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Form and Imagery in Colored Clays - Five-Day Workshop Description and Schedule

Background

Colored clay techniques have been in use for over 4000 years, and yet aside from closely related slip decorating methods, they have been largely ignored in the evolution of Western ceramics in favor of glaze surfaces where the true nature of the claybody is often concealed. Except for isolated historic examples such as pate-sur-pate, basaltware, sprigging, and marbled wares, it is only recently that colored clays have become a visible part of the ceramics mainstream. Colored clays and slips offer extraordinary richness and depth of color which is distinctly different from glazed surfaces. With patterned colored clay loaves, you can achieve a multitude of pattern and image effects available through no other ceramic technique.

Techniques to Be Covered

Toxicity concerns with colored clays, oxides, and ceramic stains, making/mixing colored clays, marbled and patterned colored clay loaf construction, lamination of colored clay veneer onto slabs and forms, creation and use of colored clay murrini, construction of simple soft-slab and stiff-slab forms, use of colored clays in wheel-thrown forms.

Workshop Description

This workshop is designed to provide a thorough introduction to patterned-loaf colored clay techniques in a relaxed but productive atmosphere. Although previous experience with clay is an advantage, these techniques can also provide a good beginning in clayworking. The pace at which you work is entirely up to you. I will provide the information and ideas for the projects and methods. You may wish to do them all, or you may wish to concentrate on specific techniques. In this case, I recommend that you attempt to do all of the colored clay loaf patterns that interest you while you are here at the workshop, so that I can assist you with any questions or problems.

With every workshop group the pace is different, and it is conceivable that we might not cover all the techniques listed. Foreseeing that possibility, you will receive handouts which include all the technical information and describe the methods in detail. This should provide enough information for you to continue with your colored clay work after the workshop is over. We will bisque-fire as much work as possible to simplify transport, but the primary emphasis of this workshop is on patterned clay loaf development.

A great appeal of colored-clay techniques is that very effective work can be created with a minimum of studio facilities and equipment. A slab-roller, spray-booth, potter's wheels and hi-fire kiln are nice to have, but this kind of work can be done very effectively with nothing more than work tables and an electric kiln.

We will accomplish a lot in the next five days, and you can get a great deal of work done if you are diligent. I encourage you to be inventive and to make things which are meaningful to you. However, if you want to learn as many colored clay techniques as possible, it would best to keep your projects simple and small. This will also help with rapid drying and firing.

Workshop Schedule

This schedule must remain flexible, because every group is different and the pace varies.

- **Monday Morning** – Intro to workshop, receive mason stains, wedge colorants into white clay to give five-pound balls of black, brown, blue, green, and yellow. It is up to you to decide how much of the stain to wedge in, depending on how intense you want your colors to be. If you use up your allotment of mason stains you can always use ceramic oxides instead, which work fine but do tend to stain your hands. *First half of slide show on historical and contemporary colored clay.*
- **Monday Afternoon** – Demonstration of layered and veined marbled loaves, wood-grain loaf, and butterfly layered loaf. Work on marbled, grained, and/or layered loaves. NOTE: moisten clay frequently with vinegar water while fabricating loaves, so that clay is still aggressively tacky when assembling.
- **Tuesday Morning** – Demonstration of patterned loaf construction. Work on patterned loaves. *Second half of slide show on historical and contemporary colored clay.*
- **Tuesday Afternoon** – Demonstration of patterned loaf construction. Demonstration of laminating patterned clays onto slabs. Work on patterned loaves, lamination onto slabs.
- **Wednesday Morning** – Demonstration of patterned loaf construction. Work on patterned loaves, lamination on slabs.
- **Wednesday Afternoon** – Demonstration of soft slab and stiff-slab forms using laminated slabs. Work on patterned loaves, laminating onto slabs, soft/stiff-slab forms.
- **Wednesday Afternoon or Evening** - *Slide show on Vince's work.*
- **Thursday Morning** – Demonstration of patterned loaf construction. Work on patterned loaves, soft/stiff-slab construction. Load bisque fire with any wares that are dry.
- **Thursday Afternoon** – Discussion of use of colored clays in thrown work. Work on patterned loaves.
- **Friday Morning** – Discussion of granite loaf. Demonstration of clay murrini, clay marquetry, ways of distorting or altering pattern slices. Unload bisque fire. Discuss results. The workshop generally ends around lunchtime.