

Using brass wire and mesh as an armature for Bronze, Copper, and Silver Clay

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Why incorporate different metals in these clays? What I discovered is a whole NEW look when building with these metal structures. It reminds me of scaffolding used for buildings or bridges and the new metals clays are like concrete. I have found that you get a FLEX in the form, very much the way a bridge works for the movement it must endure from wind, heat and cold and traffic. And finally you can create stable 3-d forms for clays without worry that the core will prevent the clay from sintering when firing in the coal.

Here are the steps for creating a cuff bracelet out of Bronz with copper details that has some flex so it will grab your wrist.

Step 1: Gather supplies

You will need a package of Bronzclay, Brass wire mesh, and copper, silver or nugold wire. I use 18 gauge wire and the fine wire mesh. You will need a container large enough to mix the bronz slip in, I use a measuring cup and a paint brush to paint it on.

Step 2: Create the form

I wanted to make a cuff bracelet that when finished, it would have some flex so that I could give it a gentle squeeze and it would stay on my wrist. I cut a wire longer than my wrist and added about one inch to each end so that I could have an embellishment on the ends. (about 8 inches). I loosely curved it around my wrist. I cut a strip of the bronze mesh about 3 inches wide and 5 to 6 inches long. I folded both long edges under to keep the sharp edges from being exposed and fan folded the strip. Next, I hole punched the middle so that I could slide the wire through. Once, it was on the wire, I curved the ends of each wire for decorative design. It looks like the above picture. I slipped it on my wrist to ensure that it fit. Because the wire will not shrink, it should fit your wrist as this stage.

Step 3 Mixing the very thick bronz slip

I took a measuring cup and put in about 30 grams or 1/3 of 100g of bronz, and broke it up with my brush. I began to add what I call my magic water, which is a small travel size spray bottle with 1/4 teaspoon of glycerin and lavender oil added to it.. I start spraying in the cup covering the clay and begin to mix it up with the brush to get the slip as thick as a milkshake not watery.

Step 4: Painting the thick slip on the wire and mesh form.

Next I begin to cover the form completely with the very thick slip. I let it dry and reapply about 4 times until it is thickly covered, drying in between each application. You can dry it with a hairdryer or on a cup warmer, in between applications of each slip layer.

Step 5: Wrapping the wire with clay

After about 4 layers your bracelet form will have this cool Easter bunny chocolate shell look to it! Its now time to wrap the wire part of the bracelet. Roll a coil of clay, thicker then the wire. Use a hard plastic square and apply even pressure while you are rolling a coil and you will get beautiful coils. Start at the inside of the cuff where the mesh meets the wire and begin to push the coil around the wire. Cover both ends of the wire cuff.

At this point fill in any cracks and smooth with a baby wipe or wet paper towel piece, and colorshaper. Pretty neat looking!! Dry it completely on a coffee warmer or let it air dry.

Step 6: Adding copper clay and other metal embellishments

When the clay is completely dry I rollout copper coils and added to the middle of the bracelet in the deep cracks and wrapped around the wire ends. I took nickel findings that would work great for holding my stones when fired and pushed them into the copper clay and painted some copper slip around them. These would hold my smoky topaz stones when I was done. If I want to add any silver clay I would wait until I fired the copper and bronz. The silver clay seems to grab on best when the clays are fired metal.

I fired my cuff in my fire fly kiln at 1500 for 2 hours. This is what it looked like. I tumbled it in my tumbler and hand burnished it, then added more clay to some cracks and the edge of the wire, where it left a gap. I refired same temp and time and polished and burnished and added my stones.



And here are the finished bracelets!
Design, creation of project and photos by Carmen Alvarez-Kefer