to draw on a pot or tile with a sensitivity that is very different from one done with brushwork. The use of a brush often results in a loose, quick, finished drawing, while carving into clay can be a much more precise labor of love. Extremely intricate imagery with hard, sharp edges is possible using carving tools that might be difficult to create with a brush.

When we combine a carved drawing with vivid colored underglazes, a fresh and fun process reveals a striking finished product.

**GRADES 3-12** Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

### Preparation

1. Begin with a leather-hard ceramic piece, either thrown or hand-built.
2. View various examples of the Mishima technique.

### Process

1. Lay down a background of colored underglaze onto a leather-hard piece of pottery, sculpture, or tile. If the design is already visualized, the colors of underglaze can be intentionally placed. Alternately, a random application of the colored base coat can be done.



### Materials (required)

[Amaco 11-M A-Mix White Stoneware Moist Clay](#), 50 lb, (30549-1350); share one box among class

[Speedball Ceramic Underglazes](#), 16 oz, (30457-); choose 2-3 colors plus Black (30457-2026)

[Kemper Wire Loop Sgraffito Tool](#) (30317-1063); one per student

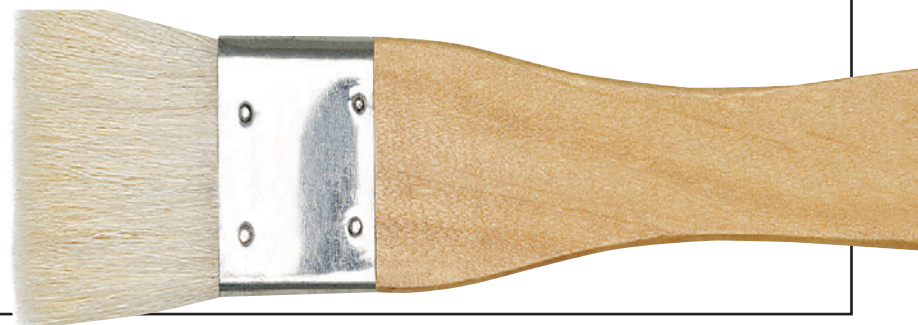
[Amaco Wax Resist](#), 16 oz (32936-0006); share one bottle across class

[Yasutomo Flat Hake Brush](#), 1" (05408-1001); one per student

[Amaco Lead-Free Clear Transparent Glaze](#), Pint (30406-1026); Need 2-3 per class depending on size of work

### Optional Materials

[Scratch-Art Tool Set](#) (14939-1009)







**Step 1:** Brush underglazes onto leather-hard clay. Allow to dry until dry to the touch.



**Step 2:** Apply a layer of wax resist over colored areas. Allow to dry for one hour or overnight.



**Step 3:** Carve through the wax down to the clay beneath.



**Step 4:** Brush underglaze over carved lines. Sponge underglaze off waxed areas. Dry and fire.

### Process, continued

2. When the slip has dried to the touch, completely cover it with a slightly thinned application of wax. The wax should flow easily. Add a small amount of water to the wax if necessary. The use of a broad, natural bristle brush works best. (NOTE: It's a good idea to reserve a few brushes exclusively for wax application. Wax can be removed with soap and hot water.) Let the wax dry for at least an hour. If carving will be done the following day, cover the piece in plastic.
3. Now, begin the carved drawing by carving through the wax into the clay beneath. A variety of tools can be used at this step. Experiment with mini-loop tools, needle tools or anything that can be used to scratch or carve. Be sure to carve through the layer of color to reveal the clay underneath. If students are fairly new to carving into clay, a suggested approach is to allow the raised excess pieces that remain after carving to dry slightly before removing them. Since they have more surface area, these excess pieces will dry faster than the main piece and can then be brushed off when dry.



## Process, continued

4. Choose one or more colors to fill the carved lines of the design. Black is traditional and will make the drawing stand out, but other colors work as well. Using a natural bristle brush, brush the slightly diluted underglaze over the carved lines in sections. The wax will resist the underglaze and cause the underglaze to sit on the waxed surface. With a barely damp sponge, swipe over the surface to pick up the underglaze that has not settled into the carved lines. Continue in sections until all the carving has been filled with underglaze. When sponging, be careful not to pick up too much of the underglaze out of the carved areas. A light hand with the sponge works best. If there are areas of the carving that should be reworked or added to, more carving can be done, and the area brushed again with underglaze.
5. When the piece is bone dry, bisque fire to Cone 08-04. The wax will be removed during the firing. Now the piece may be glazed with a clear or transparent glaze. These specific instructions call for a Cone 6 clay body and glaze, but this technique will work equally well on a low fire clay (Cone 04) and will go up to Cone 10. **Options:**
  - Apply wax to the leather-hard clay and carve into it. No initial underglaze color is used. This method results in an in-laid slip design in one or multiple colors.
  - Apply black underglaze to the leather hard clay covered by a layer of wax, and then carve to reveal the white of the clay body beneath. This will result in a white on black motif.



## National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

### Creating

**Anchor Standard 3:** Refine and complete artistic work.

### Connecting

**Anchor Standard 11:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.