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Restoring Challenging Decals, Transfers, Marks or Creating New Images

By DiAnna Tindell

During an International Royal Bayreuth presentation a few years back, a question was raised about the techniques for reproducing marks on porcelain. At that time, I was only able to respond with techniques that might be considered slow, detailed work—hand painting the mark back on the porcelain. The group had concerns with known pieces turning up that were excellent copies of Royal Bayreuth with believable marks. This presentation's question inspired me to seek further knowledge into the available resources for duplicating not only marks, but decals, transfers, and any other challenging images.



A scanned R.S. Prussia mark added to a 'blank' sugar bowl using special decal paper.

After a few years of research, testing, and some very creative projects, I have found state-of-the-art technology that allows a lot of flexibility. With the right type of digital cameras, computer equipment, art/photo computer software, printers, various decal papers, chemical solutions and candidate objects, there are a number of solutions for restoring damaged areas.

For instance, a very common occurrence is the loss of a mark due to the conversion of a piece into a lamp. This is mostly done to a vase or pitcher by drilling a hole into the base for the wiring. Unfortunately, part or all of the mark is often drilled out as well. To restore a vase or pitcher back to its original state, the hole would require filling

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and the mark replacing

Marks can be extremely tiny and complex in details. The skill to hand paint that detail can sometimes be too great a challenge. With the use of a digital camera or the scanning of a similar porcelain mark, that complicated mark can be more easily and quickly duplicated. Once sized and placed on special decal paper, it can be placed on the newly restored base, perhaps as a more exact match than even the artisan restorer could have done by hand.

To offer a brief background of transfer ware, the printing process began about 1756 and was developed by John Sadler and Guy Green of Liverpool. It was also adopted by Josiah Wedgwood who used it on his own

ivory-based "Creamware."

Transfer printing is the process by which a pattern or design is etched onto a copper or other metal plate. The plate is then inked, and the pattern is transferred to a special tissue. The inked tissue is applied to the object to be fired again. "Underprinting" was developed later as the first transfers could easily wear off. Additionally, another technique called "clobbering" was a combination of transfer and hand painting by an artisan.

If you study the detail on a transfer ware pattern with a jeweler's loop, you can see the tiny dots that make up these images. To reproduce a missing area, hand painted brush strokes do not look right. It takes the same repetition of these tiny dots, but to brush on one dot at a time is a slow process. However, a decal copy can be easily applied to the blank newly formed restoration.

If the restoration of background colors has been airbrushed on nicely and other surface areas correctly prepared, it is possible to line-up the decal imaging to the existing original. Some compatible fixatives will need to be top coated along with possible gloss or dull glazing as a final finish.

So what if you do not have the detail of the transfer readily available from any like object? If that object is a documented collectible and photographed well in a book, there is still hope. An image as small as a postage stamp can be scanned from a photo source within a value guide, reference book or other source. This scan can then be used in various computer art/photo software programs to create a decal.

The process described thus far doesn't begin to illustrate the many uses for this major breakthrough. This process is flexible and can be transferred to many different surface types, not to just porcelain, crystal and glass.

The special decal papers come in high gloss clear, matte, white, etc. Some challenges to consider relate to the size of the image needed, the curve of the surface, the demand of exact linear alignment, metallic design and level of mirrored surface. Special looks can be achieved with some mixed media by additional hand painting and/or airbrushing over the applied decal. Sometimes, the decal can serve as a stencil guide for more complicated hand painting. Many fun ideas can be considered as well since any image can be projected on the decal paper and placed on almost any object.

DiAnna Tindell is a professional master restoration specialist and founder of Tindell's Restoration Schools in Nashville, Tenn. For more information on this article, visit www.TindellsRestorationSchools.com where you can also get info on her workshops at the ACDA Symposium in Nashville in February, her Glass Craft Workshops in Las Vegas in March and many more events, training programs, appraisal and restoration services, videos, books and products.

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Digital camera images of a floral design on a Meissen stand transferred to blank areas on the piece.

