



Sarah VanderVoort



Peter Valenti



Karen Jean Smith

Raku fire

Characteristics: Dark clay surface with crackle and/or metallic glazes, often water permeable

Firing temperature: Variable

In contemporary raku processes, pots must first be bisque fired to prepare them for glazing. The bisque pots are then decorated with specially formulated raku glazes and placed in either an electric or gas-fueled kiln. When the pots are glowing bright orange and the glazes are molten, the pots are removed from the kiln and placed in a nonflammable container, often a metal garbage can that is filled with combustible materials such as straw or newspaper. Several of the very hot pots are placed in each can, thus igniting the combustible material. The lid is fit tightly to the can which reduces the amount of oxygen, and the carbon from the flaming materials is absorbed into the clay surface making it dark gray or black. The raku glazes also react to the chemistry in the oxygen reduced atmosphere.

After about a half hour, the hot pots are removed from the cans and carefully dipped into a bucket of water. In the case of some raku glazes, crackle lines may result when the glaze cools and shrinks, thus creating exposed surface areas that absorb carbon in weblike patterns. Once completely cooled, the pots are scrubbed to remove soot and straw and the beauty of the crackle or metallic glazes then emerges.

Most raku pieces are not functional because they are not watertight, so raku is generally used for decorative and/or sculptural work.



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