



Gallery Guide

January 28, 2011 - March 27, 2011





Drawing for *Charro and Woman at Well*
Mexican Arts and Crafts Workshop, 1930s
Colored pencil on butcher paper, 16.5" x 24.5"

Colors on Clay explores the history and imagery of San Antonio clay works created during Ethel Wilson Harris' entrepreneurial endeavors in the early twentieth century. In a period of municipal transformation – a large influx of Mexicans were migrating to San Antonio as a result of the Mexican Revolution – Harris provided an outlet for Mexican artisans to cultivate and promote their traditional crafts in the United States. The three tile workshops she started and managed (Mexican Arts and Crafts from 1931-1941, San José Potteries from 1934-1945, and Mission Crafts from 1941-1977) produced thousands of ceramic wares and clay works that adorn the city of San Antonio.

Fernando Ramos emerged as the principal artist and designer in the initial workshop, capturing scenes of South Texas and Mexican life. Ramos had newly immigrated and had a penchant for dance, and his designs captured the quintessential pastoral settings of Texas, flamenco dancers' emotive movements, and the idyllic scenes of rural Mexico. With a characteristic sinuous line work, Ramos' oeuvre established the primary designs used in all of Harris' workshops. The *Colors on Clay* selections of paintings, drawings, and tile work represent the discursive history of Ramos' designs and his pivotal role in sustaining the iconic styling of the workshops' productions. Juxtaposing Ramos' original drawings with later application reveals the enduring impact of these initial creations.

On generous loan from the private collection of Susan Toomey Frost, *Colors on Clay* displays the cultural patrimony created and sustained by Harris' workshops and their fundamental role in creating a unique internationally renowned San Antonio visual identity.

Chronology

1720

Mission San José founded by Father Antonio Margil de Jesús

1893

Ethel Wilson Harris born in Sabinal, TX [d. 1984]

1929

San Antonio Conservation Society begins purchasing land to preserve Mission San José

1931-1941

Mexican Arts and Crafts operates in a historic barn along the San Antonio River

1933-1936

San Antonio Conservation Society conducts restoration of Mission San José granary

1933 -1934

Harris' pottery operations participate in the Chicago World's Fair

1934 -1945

San José Potteries operates in a building one block south of Mission San José

1936

Harris' pottery operations participate in the Texas Centennial Fair in Dallas, TX

1937

Harris copyrights her signature crafts mark (maguey) and a catalog of Fernando Ramos' designs with the Library of Congress

1939

Harris becomes technical supervisor of the Arts and Crafts Division of the Work Projects Administration in San Antonio
Harris' pottery operations participate in the New York World's Fair

1941

San José Mission State Park is created; Harris is named first site manager

1941-1977

Mexican Arts and Crafts closes and moves to Mission San José, operating under the new name of Mission Crafts

1955

Harris moves into a modern home on Mission San José grounds

1983

Five years after its establishment, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park officially opens

2001

The National Park Service lists the Ethel Wilson Harris house on the National Register of Historic Places

Ethel Wilson Harris



Portrait of Ethel Wilson, March 1919
Courtesy of Susan Toomey Frost

Ethel Wilson Harris [d. 1984] was born in Sabinal, Texas in 1893. After attending San Antonio Female College, Harris ran a small tile contracting business throughout the 1920s. She would later become president of three internationally recognized pottery workshops in San Antonio: Mexican Arts and Crafts, San José Potteries, and Mission Crafts.

The first pottery workshop, Mexican Arts and Crafts, produced various pottery and tile from 1931-1941. Upon approval of the San Antonio Conservation Society, Harris leased the granary at Mission San José to promote Mexican artistry, sell her workshop's pottery wares, and promote San Antonio tourism.

Harris expanded her workshop's exposure by participating in the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Although a fledgling company, Harris' pottery workshop was one of the only San Antonio businesses represented at the Fair. As a result, Mexican Arts and Crafts was invited to participate in the 1939 New York World's Fair.

