

MUD – What is it, where did it come from and what do I do with it?

by Margot Clark

What is MUD?

MUD is a texture product that air dries rock hard and can also be kiln fired whichever you choose. It gets its name from the consistency – it looked like white mud to me as we were developing it so MUD seemed like a fitting and descriptive name. I use it air dried for decorating ornaments, eggs, matboard, wood, metal, paper – most anything that is not oily feeling like some plastics. I kiln fire it to make tiles for kitchens and bathrooms, on terra cotta and porcelain and for fused glass artwork. I have a ton of photos to show you lots of possibilities!

Where did MUD come from and why?

A bit of history: I have worked in the ceramic and glass industry since the early 90's right along with the decorative painting industry. I knew that one of the company's I had worked for might be coming up for sale in a few years – Unique Glass Colors which made kiln fired glass colorants. Since I had used the product for almost twenty years I felt fairly confident of my product knowledge but certainly could not run a company that size by myself. I had been doing art shows and gallery shows with a friend who only works in glass so I approached my husband Harold and my friend Saulius Jankauskas (we call him Dr. SJ because it is easier!) and asked them what they thought about buying the company and they agreed it was possibility for the future. That was December of 2008. Since life does not ever go how you expect it to we found ourselves talking to the owner about buying the company in February of 2009. By August we had made several trips to Louisiana to learn all the manufacturing processes, purchased a warehouse and offices and moved the whole company to Casselberry, Florida where we all live. We were open for business by September 15th.

I am the CEO/Director of Marketing, Harold is the COO/Director of Warehousing and Production and Dr. SJ is our CFO/Director of Research and Development and a practicing plastic surgeon. I was still traveling and doing demos for companies using their texture products to create my textured painted flowers. It occurred to me that since we could manufacture colors we should be able to manufacture me my own texture product so once we got settled in I asked Dr. SJ if he could make me a texture product that would dry harder and not chip off as I wanted to be able to do Faux Wood Carving and the product would have to stand up to wear and tear. Since he only works in glass and all of our other products are kiln fired he said he would but it would have to be able to be kiln fired along with our colors. In December we had MUD! By the following May we also had Black MUD. We market Unique MUD to the glass industry and Margot's MUD to the decorating painting industry. I have now been teaching MUDDING to lots of people and they have become great MUDDERS!

MUD contains finely ground glass which makes it dry rock hard and also allows it to be fired in a kiln between 1425F and 1550F. Note that the hotter it is fired the shinier it becomes.

What do I do with it?



Let's start with flowers. I love to create flowers in any medium. One of the techniques I use to paint flowers in acrylics I call my Contemporary Multi-load Technique where I use my Margot's Miracle Brush and look for the highlight on the petal, dribble paint off the brush, catch the paint dribble and pull it to the calyx. This worked perfectly for texture painting also, but instead of dribbling paint off the brush I use a pastry bag with a stainless steel writing tip to "dribble" and then use the brush to catch and pull in to the calyx. I absolutely love to create ornaments and trying to get a pattern on a round ball is a pain so I developed a step-by-step method of

creating flowers so no pattern is needed. You can see the logical steps to follow and soon you will be thinking up your own flowers and designs.



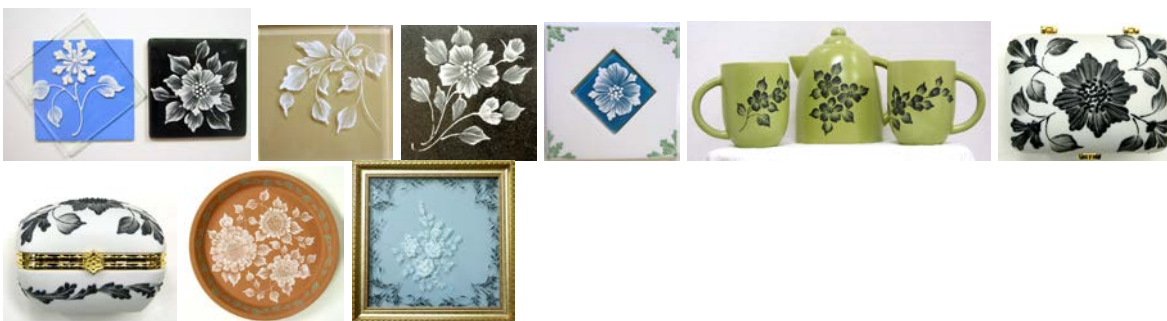
Here are some examples of different air-dried projects using the flowers (and variations) shown on the worksheet. You can see wooden eggs, paper gift bags and greeting cards, glass ornaments, an embellished paper mache mask and a wooden candle plate.



