

RESISTING MATERIALS

Jar Decorated with Resist Motif | China, Early 8th century



Jar Decorated with Resist Motif. China. Early 8th century.
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Julius Levy Memorial Fund,
BMA 1939.242



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When you look at this wide, round jar, what do you see? The lower quarter of the vessel is an off-white color, but the rest of the jar displays a vibrant range of whites, greens, and browns. This is often referred to as a three-color glaze, but when you look closely, you can clearly see a wider array of colors. How many colors can you find as you look at the jar?

Under a rim of brown, white flowers with three, four, or five rounded petals atop a short stem of light brown appear against a background of deep green. Petals may be all white or display a hazy film of light green. Each section of seven flowers (one flower at the top and three rows of two flowers each) is separated by a decorative vertical design—two rows of organic white circles delineated in green with a stripe of brown in the center.

This vessel was made in China in the early 8th century during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) at the height of the Silk Road, when a vast network of land and sea routes enabled massive cultural, artistic, and religious exchange across Eurasia, from what is now Italy to Japan. The Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) in China was diverse, cosmopolitan, and bursting with artistic innovation. This particular jar was crafted in the region of the capital city of Chang'an (today Xian). Three-color glazed ceramics—figures and vessels—were made exclusively for members of the imperial family.

Decoration on this jar reflects both the flowering of artistry and the cultural exchange during this period. Artists used wax or powdered clay to create areas that would “resist” the glazes, leaving the designs you now see on the jar. This may have been inspired by resist-dyed fabrics that were imported through the Silk Road. (One example of a resist dyeing technique is tie dyeing.) The lead glazes that cover this jar are very runny, and using them to create the flowers and other decorative elements on a jar this round was a significant technical achievement.

RELATED ACTIVITY

Exploring resist techniques can be fun and easy. You will need paper, crayons, watercolors, and a brush. Select a crayon color and draw or doodle on a piece of paper. Then select a color for the watercolor. Paint the watercolor all over the drawing or doodle—notice how the waxy crayon “resists” the watercolor paint. Experiment with different color combinations and see which ones you like best.



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