In 1939, Harris became the technical supervisor of the Arts and Crafts Division of the Work Projects Administration in San Antonio. This federal program promoted millions of people to carry out public works projects, including large-scale art projects. As a result, San Antonio charitable and public institutions received complimentary products, and Mexican Arts and Crafts became synonymous with San Antonio's visual identity.



Crafts mark modified by Harris for WPA products
Courtesy of Seale Studios

Harris remained dedicated to San Antonio as Manager of San José Mission State Park. On May 8, 1941, Harris became the first woman to be appointed site manager of a Texas state park. In October of the same year, she resigned her post as technical supervisor for the WPA's Arts and Crafts division and took up residence in a restored part of the mission.

Living on-site allowed Harris to fully devote herself to managing her workshops and the mission compound, which she would continue to do for twenty-two years. Harris succeeded the Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop with Mission Crafts, and although a much smaller endeavor, the workshop produced works on the mission grounds and sold its wares along with selected hand-made objects from Mexico for decades.

In 1955, Harris moved into a modern house designed by one of her sons, architect Robert Wilson Harris. The house was built on private land that Ethel Wilson Harris had purchased - a small plot of land conveniently located right next to the Mission San Jose compound. Harris eventually retired from



*Harris ringing mission bell in her Texas State Parks Board uniform
Courtesy of the San Antonio Conservation Society Foundation*



Ethel Wilson Harris House, Courtesy of Seale Studios

her mission site manager position in 1963, and closed all pottery operations in 1977.

After her death in 1984, the National Park Service restored Harris' house, and in 2001 the Ethel Wilson Harris House became part of the National Register of Historic Places.

Mission San José

Mission San José, home to two of Ethel Wilson Harris' workshops, was established in 1720 by Father Antonio Margil de Jesús. Located four miles south of Mission San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo), Mission San José was the largest of five Spanish missions situated along the San Antonio River. The mission compound included a church (with bell tower), convent, gristmill, granary, workshops, and living quarters for natives.



Mission San José, Seth Eastman, ca. 1848-1849
Oil, canvas, panel, 22" x 15.5"
Courtesy of the Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas

San José developed a reputation as the "Queen of the Missions of New Spain." Of all the missions in the region, Mission San José was the most successful in accomplishing the task of converting the indigenous population to Christianity and the European lifestyle. The mission managed to thrive until the 1780s, even after suffering severe losses due to an epidemic of smallpox and measles in 1739. By the turn of the century, however, the mission was in decline due to insufficient military defense, disease, and increased attacks by

hostile Apaches and Comanches. The mission closed in 1824. Portions of the land were sold to civilians, and ownership of the church was handed over to the local Catholic diocese.

