

The Ceramic Twizzler® Tile Mural

A collaborative effort made from [Laguna B-Mix Clay with Grog](#) and [AMACO Velvet Underglazes](#) and Clear Glaze



"Twizzlers Dancing"

Ceramic Tile Mural - 3' x 5'
Sorenson Visual Arts Center, Babson College, Wellesley, MA
photo by Tony Rinaldo

I am the studio manager/ceramic artist-in-residence for a small ceramics program based at Babson College, a business school, in Wellesley, MA. My forte is bas-relief tile and sculpture. I come to ceramics from my career as a book illustrator.

Babson College offers a non-credit, creative outlet for students and staff at the college, in a large sunny room, with 10 potters wheels and 3 handbuilding worktables. Students have the option of taking formal classes with 2 pottery teachers or working independently with technical support from me for their projects. Our studio is open 7 days a week. The studio also welcomes the engineering students at adjacent Olin College, in the town of Needham, MA, and the students from Wellesley College, in the same town.

Last year, I attended a staff/faculty workshop. Participants were focused on doing something collaboratively with a stick of the red Twizzler® licorice candy (The Twizzler® Licorice Candy, made by the Hershey Candy Co., was an idea inspired by a popular Babson College Dean who likes giving out the candy to students).



Representing the college's ceramics program, I suggested pressing a Twizzler® into clay, firing that into a master bisque mold, and reproducing imagery on tiles from the impressions of the clay licorice sticks. I must say, no one in the group much appreciated my idea, and probably didn't know what I was talking about.

I discovered that the licorice released easily from clay and makes a clean impression. I even made tulips and daffodils pressing the spiral shaped licorice into the clay at different angles to make bisque molds.

I thought of creating a tree to take advantage of the licorice texture on a tree trunk. Dalila Fernandez Delengo, wife of a Babson MBA student, came up with the perfect Google photo image and sketch to give us design direction. Her sketch was divided into 40 6" x 6" squares. I blew up the squares to make the mural the final 3' x 5' overall size, including 3" x 6" border tiles.

Many students participated in the creation of this project. A special thanks goes out to the talents and dedication of Jamaal Eversley,

Obe Boakye, both undergraduate students, Joyce Gordon (Senior Director in the Undergraduate Dean's office), and Dalila Fernandez Delengo, who all collaborated with me.

Students are stopping to enjoy it and some say they thought it was made of real Twizzler® candy! Some just see a tree; some notice the tree is a dancing figure.

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Materials List of Ceramic Twizzler® Tile Mural

To create this project I used the following:

1. **Fresh bags of Red Twizzlers® licorice candy, regular and long size** (Used to make molds of straight licorice sticks, knots for trees, flowers..... *and some to eat of course*).
2. **A tile cutter for making 6" square tiles, or use ruler and a right angle.**
3. **[Laguna B-Mix Clay with Grog, cone 6](#), or any other low or mid-range clay body.**
4. **[AMACO Velvet Underglazes](#), choosing colors to match a red Twizzler®. Zinc- Free AMACO Clear, cone 5/6 over all.**
5. **Photo copied image and enlarge it to fit 3' x 5' over all size with border. Tiles measured 6" square, total of 40, with 3' x 6" border tiles. Kinko Copy Center has poster making copier for oversize images.**
6. **Slab Roller.**
7. **White Tissue Paper used to trace over the enlarged image divided into squares.**
8. **Water-based dark marker to trace each 6" x 6" image onto tissue paper, then transfer to clay squares.**
9. **Spray bottle for water & sheets of plastic to keep tiles moist while working over several weeks.**
10. **Ware boards and cloth for drying out tiles, wicking moisture out daily by changing boards and cloth to keep tiles from warping.**

Step-by-Step Fabrication details for creating the Ceramic Twizzler® Tile Mural

Step 1:

Make several molds of whole pieces of a Twizzler®, regular size. Taking advantage of the flexible, easy release quality of this spiral textured candy.



Roll out a large slab of 1" thick clay and play with the licorice to create single impressions of the candy. Make several of these impressions so several students can work on the project at once. Tie the long Twizzler® into a knot for pressing into clay (use for the knots in the bark of a tree). Make tulip and daffodil flowers by pressing the Twizzler® at different angles into a slab of clay.

When you press the Twizzler® into the soft clay, make sure it is pressed down until it is flush with the top of the slab, making sure it is about ¼" thicker than the Twizzler®. Carefully remove the licorice. Cut about a 1" or so border around your impressions (poke a few pin holes in the border if you think it's going to blow up in kiln from being thick clay). Dry out the molds between 2 boards to keep them flat, and bisque to cone 06.

*Flat bisque molds are important. If they warp, the pressure of pushing clay into the molds may break them.

Step 2:

To make the tiles, roll out slabs of clay about 3/8" thick. Figure how many 6" x 6" tiles you can make from your slab roller. Be sure to transfer your slabs onto ware boards. (We used a 6" x 6" tile cutter.)

Leave the cut squares in place until the clay gets a little firmer, but not leather hard, with ware boards on top to keep tiles flat. Cover each ware board with plastic sheets, keeping clay squares wrapped in plastic top and bottom while creating the piece.

Step 3:

Transfer image onto the wet tiles. Use a large table covered with ware boards to spread out the entire tile mural while creating it. Have

plastic sheets ready to keep it moist during the creative process. Keep misting bottle handy at all times. Number all the squares that make up the whole enlarge image.

Cut up enlarged paper image into numbered squares, and trace each square with water-based markers onto the tissue paper. Press tissue paper image onto the damp tiles. The marker guide lines for each square will transferred easily.

Step 4:

Build the support structure of the tree, a kind of armature that the Twizzlers will be added to. (Don't worry about thickness here, as you can carve out the thickest parts from the back of some of the tiles later, once everything is laid out.) Keep the tiles covered with plastic as you are working. Make decisions about foreground, middle ground and background. Making sure the clay has not dried out and is soft enough to stretch a little.

Work on building a middle ground for tree branches and leaves and a background of mountains and sky with adding and subtracting clay with carving.

Step 5:

Use your molds and press clay into them. Make tons of clay Twizzler licorice sticks and save them between plastic, ready for your application. Hand carve bisque leaf molds as well.



Step 6:

Score the clay tree and add some slip as you apply the clay Twizzlers, and leaves from your mold. Carve down parts of the tree to create the feeling of branches that go behind foreground sections of the tree in space.

Step 7:

Number each tile for reassembling later and dry out carefully, keeping boards and weights on the tiles to keep them flat. Wick them daily from the top and bottom.

Step 8:

Bisque all the tiles made from the [Laguna B-Mix clay body](#) to cone 04, the bisque temperature recommended by the AMACO Company for using their glazes.

Step 9:

To glaze, first paint [AMACO Velvet Underglaze Amethyst V-381](#) over all the imagery, the tree the leaves, the flowers and background. Then wipe underglaze away with a sponge to take off the surface underglaze, and leave the amethyst shadowy color in the recessed textures. With a mixture of [2 red Velvet Underglazes V-383 and V-387](#) match the Twizzler color and paint it over the amethyst shadows. Add different velvet underglaze greens, yellow, oranges to the rest of the imagery. Finally, apply AMACO Zinc-Free Clear Glaze over all.

Step 10:

Fix a non-warping marine plywood board, cut just a bit less than the overall 3' x 5' size needed with extra support boards in the back and sturdy hooks for hanging. Used tile adhesive and space the tiles so they float slightly over the edge of the mounting board. Then after 24 hours of drying, add grout. Grout with sand is recommended so it doesn't crack.