Color without a Kiln

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Prisma Color Pencils

Prisma colored pencils have been used to color various metals for years by a number of jewelry artists, most notably Deb Karash. The process most often necessitates sand blasting the metal to give it 'tooth' for the colored pencil to stick to. In the case of Deb's work, the colored piece would then be riveted to second piece of metal to create the finished piece of jewelry.

Jeanette Landenwitch began experimenting with this technique on metal clay several years ago after she had moved from the east coast to the Midwest. While unpacking her boxes, she discovered some oil pastels that she had forgotten about. She placed them up on the window sill of her studio, hoping that one day she would find the chance to play with them. She did in fact try using them on some of her metal clay pieces, but found that the look was too thick for her liking. It wasn't until she attended a SNAG conference in 2005 that the subject of using colored pencils on metal clay came up again. When she returned home she began playing with the Prisma colored pencils, adapting the technique to the unique characteristics of metal clay. What she discovered was that the Prisma pencils adhered to the metal clay without the need for sand blasting or even 'roughing' up the metal. As long as the metal clay piece was not brushed to a high sheen, there was enough of a 'tooth' to it for the colored pencils to stick. The following information comes from Jeanette's experimentation with Prisma colored pencils and what she learned from it.

When applying the color to metal clay, the piece can be either lightly brushed, giving it a look similar to a transparent enamel over a silver base, or it can be left as it appears when taken straight out of the kiln, giving it a look similar to that of a transparent enamel over a white enameled background.

To begin, you will want to select a color palette of 3 to 5 colors, or shades of color, that harmonize or contrast well. Before applying color it is essential that the metal clay is clean. Therefore working on a piece straight out of the kiln is optimal. If the piece has been handled, then it should be cleaned with rubbing alcohol. Either way, it is important to remember that when applying color, it is best to handle the piece by the edges to avoid depositing any grease or oil from your fingers.

When applying color to beads it is best to apply one color first to all the beads before beginning the application of the second color. The same applies to adding the third color. This is the best way to keep the colors consistent.

Once the colors have been applied, the next step is to blend them. This can be accomplished dry, with a soft cloth, such as an old tee shirt, or for designs with hard to reach areas or deep relief, with a Q-tip. When two colors that overlap are smoothed, the result is a new blended color with a gentle transition from one color to the other on either side of the overlap. The other purpose for blending is to subdue the colors, giving them the look of soft enamels.

For areas that need a greater amount of blending or have deeper indentations, turpentine can be added to the cloth or Q-tip, which then liquefies the pencil colors, making them easier to bleed together, giving it an even softer effect. Sometimes it might seem as if too much color had been removed, to the point where all that is left is a shadow of the color you first applied. Often

what happens in this case is that the color will in fact ‘pop’ out when in the final step, acrylic sealer is applied. Certain colors in particular seem to ‘pop’ more than others.

An example of colored pencil combinations could be the coloring of a leaf. The first color put down might be a yellow color over the entire piece. Then a lighter green might be added along the edges or where the light might be reflected off of it if the light was coming from a particular direction. The 3rd color could be a darker green depicting the veins of the leaf. These could then be blended with a rag to soften the over all look.

Another example would be to lay down a blue color and then to overlap a red color over part of the blue. When the time came to blend the colors, the area that overlapped would become a soft purple. Once the colors are blended, the metal clay piece can also be lightly brushed to bring out the silver in selected areas.

When you are happy with the over all color application the entire piece needs to be sprayed with several light coats of acrylic spray, preferably Workable Fixative by Krylon, to seal in the color and in many cases, to make the colors ‘pop’ into view.

Another method of applying Prisma colored pencils to metal clay is to first apply a thin coat of acrylic gesso, followed by a coat of Golden gesso and grounds. Once these are dry, the color can be added on top of the gesso, using the side of the pencil. The interesting thing about this method is that there are colored gessoes, ranging from the traditional white to blue, grey, and black. This alters the colors of the pencils, opening up a variety of new looks.

Finally, Jeanette Landewitch has continued her experimentation and has found that oil pastels and water color pencils can indeed be effectively applied to her metal clay work. It looks as if the door to the use of various types of colored pencils on metal clay has just begun to open and that there is a whole new world of possibilities out there, just waiting to be discovered.

Vitrea China Paints

Vitrea china paints can give your metal clay jewelry the look of enamel without the high temperature and multiple applications necessary with traditional enameling. Vitrea paints come in transparent and frosted colors and can also be diluted with a clear thinner to soften the look.

Vitrea paints also look stunning on porcelain cabochons that are often integrated into metal clay work. Just like the hand painted china of a by-gone era the colors are soft and exquisite.

The colors need to by stirred before application and can be mixed with other colors to form a new color. Also, as mentioned before, they can be mixed with the thinner for a more transparent shade of color. If you plan on applying a second coat over the first, it is important to let the first coat dry completely. After allowing 24 hours for the final coat of paint to dry, the metal clay or porcelain piece is placed in an oven at 325 degrees to set the colors. Once baked, the colors are permanent and can withstand tumbling polishing, and the application of Liver of Sulfur. This makes it important to be very sure you are happy with your colors and design composition before baking. So next time you want an enameled look without the inherent difficulties that are involved in enameling, why not try something different and see how you like working with Vitrea paints.