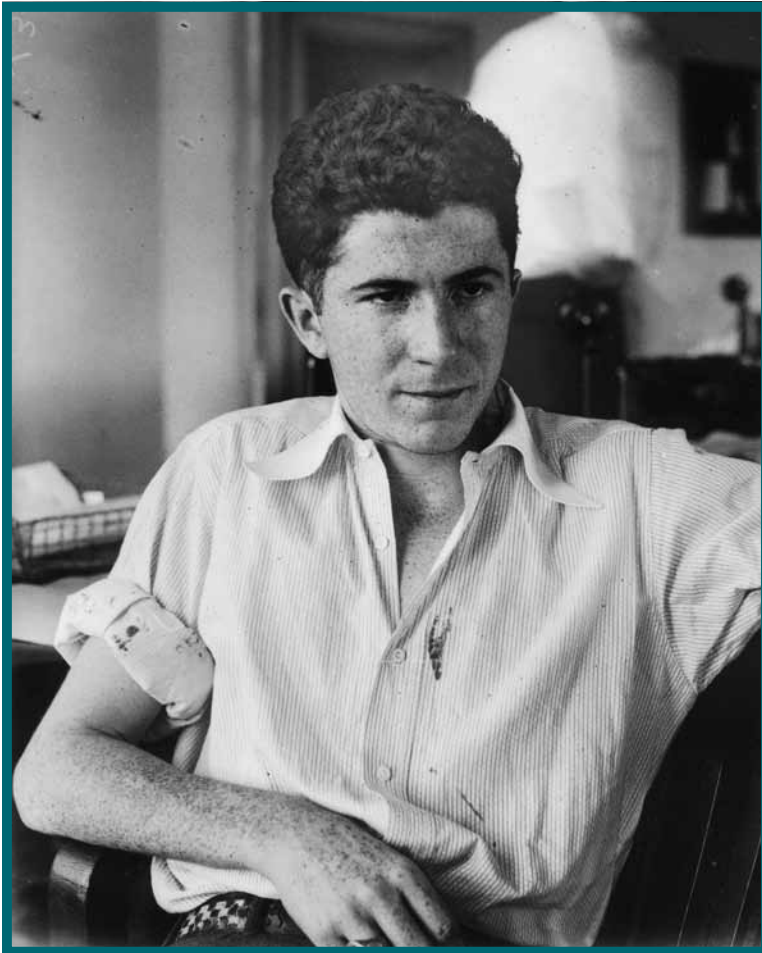
After closing, the physical structure of the mission suffered considerable damage, including the collapse of the church bell tower, dome, and granary roof. Community groups initiated efforts to restore and preserve Mission San José, beginning with a national letter-writing campaign in 1902 by the San Antonio chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. The San Antonio Conservation Society, with which Harris was very involved, began purchasing land and property to preserve the mission. They funded restoration of the granary, which was then leased to Harris for use as a gift shop. The organization's efforts proved instrumental to the creation of both San José Mission State Park in 1941 and to San Antonio Missions National Park in 1978. The national park officially opened in 1983, preserving the legacy and history of the missions for future generations.

Fernando Ramos

After immigrating with his parents to the United States from Mexico, Ramos began his artistic career in San Antonio. He attended art lessons at the Witte Museum and won the annual Fiesta poster contest, kick-starting his career in the San Antonio arts scene.

Ethel Wilson Harris hired Ramos as the principal artist for the Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop while Ramos was still in high school. Harris marketed Ramos' original creations during her tenure in all three workshops and eventually copyrighted a book of Ramos' designs with the Library of Congress in 1937. After working part-time at the workshop,

Ramos left in 1934 to study with the masters of Spanish, Mexican, and Gypsy dance schools in Mexico.



Portrait of Fernando Ramos, October 1932
Courtesy of UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures

It was there that Ramos met Carla Montel, a fellow dancer and his future wife. Ramos and Montel became a sought after dance couple forming a team called "Carla and Fernando." They toured the United States, performed in movies such as *Bells of Capistrano* (1942), and even performed at the prestigious Carnegie Hall in New York City. Although they later divorced, the couple's dancing provided the impetus behind many of the designs of Mexican Arts and Crafts. In the 1960s, Ramos opened a dance studio in Fort Worth, Texas. He returned to San Antonio in 1959 and 1962 to help Ethel Wilson Harris with her productions for the outdoor amphitheater at Mission San José.

Ramos' designs were the foundation of Harris' workshops, and his images continue to express the emotive nature of movement associated with both a dancer and visual artist.

Mexican Arts and Crafts, 1931-1941



Artisans in front of Mexican Arts and Crafts
Courtesy of Susan Toomey Frost

Ethel Wilson Harris founded Mexican Arts and Crafts in 1931 in a historic barn along the San Antonio River, located at 1002 North St. Mary's Street. This workshop produced pottery, tiles, and other traditional Mexican wares. Harris, who often traveled to Mexico and was an avid supporter of Mexican folk art, wanted to keep the folk art tradition alive in San Antonio through her workshops. She instructed designers to create scenes reminiscent of everyday life in Mexico, and employed artisans of Mexican descent living in San Antonio.

