enhances the tendency of the varnish to move away from the inked areas onto the non-inked areas, as compared with wet-on-dry printing.

By way of contrast, Figure 5 illustrates a smooth surface finish achieved with the same decoration pattern but where the ink is a varnishable ink. The varnish appears smooth over both varnishable white ink and base metal, with no tactile features. The texture effect of Figure 5 is formed by a standard varnish filmweight (approximately 4-6 grams per square metre) over a white varnishable ink (RN20334 base).

Figure 6 illustrates an effect created by a combination of varnishable and non-varnishable inks, using the same underlying decoration pattern. The distribution of inks creates a smooth finish and tactile finish respectively. The feature transitions between the two different ink patterns are preferably smooth. Such a transition may be provided at the junction between the main can body and an end region to be necked. This may be helpful to avoid problems with necking of the embossed finish surface. Printing a pattern comprising a combination of varnishable and non-varnishable inks may also provide an enhanced finish that is smooth or tactile respectively in different locations on the printing surface.

Figure 7 illustrates an exemplary artwork pattern and printed result, where the parallelogram shaped regions identify areas to be printed with non-varnishable ink and the regions between the parallelogram shaped regions identify unprinted regions. The minimum separation (between features) and the size of features is largely dependent on machine type and condition, as well as the pattern specification required to guarantee the desired effect at line speed. The inventors have ascertained that during printing, some growth of individual pattern features typically occurs. This is evident from the larger printed pattern structures in Figure 7. The feature size and minimum separation between features should therefore preferably be at least 0.1 mm to avoid merging of features. The separation between features in the pattern may optionally be in the range 0.1 mm to 1 mm. The size of the features in the pattern is optionally substantially equal to the separation between features in the pattern. For example, the area of the pattern features may comprise 40-60%, e.g. 50%, of the total surface area of the printable surface (i.e. the surface on which the texture pattern is to be created).

Figure 8 illustrates an exemplary artwork pattern overlaid by a converted micrograph (i.e. where a micrograph has been converted to an equivalent line drawing) of the printed result.

CLAIMS:

1. A method of decorating a metal can body and comprising:

printing an ink pattern onto the can body using a non-varnishable ink, wherein a spacing between printed features in the ink pattern is less than 1mm and an area of the printed features comprises 40-60% of a total surface area of a printable surface; and

applying a varnish over the printed ink pattern while the printed non-varnishable ink remains wet, the pattern being configured to give rise to an embossed textured pattern in the varnish once the varnish has dried.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein dimensions of printed features in the ink pattern are substantially the same as the spacing between the printed features.

3. The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the spacing between printed features in the ink pattern is less than 1mm, preferably less than 0.4mm.

4. The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the spacing between printed features in the ink pattern is less than 0.25mm, preferably between 0.05 and 0.15mm.

5. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a filmweight of the non-varnishable ink is less than 1.5 microns.

6. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein said ink pattern is a substantially regular array of printed and unprinted areas which gives rise to a substantially regular textured pattern.

7. The method according to claim 6, wherein said printed areas are discrete areas.

8. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said ink pattern is an Intaglio pattern.

9. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a maximum thickness of the varnish within the textured pattern is between 1.2 and 3 times a nominal thickness of the applied varnish.

10. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein said step of applying the varnish is carried out less than 500 milliseconds after said step of printing, preferably between 50 and 120 milliseconds.

11. The method according to any one of the preceding claims and comprising, following said steps of printing and applying, passing the can body through an oven in order to dry both the ink and the varnish.

12. The method according to any one of the preceding claims wherein said non-varnishable ink is a solvent-based dry offset ink.

13. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein regions between the ink pattern are unprinted with ink such that in these regions the varnish is applied to the metal substrate.

14. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, said ink pattern comprises an array of discrete non-varnishable ink spots.

15. The method according to claim 14, wherein each ink spot has an area of 1mm^2 or less, preferably less than 0.2mm^2.

16. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the varnish includes a coloured pigment or dye, or an effect pigment, for example leafing or non-leafing aluminium flake, interference effect, or pearlescent effect.

17. The method according to any one of the preceding claims and comprising a step of, prior to applying said varnish, printing another ink pattern onto the can body using a varnishable ink, said ink pattern and said other ink pattern being substantially non-overlapping.

18. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 16, further comprising a step of, prior to applying the varnish, printing a varnishable ink into said pattern to provide alternating areas of varnishable and non-varnishable ink.

19. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the ink, or one or both inks, is or are a clear ink.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein said clear ink contains a fluorescent additive which can be activated by exposure to UV light, e.g. at a wavelength typically between 350 and 400nm.

21. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the ink, or one or both inks, is or are an ink containing thermochromic or photochromic pigments.