

# Slip Painting

by Tamar Laderman

A few summers ago, I traveled to Vermont and spent a week at Jerry Goldman's studio creating slip paintings. The experience was unique, starting with the studio Jerry built this studio himself, and it's a massive building with three levels—a mosaics studio on the top level, a woodworking shop in the middle, and a well-equipped ceramics studio on the ground floor, featuring big windows that open to a wooded area on the north side.

As a landscape painter, I'm aware of the paint and of manipulating colors, tones and lines to create illusions. My inspiration comes from the landscape and the materials, so as the week moved along, I was swept up in the experience of fresh air, sparkling clear light, woods, rocks, and bubbling water. I was also intrigued by the possibilities of the clay medium. Slip painting concretizes the experience of capturing nature. Instead of painting rocks, I was making rocks, and I found myself hunting for objects to imprint textures, so that bark was no longer a play of light, it was "bark."

Jerry recommended making a drawing so I could plan things out, it would also help to maintain a record of the slips and procedures I used. Since I always sketch before I paint, this seemed natural, except for labeling the colors—something I wasn't used to doing while sketching, but necessary for planning purposes.

After drawing, I spent most of the day on preparing the slab, the colored slips and problem solving. Jerry had suggestions and solutions for technical problems, and setting up the palette ahead of time was crucial. I chose my colors from thousands of fired samples Jerry had developed over the years, and mixed appropriately-sized batches according to his recipes.

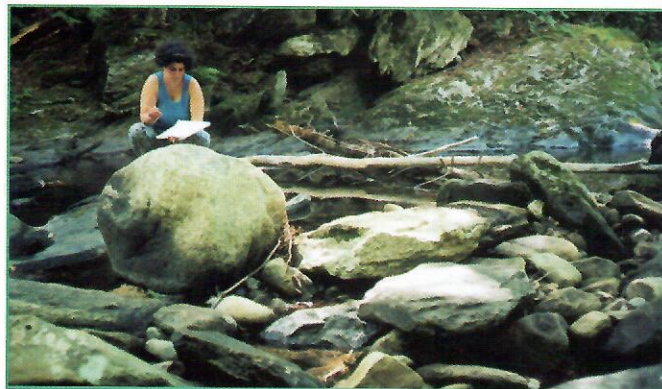
Each painting was an experiment and I found that I could prepare objects with intricate details ahead of time. I poured colored slip on a slab of plaster and created textures and patterns that I cut up and used to shape tree trunks and rocks. As long as these shapes remained moist, I could transfer them to the picture.

After creating a picture, details were fixed, edges smoothed and the long process of waiting began. Before I left Vermont, I witnessed the opening of a kiln containing works of previous artists. Piece after piece came out, some were stunning, some broken, some cracked. I realized the process made me grow as an artist. Skeptical, I now detached myself from the pieces. Weeks later I got a call from Jerry all was well and the paintings were fired with very minimal cracking. After finally looking at the fired pieces, I was pleased. My critical eye observed that not all colors were what I intended, and I got carried away and mixed up some untested colors. Well, there's always next summer, and till then I'll just paint.

## The Slab

*Over the years, Jerry Goldman has created a unique method for preparing slabs for clay painting that yields few cracks or warping. Here's how he does it:*

1. The first step is to create a plaster mold for the slabs. To begin, set a piece of plate glass on wood strips so the glass is raised about  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch. Seal the edges of the glass with soft clay. Bevel and smooth the edges with a spatula. Build a 2-inch-high form around the edge approximately an inch from the edge of the glass. Pour plaster into the form. Remove the glass after the plaster has set and allow the mold to thoroughly dry before use.
2. Pour a  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch layer of slip into the plaster mold.
3. Place a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick heavily-grogged slab in the wet slip. The clay should contain at least 50% grog.
4. Cover the top of the slab completely with colored slips of your choice. Note: If desired, you can reverse the painting method. Paint a mirror image of the painting on the plaster bat, then add the core topped with a thin layer of slip.
5. After the painting is complete, allow time for the moisture level of the slip and slab core to even out and to provide enough time for the slip to dry and shrink free of the plaster.
6. Remove the clay painting from the mold by laying a sheet of newspaper over the painting and placing a  $\frac{1}{2}$ - or  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick piece of plywood over the top. The plywood should extend at least 1 inch beyond each edge of the painting.
7. Get a good grip with both hands on the plywood and plaster bat, and flip them over. Do not dally. Gradually lift the mold straight up to clear the clay painting.
8. Burnish the edges of the slab to help avoid cracking and warping.
9. Allow the slab to dry slowly.



### Step 1

Before starting work each day, Tamar went down to the falls and sketched what she wanted to paint.



### Step 2

Slip was poured into the plaster bat and, soon after, a heavily grogged clay slab was placed in the still-liquid slip.