Ethel Wilson Harris hired Fernando Ramos, a young high school student who displayed tremendous artistic talent, as the principal artist for Mexican Arts and Crafts. Working with Fernando Ramos led to the creation of iconic scenes and original tile designs that would continue to be used in the workshops after his tenure. Ramos was born in 1913 during the tumultuous Mexican Revolution, and as a result, his parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Young Fernando Ramos had an inclination for dancing and drawing, and he would eventually fuse these two passions into an enduring style. Harris marketed Ramos' original creations throughout the duration of all three workshops and copyrighted a book of Ramos' designs.



La gitana and El gitano
(Self-portraits of Carla Montel and Fernando Ramos)
Fernando Ramos, 1930s

In 1934 Harris expanded the workshop to include another production facility known as San José Potteries, and in 1935 she leased the Mission San José granary to set up a Mexican Arts and Crafts satellite gift shop. The United States began taking notice of the workshop's productions when they were presented at the Chicago and New York World's Fairs, but it was Texas – specifically San Antonio – which benefited the most from the development of the Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop. For the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936, Mexican Arts and Crafts created unique tile murals and wrought iron tables to commemorate the events and Texas folklore and history.



Mexican Arts and Crafts gift shop in Mission San José granary
Photo by H.L. Summerville, courtesy of Susan Toomey Frost

After Harris became the technical supervisor of the Arts and Crafts Division of the Work Projects Administration (WPA), about sixty WPA artisans joined the Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop in 1939. Artisans created dishes for needy families, keys to the city, city parks, stadium murals, and fountains. Although Harris ended her involvement with the WPA program in 1941, the works created under this legislation proved invaluable for San Antonio. Mexican Arts and Crafts would eventually cease production in their location along the river and transform into Harris' third and final tile venture: Mission Crafts.



Reproduction of *La Corrida de Gallos*, 1940-1941
Mexican Arts and Crafts, with WPA Arts and Crafts Division
Courtesy of The Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas

San José Potteries, 1934 -1945

The second of Ethel Wilson Harris' endeavors, San José Potteries, was initially established as a production factory for the tiles and pottery created by the Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop (which was still in operation at the time). The barn housing Mexican Arts and Crafts did not have adequate space or a kiln required to complete the tile making process. Prior to the founding of San José Potteries, Mexican Arts and Crafts used the production facilities of the Southern Company, a plumbing supply manufacturer that was trying to enter the tile making business. Two employees of the Southern Company, J. E. Hennegan and Frank R. Henderson, aided Harris in developing plans for San José Potteries.



Workers in front of the San José Potteries workshop
Courtesy of UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures

Mrs. Lewis Krams (Mabel Jewett) Beck, an avid supporter of the Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop, purchased shares in San José Potteries and urged her son, Cecil Beck, to invest his inheritance into the company. As he knew very little about tile making and business practices, Cecil Beck named Ethel Wilson Harris president of San José Potteries, his mother vice president, and himself secretary. The factory had a kiln capable of firing 2,000 pieces at one time, and at its peak employed a team of about forty artisans.

For this particular workshop, Harris produced a small catalog of "Pan American Ware," which offered customers various designs in the form of single tiles, tile murals, dinnerware, and pottery. The designs for this line of products expanded into subject matters typically not seen in work done by Mexican Arts and Crafts. Attempting to appeal to a broader audience, "Pan American Ware" included scenes of Colonial, Western, and Indian life in addition to scenes from Mexico and South Texas.

San José Potteries produced items unique from the other two workshops. Bookends and doorstops were manufactured completely out of clay, whereas those made by Mexican Arts and Crafts and its successor, Mission Crafts, were clay tiles set in a wrought iron frame. The company also produced vases, ashtrays, and cookie jars, among other novelty items.

