



Tie Dye String Painting

with Michael Harbridge

This project originally started with the use of silly string to create the background textures with awesome results. However, I noticed my local dollar store changed brands of string and the new product seemed to be more plastic, rather than a paper, pulp base. After researching, I discovered many brands of silly string are made with a plastic base, and it is not safe to fire away. So I went on to plan "B" and wound up with string we could remove prior to firing.

One stroke underglazes are used for this method because they are much more concentrated, and when thinned with water to create the watercolor effect, give the best color and results. Products like Stroke & Coat, Concepts and Fun Strokes can be used, but when thinned the results are not as bright. Those products can also chip and flake away when the string is removed. So one stroke colors will work best.

Step 1: Dampen the ware to remove all dust.

Step 2: Cut several lengths of string, dip each into clean water and drape over plate or around shape. Allow the string to overlap, curl up and form unique patterns.

Step 3: Thin each one stroke underglaze in separate cups with three parts water to one part color.

Step 4: Load the large fan glaze brush with the lightest color and dab it randomly over the string-covered plate. The goal is to have puddles of color gathering around the string.

Step 5: Wash the color from the brush and load with the next darkest color and randomly dab over the string-covered plate. This color will bleed into the first color. The goal is to get a tie dye look, so this is fine.

Step 6: Repeat step 5 with any remaining colors until the entire plate is covered with color.

Step 7: Allow the plate to dry to at least the point the shiny, wet look is gone. Remove the string. Clear glaze and fire.

Step 8 For added effects and more fun, use a Wisp Fan loaded with a thinned color (usually darker is better) to splatter small specs of color over the surface. Also, sponge a color around the edge of the shapes.

Materials List

Bisque: Shapes of choice

Color: One stroke underglazes
Clear Glaze of Choice

Brushes: by Royal & Langnickel
R2845-6 Aqualon Natural Fan
R2855-3/4 Aqualon Wisp Fan
R2005 Synthetic Sponge

Miscellaneous:
Cotton String
Water

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Making a difference in the industry

So how do we take a technique to make a difference in the fired arts industry? Some people want to believe the hobby ceramic market is dying. Traditional storefront studios are becoming a thing of the past and home studios are becoming harder to find. But sitting back talking about how things used to be is not going to change the facts. Contemporary studios dominate the market but they are not creating the repeat business, product sales and kiln sales of the past. So how can that change?

First of all, it's not going to go back to what it used to be, so get that idea out of your mind! Contemporary studios are here to stay and consumers have and will support them. I hear comments all the time from traditional studio owners wondering why consumers would drive past their studio to go to a contemporary studio and pay higher prices to make nearly identical items. Think about what that statement says. Customers are driving past your studio to pay a higher price at another studio. Hmm? That is strange. Why would they do that? I guess I would take a close look at my studio and compare it to what the other studio offers. Is the other studio cleaner, more organized and more appealing? Does the fact the other studio offers bisque instead of greenware have something to do with it?

Unfortunately, many traditional studios have accumulated a lot of stuff over the years. That's a polite way of saying clutter, junk and stuff all over. The coating of dust covering it all can also be a turn off. Please don't get me wrong and think I'm being mean. With all the dust created with the casting process, it's difficult to keep it all clean. And, we all have our collections, rooms or closets with clutter. But take the time to clean things up and get rid of the clutter. It will make a difference. Learn from the competition. The hobby ceramic market is not dying, it's just changed.

Contemporary studios can easily incorporate the tie dye string method into camps, adult workshops and everyday business. The cost of the string is minimal so the charge could be the same for each shape as charged normally. For kids camps and parties, plain shapes and the popular peace sign shapes are easy choices. Traditional studios can also follow this same program.

