

Advanced Clay Studio – Ceramic History – Syllabus

This syllabus includes important information of use throughout the semester. Review it often, and pay close attention to assignment due dates and scheduled reviews.

Course Objectives - to build studio self-confidence and independence based on:

- A sense of personal artistic style and direction.
- An advanced working knowledge of ceramic form and decoration.
- A sound working knowledge of clay/glaze chemistry and kilns/firing theory.
- A familiarity with professional studio practice.
- An awareness of historical and contemporary ceramics, and the inherent ethnic and cultural diversity in ceramic form and decoration.

Required Text

- Pitelka, Vince. *Clay: A Studio Handbook*, American Ceramic Society 2016

Course Description

This course involves a complex dynamic, combining students ranging from early intermediate to the most advanced. In order for this to work, expectations and requirements must be flexible, and it is up to each of you to work collaboratively with me in order to make the most of this opportunity. Our goals are to increase your command of the ceramic medium, to help you develop individual content and style in your work based on your own personal involvement with clay, and to ultimately get to a point where you are autonomous, self-sufficient, self-directed in the studio. Primary emphasis is hands-on studio work, building on the skills and knowledge you have accumulated in previous studio experience. We do not normally have regular studio demonstrations in this class, but since so many of you are working on the wheel I will schedule throwing demos as needed throughout the semester, and am happy to do other demos when you request them or I recognize the need. Secondary emphasis this semester is an exploration of the history of ceramics worldwide, including lecture/discussions and a take-home final exam. There will be a series of loosely-defined assigned studio projects associated with our study of ceramic history that will be due at first quarter review, midsemester, third quarter, and final review.

The Secondary Emphasis - Ceramic History

Inevitably the work of every ceramic artist is influenced by the art of the past. There is much fertile ground to draw from, and the more you know of ceramic history, the more informed your choices in steering your own style and concept. Through the semester we will have a series of slide lectures exploring the history of ceramics world-wide. For each slide lecture you will receive a comprehensive outline of the information covered, but you should also take notes in order to ensure good retention of the information. As we study the ceramics of different parts of the world, we will cover the entire range of important ceramic development in one region from formative to maturity and then move to another region and start again. Thus we will be jumping back and forth in time, and that can be confusing. Keeping accurate notes correlating places and dates is necessary to overcome this challenge. We will have a take-home final exam covering this component of the course.

Inventorying Your Knowledge and Skills

As you proceed through the advanced studio series, periodically inventory the skills and techniques you have explored, and purposefully address any weaknesses. As much as possible I will try to recognize your needs and provide information and assistance in a timely fashion, but because of the broad range of skill levels in one class this presents a special challenge, and I rely on you to deal with it in a responsible fashion and ask for help when you need it. It is imperative that you achieve broad-based familiarity with ceramic materials and techniques. It is too easy for an emerging artist to settle into a narrow stylistic direction based upon proficiency in a limited range of materials and techniques, without experiencing all the alternatives. Invariably the resulting work betrays a shallowness of method and material, and lacking familiarity with other directions in clay the artist often experiences studio burn-out.

Look over the ceramic skills inventory form, put it to good use, and don't be intimidated by it. You do not need to be expert in all the materials, processes and techniques listed, but you should become acquainted with all of them. The pursuit of knowledge is habit forming, and if you already know a little about something it will be easier to find out more later on. Also, you will be far more certain of your own stylistic direction if it arises from broad fluency in ceramic materials, processes, and forms. It is what you don't know that holds you back. As you approach each of the assigned studio projects, don't just pursue it in terms of the technique, form, and surface decoration you most enjoy. Think about where you need to build your skills, and specifically plan your approach to the assignment in order to address your weaknesses.

How Much Work Should You Do In This Class?

The amount of work you do is up to you, but there is no substitute for practice. You have to make an enormous amount of work to become an autonomous, confident studio artist, and there are no shortcuts in this regard. From quantity production comes fluency in the media and the willingness to take risks, and from risk-taking comes the most productive learning.

