

MAIOLICA BY ROB BIBBY

Maiolica is the Italian name for decorated tin glazed earthenware pottery which has a long and varied tradition both in Europe and further afield. The method offers potters the opportunity to decorate their wares by painting directly onto the pot in almost the same way an artist will paint on paper. The colours are applied in various ways onto a white semi-porous surface giving the possibility of both detailed images and abstract areas of colour. The technique is quite a simple one and the following is a description of my version of Maiolica.

CLAY

I use red terracotta for most of the hand thrown pots I make. It is a satisfying clay to work with and has an interesting tendency to break through the white glaze where it is thin, emphasising surface variations such as throwing rings. I also use "toasted stoneware" for making plates because I have found that with terracotta the rims of plates have a tendency to sag.

GLAZE

I use one basic glaze from which I make a transparent and a white version.

	Clear Glaze	White Glaze
Lead Bisilicate	65	65
Calcium Borate Fritt	10	10
China Clay	10	10
Flint	5	5
Tin Oxide		10
Zirconium Silicate		4

The glaze is applied to biscuit fired clay and is fired to about 1100*c; The clear glaze is used for mixing with colours to help ensure they melt and blend with the white glaze.

COLOUR

The decoration on Maiolica is by means of oxides and underglaze colours which are applied over the dry glaze in a way which is not unlike watercolour painting. The colours come as a powder and are mixed with clear glaze and thinned with water to a working consistency.

Underglaze colour (or glaze stain)	1)
) by volume
Liquid clear glaze	1)

The colour is applied onto the pot by various means including brush, sponge, spray etc. full range of colours are possible and they can be mixed either on the palette or by dipping the brush in more than one colour at a time. A wide variety of results can be achieved, probably the best being those which result from the confident and spontaneous making of marks. Ideas for designs can be developed on paper using ordinary paints and it is a good idea to practice making brush marks before starting to work on a pot.

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SLIP DECORATION

Slip is liquid clay. It is applied when the pot is leather hard and provides colour but it is not a glaze on its own. Slip can be made by mixing any clay with water so it becomes a thick liquid. Slip can be coloured by adding oxides or glaze stains and will give an opaque layer of colour. Slip dries slowly and is usually applied by brush, sponge, trailing or dipping.

Ways of using slip:

1. Sgraffito- A white slip is applied over a red clay, when the slip is touch dry a design can be scratched through it revealing the red body clay beneath.
2. Two or more coloured slips are applied at the same time - the pot is then shaken or tipped to allow the colours to partially run together creating a swirling pattern.
3. Slip can be trailed to create simple drawings or lettering using a bag with a nozzle a bit like those used to ice cakes . See traditional English Slipware for examples.
4. Slip can simply be used to make a dark coloured clay appear like a white one or to provide a white background on which to paint.

After the slip is applied the pot is allowed to dry before being biscuit fired to 1 000 degrees centigrade.

GLAZE

A mixture of oxides and minerals which is designed to melt at a given temperature. Glazes vary a lot they can be coloured, opaque or transparent, they can be shiny or matt and they usually provide a waterproof coating over the surface of a pot Glaze is normally applied to a biscuit fired pot by dipping or pouring giving an even coating. During the firing the glaze melts and if it is applied too thickly may run, so it is important to glaze with care and to ensure that contact points like the base are thoroughly cleaned.

I normally have two glazes available:

1. Transparent glaze: - will give a shiny surface and allow coloured slips or underglaze colours to show through.
2. White glaze: - a semi opaque white glaze which provides a good surface on which to paint glaze stains and oxides. This is a traditional process which includes maiolica faience, tin glazed earthenware and delft ware.

When the glazing is finished the pot is fired for a second time to 1100 degrees centigrade.

COLOUR

The following is a list of materials which can be used to give colour in pottery

Colouring oxides: - "A compound of an element with oxygen". We use a number of oxides to provide colour and texture.

- Cobalt - blue - very strong.
- Chrome - green, can sometimes give pink.
- Copper - green, turns a metallic black when applied thickly.
- Iron - brown, a number of different versions including yellow ochre, crocus martis, iron spangles, iron chromate etc..
- Manganese - brown or purple.
- Titanium - in the form of rutile gives a mottle.

Glaze stains or underglaze colours are manufactured pottery colours which give a wide spectrum of colour for painting on pottery. They can be mixed with each other and with oxides. It is a good idea to mix some clear or white glaze with the colour before application to help it blend with the base glaze during firing.