Calculating cost

- 1) Figure the cost of your selected shape. If starting with bisque, don't forget to add in shipping costs. If starting with greenware, it's customary to double the greenware price to figure in cleaning and firing.
- 2) Determine the cost for color by placing a half ounce of each color in separate cups. Your customers will generally take more color than they need, so don't figure it at exactly what is used. There will be waste, and it needs to be figured in.
- 3) Don't forget to include the cost of small plastic cups if they are disposable. Don't give them large cups. Stick with the small sauce type of cups available from restaurant suppliers or you will have more waste. What about brushes?
- 4) What does it cost to dip the item in clear glaze. Don't just figure the cost to glaze, but also the time it takes to have someone prepare the glaze, dip and clean up.
- 5) Those items need to get fired. How long does it take to load the kiln and unload the kiln? Those things need a value associated.
- 6) You've made in investment in the kiln and have to maintain it. And, some day it will need repairs or to be replaced.
- 7) What other costs do you have. You could go as far as overhead, taxes and all other associated costs of being in business.

For the sake of determining the actual cost to create a shape, here is an example.

\$2.25 Cost of bisque dinner plate

.80 Cost of color

.50 Cost of dipping and labor

.15 Cost of cups, string and brushes

.50 Cost of firing and kiln upkeep

\$4.20 is the total cost to make the plate

Make money!

This is an excellent opportunity to grow the fired arts market! Show this technique to friends and family. Let them see how easy and fun it is to do. Years ago the ceramic industry grew rapidly due to all the home studios. Everyone seemed to know someone who had a kiln in their home and it became a weekly ritual for classes and friends gathering to paint. The same thing could blossom today. Why can't you use this as an opportunity to generate some extra income while helping create awareness of fired arts?

Where are the new people?

Regardless if you have a studio or not, don't wait for people to come to you. Look at completely different venues to show off fired arts. Ask yourself where you can reach people? Here is a list of some options.

Church groups - Adult and children church groups are always looking for activities and outings. You can go to them and host a workshop. They generally have a facility. Again, studio owner or not, you can do this!

Scout troops - Scouting programs have requirements to get badges, and ceramics is just one badge. Hook up with local troop leaders to offer your services.

Craft shows - People going to craft shows often do crafts...or want to. Demonstrate methods at craft shows and give out literature on your services. You could even do make and takes.

Fairs - Where else can you get masses of people spending money? At least with a project like this, you get something in return. They could spend the same amount on silly games and have nothing to show.

Community events - What's going on in your community? Try to set up during various events and show off!

Schools - School art program funds are getting cut. But that is not to say students can't do a special project. (See marketing details below.)

Daycare -Handprints, footprints and so much more can be done with little ones.

Farmers Market - Again, large numbers of people spending money!

This is just a small list with potential. You can certainly come up with more.

Marketing

If you are going to put the effort into reaching out to new groups, you want to follow it up with good marketing to reach the fullest potential. Include literature about what you offer. Studio owners have a physical address customers can patronize. But those of you going out to do programs can also benefit. Talk about party programs. What parent would not want someone to come to their home to create a project with a group kids? But, don't stop there. Make sure you announce to the kids that they too can have a painting party. Supply literature so they go home and harass their parents. But don't stop there! Make sure to include literature again in the bag with their finished item as a reminder. For every party you have, you could book several more.

Attention studio owners! Don't be so willing to deliver finished pieces to the customer after the final firing. It's better if you can get them to pick them up at your store. This way it forces them to see all you have to offer. Give an incentive like free studio time if they pick the item(s) up. If you go out to a fair or other event, give the customer a claim ticket to pick their item up at the store a week later. Imagine the traffic it will create.

Free workshops

Before you say, "Are you crazy!" read this through. What if you did small bisque shapes at any of the above venues for free. This may be a \$1 or lower priced piece of bisque. If you require they be picked up at your studio, it brings a lot of people through your door. How much would you spend on advertising to get a new person to come see what you do? A couple bucks is pretty inexpensive advertising! And for those without a studio, going to a school and offering a small project for free is a good way to get literature in the hands of every student for potential parties. The teacher will love you. Contact the local media or send out press releases about the free event. The coverage is all free advertising. Don't look at the cost short term. Look at it as an investment in the long term!