As professional clay artists starting out in the real world you will work very hard to make a good living. If you have made the right choice and are genuinely dedicated, the studio involvement and commitment will come easy, and the independent studio life will be tremendously rewarding. But if working hard in the studio comes as a struggle here at the Craft Center, it is unrealistic to expect that the necessary motivation and self-direction will magically materialize once you are out of school. Your future success as a clay artist hinges on your level and consistency of dedication and accomplishment here.

Assigned Studio Projects

For each of project you will receive a handout outlining requirements and suggesting project ideas. Aside from the first quarter you may select from suggested ideas or propose your own that interprets the historic ceramics we are addressing in that assignment. Make it ambitious.

First Quarter Review

- Four coil-built vessels loosely inspired by Neolithic East Asian ceramic forms – Japanese, Chinese, or Korean – three vessels at least 12" tall and one at least 24" tall. Must be completed in greenware form by first quarter review.

Midsemester Review

- Series of vessels or sculptures inspired by ancient Near Eastern, Egyptian, Aegean, Etruscan, or Roman ceramic forms. Select from the projects suggested in assignment handout or submit a project proposal for your own idea by Friday, September 9. Must be glaze-fired by midsemester review, including jars from first quarter review.

Third Quarter Review

- Series of vessels or sculpture inspired by the emergence of the glazed ceramic aesthetic in Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, and/or Rococo ceramics in Europe. Select from the suggested projects or else submit a project proposal for your own idea by Wednesday, October 5. Must be glaze-fired by third quarter review.

Final Review

- Two choices here. Either do a series of vessels or sculptures inspired by Pre-Columbian South, Central, or North American art, or else pick a 20th/21st-century potter or ceramic sculptor or movement that you admire and create a series of pieces inspired by the style and appearance of the work. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but exact copying is plagiarism unless it is done purely as a “study” never to be sold. Remember the words of Jazz trumpeter Clark Terry – “Imitate, assimilate, innovate.” You can learn a lot by imitating work you admire, but original style and concept come through assimilating qualities of the work and then creating something original. Select from the suggested projects or else submit a written proposal for your own idea by Wednesday, November 2. The work must be glaze fired and any post-firing assembly/finish completed by final review.

The Question of Scale

Aside from issues of practical utility, scale must be determined by what you are trying to accomplish in terms of skill development and artistic intent. It is always a good exercise to work large, but it can be an exercise in frustration if your eyes are bigger than your skill level. It is far more of a challenge to control form and surface when working very large, and as your skills are developing it requires proper care and planning. Working large requires far more investment of time, and yet a single serious flaw can still ruin the entire piece.

How art speaks to us depends on many factors, and smaller scale is often more appropriate and effective. There is a certain fascination for large scale work, and in magazines and galleries we see abundant examples that are poorly proportioned and executed because the maker lacked the skills to retain full control of the clay and/or proceeded with inadequate design and planning. Structural and design flaws are amplified by size. A small poorly-designed piece is easily overlooked, but when expanded to monumental proportions, it becomes monumentally unattractive and imposing in its presence. You cannot overlook it, as much as you might wish to, and the natural question is “Why did the artist even bother?”

Carefully consider this information, but don’t fear working large. You will always learn a lot in the effort, even if the results are not entirely successful. Make sure that the scale of your work is appropriate for what you are trying to say, and then make sure you have planned accordingly. Anticipate the firing process and the size of our kilns. If your primary work is large scale, it makes it difficult to try a lot of

different forms and surface techniques, and that can present real problems in terms of exploring surface design. Make sure that you are also doing smaller-scale work in quantity in order to fully explore all of the surface-design techniques.

Concept/Content and Narrative

Concept, content, and narrative are central whether you are doing figurative sculpture or functional pots. You need to develop a clear idea of what you want to say or accomplish with your work. Unless your work "speaks" to the user/viewer with authority and originality it will be seen as ordinary. We tend to talk about content more often with work that is obviously narrative, but intent and content are important no matter what kind of work you are doing in art. Even the simplest utilitarian pot has specific concept and/or intent behind it and communicates all sorts of information. If utility is a primary concern, you must consider the degree to which your work visually communicates its function and invites use.