### Step 3

The clay slab was rolled to level and trapped air expelled.



**Step 4**

All colored slips were prepared ahead of time and ready for painting. Here Tamar prepares the background.



**Step 5**

Tamar poured and painted shapes on a separate plaster bat. When they were dry enough to handle, she lifted and placed them on the still-wet background slip on the clay slab.



**Step 6**

Slip application continued using mixing sticks, syringes and pouring.



**Finished painting.**

**The fruit of four days' work.**

*Tamar Laderman earned a BFA from Massachusetts College of Art and a Certificate of Art from the Corcoran School of Art. She exhibits her paintings at the Woods Hole Art Gallery on Cape Cod. Jerry Goldman conducts workshops annually at his Vermont studio and home (right).*



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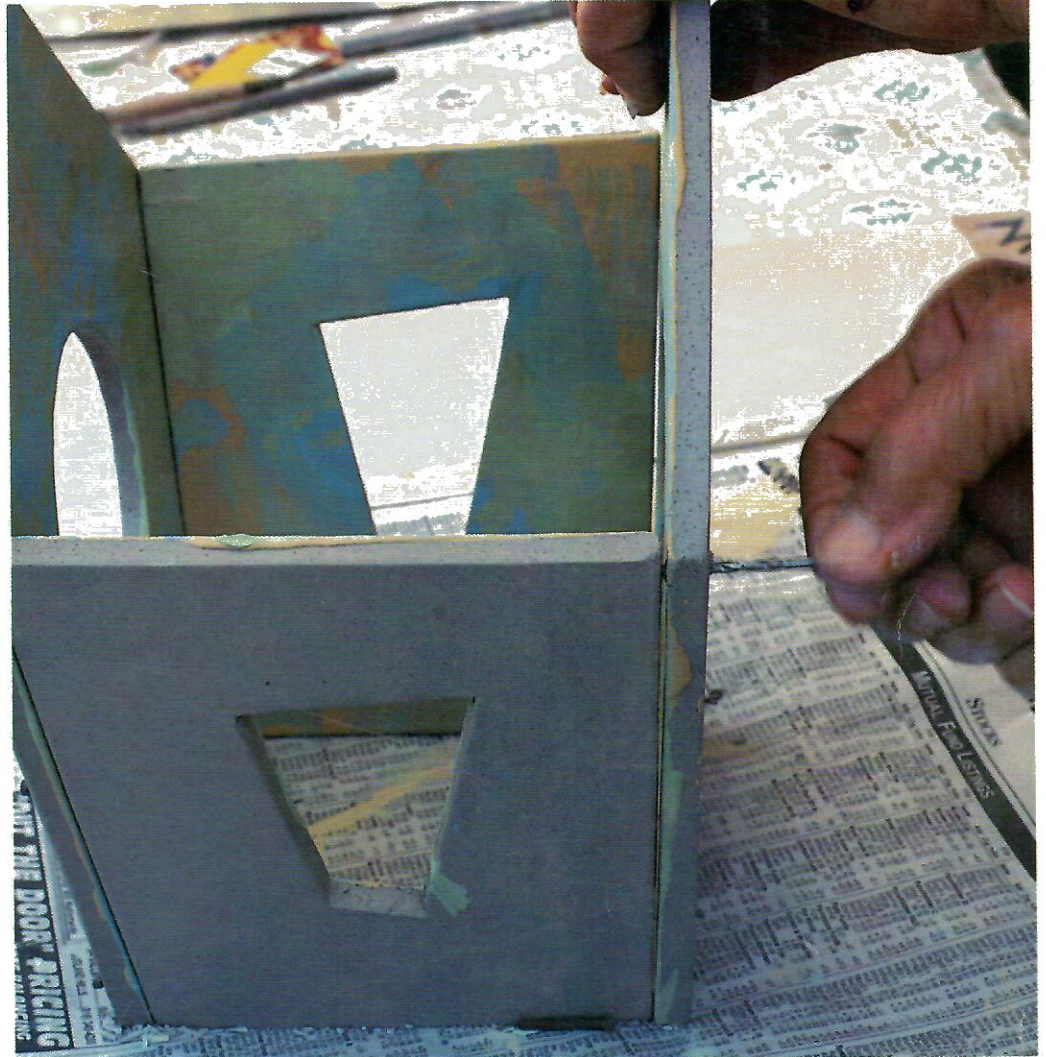
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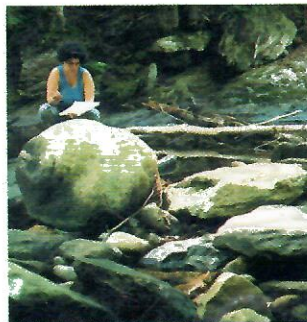
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