

Kintsugi Eggshells

What most would throw away becomes an exquisite, one-of-a-kind piece of art.

When a piece of pottery breaks into pieces, the usual response is to sweep it up and throw it away. To the average person in the modern Western world, a plate or bowl that is broken is useless. It may be glued back together, but the ugly cracks just highlight imperfections and flaws.

The Japanese have a tradition that deals with broken pottery much differently.

“Kintsugi” — translated as “golden joining” is the art of repairing broken pottery with liquid gold or lacquer dusted with gold. The breaks are enhanced and highlighted. The value and beauty of the pottery is increased because of the unique, one-of-a-kind pattern formed by the joined pieces.

If one compares the two treatments of broken pottery, numerous ideas and metaphors arise. There’s a message about consumerism — repairing and reusing materials rather than throwing them away. Relating to humankind, kintsugi seems to offer a message of resilience, as in broken, worn, and imperfect things (especially people) are not useless, but lovely in unique ways.

Eggshells are something that are broken and thrown in the trash. Once the egg itself has been removed, it is considered useless. Artist Elisa Sheehan has made it part of her artistic practice to create small paintings in shells, enhancing their cracks with gold leaf. By arranging, framing, and displaying them she elevates what most would consider garbage to the status of fine art worthy of hanging on museum walls.

Students create their own unique designed on eggshells using inks or liquid watercolor, then strengthen and seal them to form small vessels. Each one has its own unique beauty and can be the starting point for jewelry, surface decoration, and more.

GRADES K-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Gather eggshells. Split the egg horizontally or vertically, saving half-egg pieces as large as possible. Soak the shells in hot water and dishwashing fluid for a minimum of 15 minutes, and allow them to dry thoroughly.



Materials(required)

Liquid Colors, recommend for elementary ages:

Blick Liquid Watercolor, assorted colors, 237 ml (00369-); share a minimum of six across class

Droppers, pkg of 5 (04958-0000); share five pkgs across class

Plaid Mod Podge Clear Acrylic Sealer, Gloss, 12 oz (02916-1107); share one across class

Recommend for ages 13 and older:

Jacquard Piñata Colors, assorted colors including Gold, 0.5 oz (02981-); share a minimum of eight across class

DecoArt Clear Pouring Topcoat, 16 oz (00792-1006); share one across class

Blick Scholastic Ox Hair Brushes, Round, Size 8 (05866-1008); one per student

Eggshells

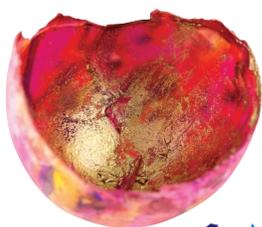
Hygloss Craft Trays, pkg of 25, 9" x 11" (61726-1010); share one pkg across class

Blick Economy White Bristle Gesso Brush, 1/2" (05160-4012); one for preparation

Optional Materials

Arnold Grummer's Brilliants for Paper Making, Gold, Copper, and Mica (12882-9020)

Holbein Watercolor Atomizer Bottle, 2 oz (02912-1003)





Step 1: Drip liquid color over both sides of the eggshell. Apply a small amount of gold to inside.



Step 2: Seal with clear acrylic gloss spray or coating.



Step 3: Add options such as mica flakes, increase emphasis on cracking and texture, and/or arrange into a grouping.

Preparation, continued

- Remove dried membrane from inside of eggshell by peeling or sweeping a bristle brush over it. This step is important as the membrane may detach itself and remove color with it later in the process.

Process

- Work on three to four eggshells at a time. This will allow time for the ink to dry on one while working on the next one. Position the rounded side up, and work on a plate or tray to contain drips. Drip one color ink over the surface, allowing it to run down the sides. Move to the next egg and repeat, changing colors if desired.

Note: Alcohol ink is only recommended for ages 13 and up with adult supervision. It will stain hands and clothing. It is safe if used properly, away from heat and flames, and not ingested.

For elementary and middle school classroom use, liquid watercolor is a safer alternative. Apply in stages, using an eyedropper tool to achieve similar results. Spritz with water to increase flow.

- When dry enough to touch, turn the eggshell over. Some of the color may have migrated through the shell to the other side. Add more if desired.
- Add a couple drops of gold ink to the inside of the eggshell. Rotate shell with hands to move the ink over the surface. Allow ink to set for up to 10 minutes (liquid watercolor may take up to 30 minutes to dry).
- Brush eggshell on all sides with clear, self-leveling topcoat to seal. Liquid watercolor should be sealed with a clear spray (always follow label instructions and do not use around children). Allow to dry.
- Once the eggshell is sealed, there are many options for further enhancement or use:

a) Emphasize the cracked texture and the reassembled kintsugi quality by pulling pieces from the edge and

- gluing them back randomly onto the shell.
- While the clear top coat is still wet, sprinkle mica flakes over the inside of the eggshell for a geode-type sparkle.
 - Coat a panel, tile, box, jewelry blank, or other rigid surface with glue; then crush a colorful eggshell into it to create a mosaic look. Coat with more clear top coat to seal in place.
 - Arrange multiple eggshells in an artistic grouping on a panel or board and display.
 - Use the eggshell as a mini vessel for small plants or trinkets.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