As you are searching for honest personal direction in your work, don't be afraid to take chances. Make work that expresses personal commitments and concerns. Experiment with expressive surfaces and see what happens. Don't settle for work that doesn't say what you specifically want it to say.

Choice of Materials in Your Work

Carefully select clays, slips, patinas, and glazes appropriate to practical utility, visual/tactile effect, and/or narrative intent. In making your work, try to anticipate the subsequent stages of surface decoration and plan accordingly. Over time, you will learn that certain decorating methods and materials work best on particular forms or claybodies, or in particular firing processes, and you will be able to plan your work with that in mind.

In addition to ceramic materials, you can use anything at all that is appropriate to your intent and narrative. Mixed media combinations open up a world of possibility in contemporary art and craft. Check out the mixed media information on the "syllabi-handouts" page of my website. Very few non-ceramic materials will survive the firing process, and shrinkage must be accommodated, but a wide variety of materials can be incorporated into the work after firing.

Access to Information Outside of Class

If you are unsure of something or need information feel free to contact me at any reasonable time in or out of class. If I'm not here, call me at home (my cell# is at the top of this syllabus). Remember that the resident artist serves as back-up faculty and is available to provide information and assistance.

Keep your text and sketchbook around at all times so you can consult them when needed. My book has a very complete glossary of terms and a separate glossary of ceramic raw materials. Put them to good use. There is also an extensive range of handouts available on my website under "Syllabi and Handouts." As mentioned earlier in this syllabus, the Internet offers a vast wealth of gallery, museum, and studio websites where you can explore images of historical and contemporary ceramics and gather useful information and recipes.

We have a very good little library containing a great collection of books and all the major contemporary fine craft magazines. Spend time online and in the library regularly keeping track of what is going on in the clay world, and bring that information into our class discussions. If you talk about your work and the work of others within the context of historical and contemporary clay, I will notice.

The Journal/Sketchbook

It is a logical assumption that all art students diligently keep journals/notebooks in which they record and develop imagery, information and ideas, because it would be so counterproductive not to do so. Any emerging artists will accomplish far more and become more certain of their intent and direction if they conscientiously keep journals/notebooks. For this class, it is a requirement. Purchase a good quality artist's sketchbook (not lined paper), and use it to develop your ideas and record technical notes, clay and glaze recipes, etc. Adapt the sketchbook to your individual needs. Record the decorative effects, slips, glazes, etc. that you use on each piece, so that once the work is fired you can build on your successes. Make note of what works and what doesn't. Be your own best critic, and respond to your own self-criticism by addressing weaknesses in particular pieces or particular decoration techniques.

In class discussions and critiques you are required to know exactly what techniques, slips, and glazes you used on each finished piece, especially this semester with our exploration of surface design. I will not collect your journals for grading, but I expect to see you using them on a day-to-day basis, and I reserve the right to ask to see them at any time. Again, don't approach this as a required part of the class. Instead, adapt the journal/sketchbook to your own use, and let it become an important and permanent part of the way you work. You will profit greatly from that.

Determining Your Grade

Up to 80% of your grade depends on studio work completing the surface design assignments. Originality, productivity, and innovation will be generously rewarded. 20% depends on proactive participation in the studio dynamic, including general cooperation with other students, responsible kiln practices (sign-up, loading, firing, unloading, cleanup), general studio cleanup, and active contribution to group reviews.

Individual and Group Reviews

At midterm and finals we will schedule the primary individual and group reviews to evaluate and document your progress. At the 1/4 and 3/4 points we will have short group reviews to help you stay on schedule and to ensure that each of you is aware of what everyone else is doing. You are required to participate actively in all reviews. Ask questions and make comments. If you do not participate, you diminish the effectiveness of someone else's review.

Contacting You via Email

I will regularly send class information or announcements via email. It is your responsibility to check your email frequently. Make sure that the email address you provided is one you are checking. You are responsible for all information sent to you via email.

