

Frit painting tutorial

My miniature frit scenes are "painted" with the following technique and tools:

- * a teaspoon
- * a cocktail stick
- * a tweezers
- * a small paintbrush with a sort of spatula/chisel end (this is the most important part. You could cut a chisel end in something else, in fact - your paintbrush could be a separate implement)



The tools: frit powder, teaspoon, brush (spatula end), cocktail stick
Not shown: reverse-action tweezers



The first spoonful of frit: heaped

Also required – obviously – glass (I work on pieces about 2 inches square) and a selection of appropriate frits in powder and fine-medium grade. I work with Bullseye glass, which I find has the widest and most beautiful range of colors/grades and is always a joy to work with.

So, for a really frustrating, fiddly, self-torturing experience, the results of which will be well-nigh invisible, proceed thus:

Take a small amount of fine or powdered frit on the end of the teaspoon and knock it off onto the square of clean glass with either the cocktail stick or the end of the paintbrush, depending on whichever you happen to have in hand at the time, trying to get it as closely as possible to where you need it, and in a thick enough layer (you always need significantly more powder than you think as it seems positively to disappear when it's fired).



Neaten the powder outline with the spatula.
The frit should be a fairly thick, even layer right to the edge.

Reposition the frit more accurately with the spatula end of the brush and *very carefully* sweep excess away from the painted area. Doing this without proper precaution just swirls the dust around as it moves in the faint draft you create (I did say it was tedious work), and any slightly out of position brush hairs also drag through the design. For powder, gently level off the domed frit you will likely have (no dome probably implies not enough powder). To finish sharpening the outline of the shape, use the chisel end of the brush again.

Proceed to the next color. When all powders have been applied, add any grain frit elements (eyes, baubles, etc.), dropping them on one grain at a time with the tweezers. A single grain of fine frit will often stick irritatingly to the tweezers, but can usually be knocked off with the cocktail stick which you are already holding awkwardly in the other hand. Pray that you do not have to do this - it's the most risky part of the job and if you get it wrong, you can have a lot of



Eye surgery for beginners

A final colour of frit, in this case black, for the pipe.



reworking to do. Don't drop that cocktail stick! Alternately, try using a fingernail (but be warned, the frit can end up just transferring onto that, which is the main advantage of the stick). It is also possible to use the same method as for powder, knocking the frit off the spoon, but it is harder to get the positioning just right.

You should be done. Move the finished object very carefully to the kiln. I usually prepare these things on a square plate mold and carry them over and put them in still on that. Firing temperature can be anything from the lowest tack fuse to full use depending on the



Ready for some heat - yeah!

desired result. Lower temperatures will produce more textured results; higher ones, a smoother look. Obvious really. The only important thing to bear in mind here is that if you aren't careful to use enough frit, when you fuse it will reduce so much it seems to have disappeared, an effect that correlates with heat. In short, to get white that shows up after firing, use *a lot* of white powder. More than you think. Especially if you fire high.

A note on sorting frit: be aware that there is quite a wide variation in the sizes and shapes of individual grains within a given size, at least with the Bullseye frit I use. Take a small spoonful and sort through it for, say, a likely pair of eyes that match (somewhat). I find it easier to work with medium and select the smaller grains. They tend to have a better shape than the fine grade, which presents almost as tiny flakes.

Looking for a pair of blue eyes ...



For completeness' sake, I should have taken a photo of the finished snowman when he came out of the kiln, but I'm afraid I forgot. However, here are a couple of other examples (one very similar), that were subsequently foiled and soldered into Christmas ornaments. The cat on the left (mounted on a second, slightly larger piece of glass) used black powder, fine aventurine green for the trees, white powder for the driven snow (barely visible beneath the trees) and medium white of the falling snow. The tree on the right used fine aventurine green for the tree, red powder for the pot, medium frit in various colors for the baubles and a scrap of dichroic for the star on top.

