

The Mishima and Wax Mishima Slip Decorating Techniques

Mishima (Slip Inlaying)

In this traditional East-Asian technique, shallow incised or impressed lines and patterns are filled with slip. Don't worry about being neat when applying the slip, because the excess is carefully scraped away with a razor blade or flexible metal rib at the leather-hard stage to leave a flush inlaid effect. For the cleanest, sharpest effect, use a gritless base claybody and slip. Do not attempt to get a flush inlaid effect with deeper impressed or carved effects, because the slip will almost certainly crack in drying or firing. Even with shallow incised or impressed design work, several applications of slip may be needed to fill recesses flush with the surface. Pay close attention while scraping to avoid going right through the design, although even the finest Korean Koryo Dynasty mishima reveals areas where this has happened.

Wax Mishima

This alternate mishima technique does not involve scraping, and thus works well even on gritty claybodies, but the trade-off is that it does not produce the classic flush inlaid effect. You can do wax mishima directly on the base clay surface, or over a contrasting slip ground, but in either case the clay or slip surface should be leather-hard. Apply wax resist over the surface, and when the wax is thoroughly dry, incise a design through the wax. Normally this is done with a very small band-loop trimming tool, but fine-point tools like the tip of a razor knife or needle tool can be used to incise extremely thin lines rarely seen in classic mishima. Apply the desired slip or underglaze to the incised areas with a brush and carefully sponge away the excess, leaving slip or underglaze only in the carved or incised design. Those areas may be waxed and more design work carved or incised to receive additional colors of slip or underglaze.

An important distinction from traditional mishima is that you are not limited to shallow carved areas, since you are not going for a flush inlaid effect. Deeper recesses with the coat of slip applied will still show relief, and will also contrast in color with surrounding areas. Again, those areas may be waxed and the process repeated with additional colors as many times as necessary.