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Slab-Built Tableware – Five-Day Workshop Description and Schedule

Skill Level - Previous experience in handbuilding and/or throwing recommended

Background

Who said that plates have to be round? In our industrialized society, people often assume that the potter's wheel is the logical choice for efficient production of handmade tableware. The potter's wheel is one logical choice, but certainly not the only one. The wheel inevitably defines ways of working that determine much of the design and aesthetic of wares produced. That is not a bad thing, but no potter should be restricted any more than necessary by the studio equipment used. Today, many potters simply use the wheel as a device to make components that are extensively altered and assembled to produce the finished product. Others have discovered a world of possibility through handbuilding tableware with slabs.

Flat planes can be manipulated and formed in many ways, and clay slabs are especially resilient and flexible (literally and figuratively). The early Industrial Revolution itinerant tinsmith, with rolls of sheet metal, simple shears, forming tools, and soldering iron, could form an infinite range of discs, cylinders, cones, and shallow domes, and from those could fabricate any sort of utilitarian vessel for the kitchen or workshop. The same can be done with clay slabs, with the added advantages of clay's natural plasticity, allowing slabs to be stretched and/or slumped to create deeper dome or bowl shapes or organic forms.

Workshop Description

This workshop explores soft-slab forming and slumping methods suitable for dinnerware forms such as trays, plates, platters, and bowls, plus soft- and stiff-slab methods appropriate to volumetric drinking, pouring, serving, and storage vessels. Slab construction offers diverse possibilities for a wide range of utilitarian tableware. The results can be loosely gestural and anthropomorphic or tight and rigidly geometric. Plate and bowl forms can be round, triangular, square, polygonal, or asymmetrical.

Much of the potential of slab construction lies in the jigs, fixtures, templates, and molds. You will learn to work with rigid construction foam-board, PVC pipe, and various other materials, allowing easy construction of slump molds and forming fixtures.

We will explore surface decoration options appropriate to soft- and stiff-slab construction, with special consideration of hygienic, low-maintenance utilitarian surfaces. Although our primary concerns are design and construction, we will bisque-fire as much work as possible so that it can be transported safely.

This workshop will help develop a different mindset, enhancing your sense of "spatial thinking" as applied to tableware forms. Western traditions of utilitarian tableware reveal a limited range of precedent, and the potter should never feel restricted to those forms. We want you to visualize and realize new possibilities beyond the common or expected solutions. You are encouraged to bring samples, slides, or photos of your work to share with the group.

Slab-Built Tableware – Five-Day Schedule

This schedule serves as a general guide, but must remain flexible. Every workshop group is different, and the schedule always evolves to suit the needs and productivity of the participants.

- ***First Day Morning*** - Introduction to the workshop, general information about the studio and our work schedule. Discussion/demo of slab forming and simple slumping. Discussion of problems with clay-memory in slabs.
- ***First Day Afternoon*** - Discussion/demo of slab-texturing and impressing techniques for soft-slab and stiff-slab methods. Work on slab-texturing and slumped-slab forms.
- ***Second Day Morning*** - Discussion/demo of slumped trays, plates and bowls, how to make slump/hump molds from rigid foam construction board. Work on textured slabs, slump/hump molds, and slumped trays, plates and bowls.
- ***Second Day Afternoon*** - Discussion/demo of handles and feet for slumped trays, plates and bowls. Work on projects.
- ***Third Day Morning*** - Discussion/demo of making slab components for assembled cups, pitchers, and storage vessels, using soft and stiff-slab methods and posterboard templates. Work on projects.
- ***Third Day Afternoon*** - Discussion/demo of tube components for handles and spouts, and other ways of making handles and pour spouts. Work on projects.
- ***Fourth Day Morning*** - Discussion/demo of assembly of slab components for cups, pitchers, and storage vessels. Work on projects. Slide show about Vince's work.
- ***Fourth Day Afternoon*** - Continued work on assembled forms. Load bisque-firings.
- ***Fifth Day Morning*** – Finish any final assembly/demo work. Unload bisque firings, clean up studio. Discuss work, outcomes, possibilities. Look at slides, photos, and/or samples of work brought by participants. The workshop generally concludes at lunchtime.