UV Gel Resin

There are a variety of epoxy resins available on the market today. Each brand has its own specific instructions and its own peculiarities. Most take a minimum of 24 hours to cure. Some of the challenges include: preventing or alleviating air bubbles, keeping a consistently warm temperature so the resin can cure properly and accurate measuring and mixing (without stirring up air bubbles.)

UV Gel Resin is a type of resin which does not need to be measured or mixed. It cures within minutes underneath an ultra violet light. A small UV light unit, similar to those used in nail salons, work well for curing resin on most metal clay jewelry pieces or small sculpture. The clear resin will cure in 30 seconds to 1 minute and the colored resins can take up to 2 minutes. There are several obvious advantages. With other resins it would take days to create a piece that required the layering or addition of a different color or different shades of color. With UV Gel Resin, it's easy to apply a layer of one color, cure it, and then immediately apply a layer of another color or a darker shade of the first color. Another benefit is that since the resin cures so quickly, there is no need to try to keep a consistently warm temperature for such a long duration of time. Also, UV Gel Resin will not yellow and can be sanded and polished to a high sheen.

To prepare your metal clay piece, it should be completely finished and then cleaned with rubbing alcohol to remove any oil and dirt from handling. If there is an opening at the bottom, into which you will be pouring the resin, you will need to seal off the opening. You can do this by applying adhesive tape to the opening and burnishing it to the silver to insure that the resin will not leak around the tape.

I like to heat my jar of UV Gel Resin by setting the container on a warming tray, dehydrator, or on top of a toaster oven so it will gently and evenly heat. This helps alleviate most air bubbles. A good rule of thumb is to heat it for a half an hour or more. Another option is to warm it with a hairdryer for a few minutes, though to be safe, wear a protective mask to avoid breathing in the fumes. Once the container is heated, I will spoon out a small amount onto a 4 x 4 piece of marble or into a shallow glass bowl or china saucer. The amount I use depends upon how much I need for that application of color. I'll pour a few drops of colorant off to the side and then using a toothpick, begin to draw the color over to the resin slowly, one drop at a time. I stir it gently into the resin, until I find the shade I am looking for. The color is very concentrated so only tiny amounts are needed. Too much colorant can prevent the resin from curing properly.

Once the color is mixed in, I am ready to apply the resin to my metal clay piece. To make the application easier, and to pop any air bubbles, I will heat the small amount of resin that I have prepared with a stick lighter, (like the lighters used to light a grill,) just before I am ready to apply it. I can then use a small spatula or demitasse spoon to transfer the resin to my metal clay piece. If bubbles do appear, you can pass the flame over the resin one more time before you cure it. You are then ready to set your piece under the UV light. Curing time for the clear resin is 30 seconds to 1 minute and 2 minutes for the colored resin. The rule of thumb is the darker the color, the longer it takes to cure. You can put a piece of aluminum foil in the bottom of the UV light fixture to concentrate the UV rays onto the piece. This will also keep your unit free from any spills. If you need to prop your piece up, use a soften piece of polymer clay or a small piece of sponge with a slice cut down the middle of it. By sitting your jewelry piece up at an angle, the resin can be cured at varying angles.

You may continue adding more layers of resin to the top of the hardened resin layer until you reach your desired volume. Each layer can be the same color, a different shade of the same

color, or a different color all together. Most anything can be embedded in any of the layers of resin. It may be easier to add an object in thicker resin, in which case you can chose not to heat it. Some examples of inclusions are silver or gold granulation, herbs, spices, flowers, leaves, seeds, pods, shells, coarse sand, insects, and other items from nature. Collage materials can be added such as paper, foils, beads, pearls, rhinestones, small game pieces, charms, and other types of ephemera. Items can be inserted into the resin and protrude out of it, creating such things as flower stems, spikes, wire shapes, and small protruding pebbles.

Once cured, the resin will still have a tacky surface even though it has been hardened. There is a resin cleanser which you will want to use once you have finished applying the final layer of resin. It should not be used in between each layer. You will then use wet and dry sanding pads or polishing papers to polish down the resin to the silver surface level. You begin with 400 grit, moving up to 2000 grit (or 4000 grit for the papers.) Avoid using traditional sandpaper as it can leave the resin looking cloudy. If, after polishing, your resin still has a matte finish it means that you have not polished it long enough. The final resin finish should be crystal clear. You will always want to use water when polishing metal clay pieces containing resin as the resin particles should not be inhaled. The final step is to polish both the silver and the resin with Wenol and a polishing cloth. Any uncured resin left on tools or on the UV lamp unit can be cleaned up with the UV Resin Cleanser.

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Pieces contributed:
Windows to my Soul wall hanging
PMC, Prisma Color pencils, enamel, pearl, Spanish moss, sterling wire
Garden Delight necklace
PMC, Prisma color pencils, Rhodochrosite, pearls, and a sterling clasp
Undersea Experience
PMC, Prisma color pencils, enamel, and amber
Nothing fits
PMC, Prisma color pencils, leather, painted wood frame

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Under the SEA
Metal clay, Fine Silver, resin