Ethel Wilson Harris' involvement with San José Potteries ended in July of 1937, only three years after its founding. Harris resigned as president due to disagreements with the Becks, particularly concerning Mrs. Beck's interference with business decisions and tendency to alter designs. Cecil Beck agreed to return all original drawings owned by Mexican Arts and Crafts, and furthermore not to make or sell in San Antonio any products bearing distinct similarities to those of Mexican Arts and Crafts. To ensure that San José Potteries would not continue to use her designs, Harris copyrighted her signature crafts mark and a catalog of Mexican Arts and Crafts designs in August 1937.



Detail of Page from Copyrighted Catalog

The calla lily dinnerware line was created after Harris cut ties with the workshop, yet is the most recognizable design produced by San José Potteries. Each piece (excluding the cup and saucer) features a single lily amidst a background of warm brown and cool green. Interestingly, Harris avoided depicting a single calla lily in any of her workshops' designs; products made at Mexican Arts and Crafts and Mission Crafts always included two or more lilies.



Calla Lily Dinnerware - Salad Plate
1940s

Cecil Beck sold the factory in 1941 to a company from New York, which continued to produce pottery in the facility until it caught fire in May of 1944. After unsuccessful attempts by the company to resume operation, the building was finally demolished in 1947.

Mission Crafts, 1941-1977



(L to R) Rendón, Carmona, and unidentified potter outside Mission Crafts
Courtesy of UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures

The Mission Crafts workshop became the successor to Ethel Wilson Harris' initial Mexican Arts and Crafts workshop in 1941. As the newly appointed Site Manager of Mission San José, Harris was allowed to live on the mission grounds. In an advantageous move, she created another workshop within the Mission San José compound. Along with the construction of a large gas-fired kiln, the new workshop had the luxury of a large space, tourism (and thus buying power for the on-site gift shop), and a rural ambiance reminiscent of many of Ramos' designs.

For further cultural atmosphere, one of the workshop's artisans, Mateo Espinosa, demonstrated Mexican pottery al fresco on Sunday afternoons. Espinosa and another artisan, Ángel Rendón (referred to by Harris as her right-hand man), often prepared the pottery and tiles for glazing and managed the kiln. Rendón had collaborated with the workshops since their inception, and he was reputed to be a perfectionist in setting tile into panels and tables. Lucile Carmona was another important artisan in the history of Mission Crafts. Carmona, who was the principal artist for Mission Crafts, began her tenure at the workshop at the age of seventeen and continued designing until its closing in 1977.



Pottery demonstration in front of mission
Courtesy of Seale Studios

Mission Crafts worked with Theo Voss, a local iron artisan, when creating pieces with wrought iron. Similar to the cultural motivations of the tile workshops, Voss employed artisans of German descent who had settled in nearby New Braunfels, TX. Items such as tables, frames, and other metal wares were forged or welded and then set with tile.



Courtesy of Susan Toomey Frost



Commissioned mural, Menger Hotel
Fernando Ramos
San Antonio, Texas, 1950s
Image courtesy of Susan Toomey Frost

The iconic Southwestern and Mexican scenes created by Mission Crafts proved time and again to be a viable tourist commodity. For example, the St. Anthony Hotel in downtown San Antonio presented Mission Crafts tiles to celebrities staying in their accommodations. In addition, numerous commissions were created for churches, personal homes, ranches, and hotels throughout the state of Texas. Harris was well known for her painstaking attention to detail in accommodating a client's design request. Also popular was the Mission Crafts line of small souvenir tiles depicting Mission San José, the Alamo, or other area missions.

After Harris' retirement in 1963, her grandson Donald J. Harris took over the business. Because costs were too high and production time too long, all pottery operations were closed in 1977.

Ladrillera Monterrey, S.A.



