

Recreation of a 10th Century Iranian Bowl

Project:

Recreation of a 10th Century Iranian Bowl currently housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Inspiration Piece:

I used the museum example below as my inspiration (Fig.1). The original museum piece is made of reddish brown earthenware clay. It appears to be wheel thrown and not molded. It was then covered in a white slip and let to dry. The bird designs were then scratched into the white slip revealing the darker colored clay underneath. This technique of scratching a pattern or design to reveal the clay underneath is called “sgraffito”. Fine copper oxide was mixed with water. The checkered pattern around the sgraffito bird designs was then painted with the copper oxide mixture. The ware was dipped in a glaze that would fire transparent or clear over the design. It was then fired in a wood fired kiln to approximately 1000 degrees celsius. At this temperature earthenware vitrifies, and becomes a ceramic vessel.



Fig. 1

Title: Bowl

Date: 10th century

Geography: Found/excavated Iran, Amul, Hamadan or Zenjan

Medium: Earthenware; glazed

Dimensions: H. 3 3/4 in. (9.5 cm)

Diam. 12 1/4 in. (31.1 cm)

Classification: Ceramics

Credit Line: Fletcher Fund, 1923

Object Number: 23.246

Curatorial Department: Islamic Art

Method:

I chose to use a red colored stoneware clay which fires to a higher temperature. I used an electric wheel to create the large flat bowl. In the 10th century they would have used a kick wheel or a stone turntable. Once the bowl was thrown and somewhat dry to soft leather hard I trimmed the bowl foot. I then painted the entire piece in white slip I made from scrap clay and water. Slip is a fine, white, watery clay mixture that is milky in consistency. Once the slip was dry on the piece, I drew the bird designs on the ware with a pencil (Fig.2). I then took a “pin tool” and scratched in the designs revealing the darker clay underneath. I made a mixture of copper oxide and water. I used a paint brush to draw the checkered designs around the birds. I first fired (bisque) the ware to cone 06 (991-1013 Celsius) in an electric kiln (oxidation). I do not have access to a wood fired kiln and believe this is a reasonable substitution. The results would be entirely the same and actually more predictable in the electric kiln. I then covered the ware in a transparent glaze and fired to cone 5 (1180-1205 Celsius) oxidation. Fig. 3 is the final result.



Fig.2



Fig. 3

Bibliography:

Primary Sources and Museum Collections:

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028. Object: #23.246 (Bowl, 10th century). <https://www.metmuseum.org>