

# PAPER TO POTS

## Slip Decorating

by Teresa Pietsch



My primary process for decorating pots is monoprint slip transferring. This allows me to constantly keep things changing—the images, the texture, the colors—so each piece becomes its own little world. I was first introduced to monoprinting on clay in a workshop led by Jason Burnett at Penland School of Crafts in the fall of 2014. In the spring of 2016 I assisted a workshop at Penland with Susan Feagin where I learned several different techniques involving slip transfers and layering of images. From there, I have developed ways to transfer slip onto clay to get my desired effects.

I use red clay to give an earthy background to my colorful slip transfers. Many of the images I draw come from flowers and plants I see on walks with my dog. I translate vegetation into loose drawings that represent the natural world around me, and use these drawings to bring color and texture to my functional pottery.

When throwing cups, I aim to keep the forms fairly simple to make transferring the slip onto them a bit easier. I often give my cups a gentle curve and a section that has a directional change that I leave as the bare clay. This non-slipped area represents the ground/earth

Three cups with cut feet, wheel-thrown and altered red clay, slip, glaze, soda fired to cone 1 in a gas kiln.

and also provides blank space to expand some element of the image as texture, usually in the form of slip-trailed dots or lines.

### Creating a Background

First, I cut a paper resist of a flower or other design. I wet the paper and place it on the leather-hard cup, then go over it with my finger or a rib to make sure it is sealed onto the pot (1). This layer will ensure some bare clay appears through the next layer of transfer.

Next, I brush colored slip onto newsprint, using a chip brush with stiff bristles so that it leaves the texture of the brush marks. I often layer two colors for added depth and texture (2). I let the slip set up for a few minutes and then wrap the newsprint around the cup. If I want a blurred texture, I apply the paper to the pot when the slip is wetter. If I want it to have a stiffer line, I let the slip dry until it doesn't have a shine. I wrap the newsprint around the cup and use a squeezed-out sponge to press the paper against the clay (3). The sponge helps take away some of the extra moisture and allows the leather-hard piece to absorb the slip's moisture. I then use a soft silicon rib to gently press the slip against the clay through the back of the newsprint (4), and

move to using a medium stiff rib with a bit more pressure. Once I think the slip has adhered to the clay, I slowly start pulling the newsprint away (5). The timing of the process varies and I have learned to judge when to execute each part of the process, based on the stage of clay and slip, to get desired results. If there are parts that haven't transferred, I lay the newsprint back down and go over it again, applying pressure with the rib. If it has dried too much to transfer, I use the sponge to add a small amount of moisture into the slip by dabbing it on the back of the newsprint, and then rub the paper with the rib again. I enjoy the wrinkles and folds of the newsprint as an added texture to the pot's surface. With the background slip transferred, I look for the edges of the paper resist flowers and pull them off of the cup, revealing the shadow of the image (6).

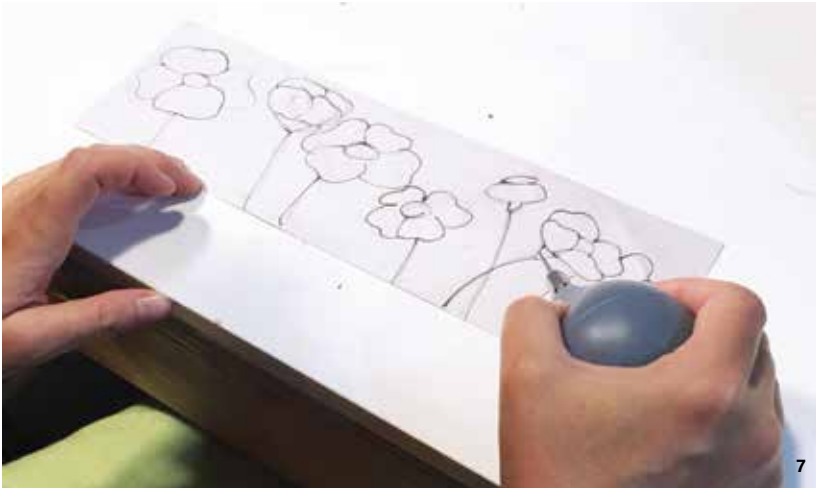
### Image Transfer

I work from the foreground to the background when creating transfer images on paper, starting with the outlines of floral motifs because what is painted on first becomes the foreground once the image is transferred onto the cup's surface. I use the same



1 Apply paper resist to the cup. 2 Brush slip for the background onto newsprint. 3 Wrap newsprint coated in the background slip around the cup. 4 Rub the newsprint to adhere the slip around the cup. 5 Remove the newsprint used to transfer the background slip. 6 Remove the paper resist.





7 Slip trail lines onto newsprint. 8 Layer slip on top of the lines. 9 Cut the newsprint into pieces. Rub the back of the image to transfer it, then remove the newsprint. 10 Press in on the flowers to alter the cup shape. 11 Cut out notches for feet. 12 Apply then reveal the bottom transfer. 13 Add slip-trailed details.



Three cups with cut feet, wheel-thrown and altered red clay, slip, glaze, soda fired to cone 1 in a gas kiln.

all-purpose base white slip colored with Mason stains for all of the decorations, both brushed and slip trailed. I draw the design on newsprint with pencil, which helps give me a rough idea of composition. I then loosely follow the drawing using black slip applied with a slip-trailing bulb (7).

After drawing my outlines, I brush on layers of colored slip to fill in the image (8). When this is all done and the images are filled in, I let the slip dry until it's no longer glossy, sometimes using a heat gun to speed up the drying process. I often cut the newsprint into more manageable pieces. This allows me to work on curvier surfaces without messing up the image too much when I'm maneuvering and applying it.

I transfer the image onto the cup that already has the background transfer applied to it. I like to do this as two different transfers so that I can choose to have the slip wetter for the background, giving a blurred effect, while the foreground can stay crisp. I follow the same procedure as with the background, using a sponge and ribs to transfer the image before carefully removing the paper (9).

#### Details

While the pot still has the moisture from adding the transfer (flexible leather hard), I go back in and use my fingers to press from the inside or outside, supporting from the opposite side, to alter the form and add more dimension to the flowers and image (10). After making these alterations and placing the cup upside down

on a banding wheel, I decide the positions and number of cutouts for a foot based on the image transferred onto the outside of the cup. This time it is a four-petal flower, so it will have four cutouts. After determining placement, I cut one line straight down the center of each point, make an arcing cut from each side (11), and soften the edge of the cut sections with my finger. For some extra decoration, I transfer an image onto the bottom of the cup inside the foot ring (12).

The finishing touches are made with an X-Acto knife for fine-line details and a slip trailer for dots and added texture (13). After bisque firing, I glaze my pots with an interior liner glaze, and fire them to cone 1 in a gas-fired soda kiln. I leave the exterior of the pot unglazed, allowing the soda ash, sprayed into the kiln during firing, to glaze the pot.

**the author** *Teresa Pietsch lives in Penland, North Carolina, producing soda-fired, floral-decorated pots as Teresa Pietsch Pottery. She is a member of Mica Gallery and is part of the Spruce Pine Potters Market. Her work has been featured in numerous galleries and national exhibits, most recently in a two-person show at Cedar Creek Gallery, as a featured potter at Lark and Key Gallery, and as a focus artist at Charlie Cummings Gallery. She was a resident artist as part of the EnergyXchange, an innovative program utilizing methane gas as a sustainable energy source from landfill offgassing. To see more, visit [www.teresapietsch.com](http://www.teresapietsch.com), Instagram: @tapietsch, Facebook: @teresapietschpottery.*