Charro on Horse
Mid 1930s
6" x 6"

The brick and roofing tile factory Ladrillera Monterrey, S.A. (Lamosa) began in 1933 under the advisement of Frank R. Henderson (1905-1999). Henderson's role with Lamosa was similar to that of his relationship with Ethel Wilson Harris and Mexican Arts and Crafts - as an advisor of initial operations and ongoing consultant.

Various differences existed between the San Antonio-based workshops and Monterrey-based Lamosa. Unlike tiles produced in Harris' workshops, Lamosa tiles were not pressed into molds, but rather made by machine. Moreover, the stylings of Lamosa tiles and tables have distinctive features referencing the Mexican landscape of Monterrey.

Landmarks were often included in the background of scenes, such as El Obispado (Bishop's Palace) and La Silla (Saddleback Mountain).

Materiales Modernos, S.A. obtained exclusive rights to distribute Lamosa wares. Lamosa tiles can be found in many locations across Texas, including buildings at Texas State University in San Marcos and the Alameda Theater in San Antonio. Juxtaposed to the Harris workshops' pieces, the color palette, treatment of line, and shading of Lamosa tiles are strikingly different.



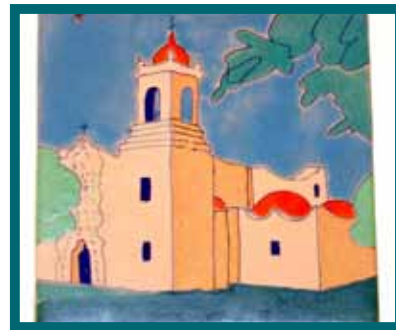
Geometric Table, Mid-1930s, 21" x 24" x 16"

Tile-making Process

The workshops run by Ethel Wilson Harris used two different methods of decorating clay tiles. *Cuerda seca* - or dry-line method - is an older and more time-consuming technique. It required artisans to transfer the design directly onto the clay tile by using carbon paper. After laying a sheet of carbon paper over the tile, followed by the original design, the artist then used a stylus to press into the lines of the design. The pressure forced ink from the carbon paper onto the tile, leaving an exact replica of the original drawing. Artists then traced these lines with wax to prevent the colored glazes from flowing into each other while being fired in the kiln. This technique is based on the fact that oil (wax) and water (water-based glazes) do not mix.



Original design



Completed tile - *cuerda seca*

For the second method, called *cuenca*, artists used a mold with the original design incised in reverse at the bottom. Once the clay was removed from the mold, the design remained as raised lines on the surface. The raised lines served the same purpose as the wax-resist lines of the *cuerda seca* method - they kept the glazes from running into each other. This method was not only faster than *cuerda seca*, but it also produced a different end product. *Cuerda seca* tiles are flat, while *cuenca* tiles have more texture due to the raised lines produced by the mold.



Mold



Tile with raised lines



Completed tile - *cuenca*

Artisans at both the Mexican Arts and Crafts and San José Potteries workshops used the older technique of *cuerda seca*. The third workshop run by Ethel Wilson Harris - Mission Crafts - favored using the *cuenca* method, especially for producing souvenirs during the later years.

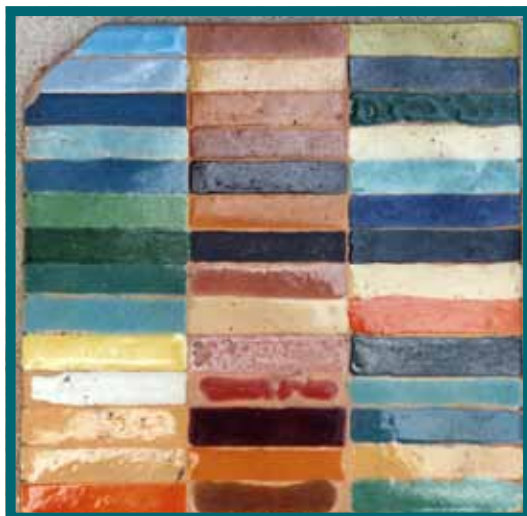
Colors and Glazes

The small numbers in each area of Fernando Ramos' drawings indicate which colored glazes to apply to clay surfaces. This system enabled multiple decorators to produce identical tiles and plates. Artisans could apply glazes either by brush or with syringe-like applicators.



