

Art 3520 - Advanced Clay Studio - Surface Design
The Narrative Content of Surface – Some Things to Consider

When we think of ceramic surface, color, pattern, and texture come to mind, but we must consider as many variations as possible, including the implied emotional and psychological meanings suggested by each quality of surface. As you read through this list, think about the immediate response they elicit.

144 Possible Qualities of Ceramic Surface

Achromatic	Elegant	Lumpy	Scaly
Antiseptic	Eroded	Luscious	Scorched
Barren	Exciting	Marbled	Scored
Beaten	Faceted	Metallic	Scraped
Blistered	Faded	Minimal	Shallow
Blotchy	Fat	Monochromatic	Shiny
Bright	Flat	Mossy	Simple
Brilliant	Flecked	Mottled	Silky
Bubbly	Flowing	Muted	Slashed
Bumpy	Fluffy	Oily	Slick
Burnished	Fluted	Opalescent	Slimy
Burnt	Fractured	Opaque	Slippery
Busy	Fragile	Opulent	Smooth
Cancerous	Freckled	Orderly	Soft
Carved	Frothy	Pasty	Soothing
Chaotic	Funky	Patterned	Spare
Cheap	Fuzzy	Perforated	Sparkling
Checkered	Gaudy	Pierced	Speckled
Cold	Glassy	Plain	Spiny
Complex	Glossy	Pock-marked	Spotted
Cool	Goopy	Polished	Sticky
Colorful	Grained	Polychromatic	Stippled
Cracked	Grainy	Porous	Striated
Crackled	Greasy	Random	Striped
Cratered	Gritty	Reflective	Subtle
Crystalline	Grooved	Rhythmic	Textured
Dark	Hard	Rich	Tight
Deep	Hostile	Rocky	Toothy
Delicate	Incised	Rough	Translucent
Dimpled	Inviting	Ribbed	Transparent
Dirty	Iridescent	Rippled	Velvety
Dotted	Layered	Runny	Volcanic
Dreary	Light	Ruptured	Warm
Drippy	Lively	Rustic	Wavy
Dry	Leathery	Sandy	Waxy
Dull	Loose	Satiny	Wet

The Content of Surface: Emotional and Psychological Impact

Every pattern, texture, and color communicates psychological and emotional content, subject to individual interpretation of course. To imagine the emotional and psychological associations with texture, we have only to think of the words in the list above that have specific textural associations - smooth, silky, greasy, hard, cratered, soft, fluffy. It is essential to consider these things when working with surface development. Both visual and actual texture will elicit these responses. Visual texture refers to the appearance of texture, regardless of the actual textural qualities when we touch the piece. Many glazes appear very textural and yet are absolutely smooth. Actual texture involves tactile sensation when we touch the piece and feel texture, and of course that brings on a whole new level of response.

I purposefully did not include colors in the list above, but you should consider the full range of colors – cool, warm, and hot. Think of variations in any single color – intensity, saturation, and value – the scale from light to dark. Adding white to a color produces a lighter tint, and black produces a darker shade. It is illuminating to go to Wikipedia and search “List of Colors” and examine the full range of registered or patented colors. Go to www.rexart.com/colorindex.html to see a complete list of artist’s colors. Think about the implications of individual colors and various color combinations. On the Wikipedia list, the names of colors are often consistent with our expected emotional or psychological response. Certain combinations of colors seem discordant and disturbing, while others are soothing and harmonious. Color is a very powerful tool, and it is the responsibility of every artist to fully consider narrative implications of colors individually and in combinations.

When we seriously consider the power and possibility of pattern, texture, and color, we begin to appreciate the unlimited range of content and meaning that can be communicated in ceramic surface. As we explore surface design, consider these issues carefully, and select your surface effects deliberately according to the narrative qualities you want to communicate. How do you want the viewer/user to feel while observing and touching your work?