I mentioned Faux Wood Carving. Here are some samples of that technique.

First is a sampler board on wood showing the MUD stained and metal leafed. Then there is a heart box where the design is done on the sealed wood and then the paint is applied over the top of the design. Just imagine how you could jazz up a flea market find with this technique. The MUD dries so hard you would have to take a chisel to it to chip it and if you did that to real carved wood that would also ruin the carving so the MUD is as strong as or even stronger than the “real” thing. The Lilies photo shows the White MUD on a navy blue background and then the same piece with silver leafing applied. So many possibilities.

Now let’s see some kiln fired projects with the very same techniques. Firing makes the MUD permanent. You can use a ceramic kiln (use the middle shelf) or a glass kiln. Note that there are kilns on the market now that use 110V, regular household current, and are very lightweight. I use both a 240V ceramic kiln and a 110V lightweight glass kiln and both are digital programmable because I love the control! However, for many, many years I fired in a ceramic kiln that used firing cones. If you have firing or kiln questions please email me at margot@margotclark.com.



The first photo shows how to create a glass tile. I am using float glass (regular window glass) with Unique Glass Color on the bottom piece and a MUD design on the top piece. Place them together and fuse them in a kiln at 1525F and - Voila! Custom glass tiles! The tan tile was purchased from a home improvement store (color already on the back of it) as was the black granite tile and I applied my design and re-fired them to 1430F – great accent tiles to add to pre-made tiles. The white inset tile was purchased, I added the design to the corners with tinted MUD (tint with Unique Glass Colors NT Colors liquefied for firing), created the inset as I did for the first tile and now you have custom inset tiles! All of the tiles are now ready for installation in a bathroom or kitchen.

How about that gorgeous green tea set? I purchased it ready-made, put my design on with Black MUD and re-fired to 1430F, cooler than it was originally fired at so the glaze just softened enough for the MUD to adhere. Next, purchased porcelain box decorated with Black MUD, terra cotta plant saucer with White MUD, decorated and re-fired. The framed piece is one layer of double strength float glass with both White and Black MUD designs and then fired to 1485F. Since it is clear it will show up whatever the wall is behind it – again a custom look. It could also go out in your garden or hung in a bathroom or spa since it is now permanent.



So – what if you are not a flower person?

Dr. SJ (Saulius Jankauskas) has created wonderful coral types by mixing the MUD with glass frit (ground glass bits), placing it on the glass, adding our Unique Glass Color and kiln firing. There is a close-up photo of the coral, see the dimension? Look at the great tree bark he created using the same pastry bag and tip I use to make the flowers. You could create the same look and use acrylics to add color if you do not have a kiln. Glass tiles are always popular and here is one that is easy to do and is very inexpensive to do but pricey to purchase. The MUD was used as you would Thinset – buttered on the first piece of glass – then bits of tempered glass from a broken tabletop were pushed into the MUD. Allow to dry, cap with a second piece of glass and fuse it all together.



Here are some kiln fired examples where I have used the Black MUD as an outline to resemble stained glass lead lines for my design before adding colors.

Color!



I am sure you have noticed that there is no color added to my white flowers. I personally love the contrast between the White MUD design and the background color. However, it is very easy to add color if you desire. I wait for 24 hours so the MUD is completely dry and hardened, then add color in one of two ways. On the pink side I is coated a petal or leaf with a thin coat of Medium, wiped the brush, picked up just a bit of color, tucked it into the darkest area, wiped the brush and coaxed the color out onto the petal or leaf for a soft gradation of color and then used a small angle shader to float a bit of color in the darker areas. On the purple side I thinned the color with a little Medium and water and then coated the whole petal and leaf. Let that dry and go back in with the angle shader and the same color to add a bit of depth. I have only done random flowers and leaves on the ornament so you can see how all of it looks together and I like this look, too! These techniques are the same for acrylic paint for air drying or glass color for kiln firing. The edge of the terra cotta flower pot was done with kiln-fired color. This way, you can do custom work easily by having all the designs done ahead of time in White MUD and then adding the color the customer desires.

People always ask if you can tint the MUD. The answer is yes but since it is so opaque you would only ever get a tint and then you have a whole pastry bag full of one color and it reminds me more of cake icing when applied in that manner. Not the look I want for my artwork!

I hope this article has given you some new ideas for making great gifts, decorating your own home or for a new business making custom tiles! Besides - it is very relaxing and GREAT fun!

MUD Kits are available with everything included – even one of my Margot’s Miracle Brushes - in both regular and Deluxe (contains Black MUD), a DVD on MUD Techniques, project tutorials and a MUD Florals Workbook that has worksheets and patterns. These are available at www.margotclark.com and www.uniqueglasscolors.com