Details of Couple with Pot (drawing and plate), Fernando Ramos, 1930s

The 8-inch tile below served as a color guide for decorators at Mission Crafts. The forty-two different glazes each have a corresponding name or number on the reverse side of the tile.



Front

Nº3 Green	Enter tan	Calamita
31 gray	21	Columbian Blue
Bracket greens	22	Indigo
Cream 60	23	36
NP 2-76	20	38
110	gold brown	41
70-8	wood brown	42
75-150	76 lite	43
37	76 m-2	45
610-43	pink	50
680-38	Bird Rose	60
305	AF Red	70
205	Orange	700 lite
	28 face	75

Back

Vocabulary

Artisan

A craftsperson or skilled, manual worker who makes functional and decorative items, such as furniture, clothing, jewelry, household items, and pottery

Crafts Mark

A distinctive mark or image that is applied to a work's surface that indicates the identity of the artist or workshop who created it

Cuenca

Tile decorating method using a mold to produce raised lines on the tile's surface; glazes are pooled within the raised lines

Cuerda seca

Tile decorating method using carbon paper to transfer a paper design to a tile, and wax-resist to prevent the colored glazes from running together

Earthenware

A light and porous clay that is fired at low temperatures

Fresco

Mural painting applied to a plaster wall

Glaze

A compound of glass and chemicals that is applied to the surface of already fired clay and creates a colorful, glossy surface when re-fired

Incise

To cut into or carve with a sharp instrument

Kiln

A thermally insulated chamber or oven, in which temperatures are controlled to heat, bake, and dry clay and other materials

Mold

A hollow form into which moist clay is pressed to create a consistent shape or design

Stylus

Sharp tool used to incise clay and other soft materials

Word Search

Look closely and try to find all of the Colors on Clay vocabulary words in this word search! For an extra challenge, time yourself to see how fast you can find them!

W	R	A	G	R	H	K	D	C	S	N	S	E	Z	A	L	G	Q	I	X	N	N	C	Y	M
R	E	C	J	O	U	F	R	C	W	T	M	H	R	E	T	C	U	E	N	C	A	L	N	G
W	L	E	F	R	N	D	O	A	Y	R	E	R	A	W	N	E	H	T	R	A	E	A	I	Q
K	E	S	V	R	K	W	Y	L	M	H	A	I	V	F	U	O	T	X	S	B	S	I	M	K
A	P	A	B	W	E	E	U	H	N	S	C	X	F	V	K	D	O	A	K	I	X	N	R	V
O	W	D	S	I	W	S	Z	P	G	M	T	A	B	J	X	L	T	W	T	E	A	C	C	I
M	A	R	L	H	S	F	C	L	A	U	L	F	Q	S	A	O	G	R	Y	X	N	I	Y	S
K	P	E	A	Q	K	Q	B	O	L	S	Z	L	A	C	J	M	A	I	T	H	M	S	D	D
Y	H	U	M	Z	F	O	Z	X	L	A	D	Z	W	R	I	W	C	X	C	D	V	E	H	F
C	H	C	E	K	J	E	K	C	M	P	G	M	Q	K	C	I	W	T	K	R	G	T	J	D

Color-by-Numbers

Often, when workshop artists created a design, they would use numbers to indicate what colors of glazes the decorators should use. This way, different decorators could produce plates or tiles that looked exactly the same. Today, you are the decorator, and it is your job to glaze this plate! Use the Color Key to find out what color to use for each part of the plate design.



Color Key

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| 1 - Blue | 6 - Black |
| 2 - Green | 7 - Light Blue |
| 3 - Orange | 8 - White |
| 4 - Yellow | 9 - Beige |
| 5 - Brown | |

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