Use of Electronic Devices during Class

Much of what you learn is from each other, watching and listening. Feel free to play music during work time in the studio as long as no one else objects to your music. Please make sure that there is never more than one music source playing at any time in the classroom, and keep the volume at a reasonable level. Do not use headphones during regular class hours, because they isolate you from the group.

No texting or cell phone usage during class. It's great that we all have cell phones and can make or receive calls almost anywhere, but unless you are expecting a genuinely important call, the things that are going on in class are far more important to you than any phone call. If you are expecting a genuinely important call, make sure you leave the room before answering your phone.

Required and Recommended Tools and Supplies

By now you all own a good range of ceramic tools, but you should continue to add to your collection every semester. There's a good assortment in the gallery, and an infinite range available online. A variety of interesting and unusual tools imported from East Asia are available at websites like chineseclayart.com. To save money, consult "Making, Finding, Improvising Studio Tools and Equipment" in the text. The following is divided up into required and recommended tools and supplies.

Required Tools and Supplies

- Text - Clay: A Studio Handbook (get it online from amazon or Ceramics Arts Daily bookstore)
- Good sketchbook approximately 8"x11" (not lined paper!!)
- Pocket folder for handouts
- Selection of band-loop trimming tools and/or steel-strap trimming tools - wire-loop tools are intended for sculpting wet clay
- Selection of sponges, including large poly sponges that can be cut or carved for glaze/slip stamps and other special applications
- Cut-off wires - if you are throwing off the hump, make a Japanese-style cut-off string
- Wooden knife and assortment of wood modeling tools
- Needle tools
- Metal, wood, and rubber ribs
- Pieces of chamois if you are throwing
- Fettling knife and X-Acto knife (pencil-thin model with 1" tapered blade)
- Serrated metal ribs for scoring clay
- Calipers if you are throwing
- Good, ball-bearing rolling-pin if you are handbuilding
- Stanley "Surform Pocket Plane" and "Surform Shaver"
- At least six empty hair-tint bottles to use for trailing slips and glazes – get the ones with the finest points – you can always cut them back for a larger opening if you wish.
- Selection of brushes for slips, patinas, and glazes - the bamboo handle long-bristled brushes are best, including the wide hakeme brushes.
- 5-gallon plastic buckets with lids for recycling clay
- Professional-quality twin-element respirator with replaceable P-100 dust filter elements. Go to amazon and enter "3M 6000 Series Half Facepiece Respirator" for a perfect one that's only \$15.
- Supply of plastic sheeting for covering wares during drying - dry-cleaner bags work best.

- Collection of textured or patterned objects and materials for pressing into the clay or for making bisque stamps.
- Collection of patterned and/or textured bisque stamps and rollers - the more the better.
- 12" and 24" rulers
- Banding wheel/turtable - the inexpensive CSI turntables available from most ceramic suppliers are adequate, but if you can afford it, get a metal ball-bearing banding wheel such as a Shippo, Laguna, or Bailey.

Recommended Tools and Supplies

- Wood paddles
- Compass for drawing circles
- Plastic or metal draftsman's square
- Stanley Surform round and half-round blades (just get the blades – amazon.com)
- 3/8" and 1/2" wood dowel for making throwing sticks, jug fingers, sponge sticks, modeling tools
- Supply of fairly heavy canvas for covering work surfaces and for rolling out slabs - best prices are at big fabric stores, or as painter's drop-cloth canvas at house paint stores
- Old towels, tee-shirts, or other soft absorbent rags
- Apron
- Several cheap or recycled bed sheets if you are doing large sculptural work - to cover your work under the plastic during drying so that condensation doesn't concentrate on small areas of the work.
- Clear plastic storage boxes with snap lids to use as portable damp boxes for small forms - these are very handy, and once you use them, you won't want to be without them.

Course Schedule

This schedule includes important dates and events during the semester.

First Week - Introduction to class. Mix clay and discuss project proposals. *Slide lecture on Chinese ceramics.*

Second Week – *Slide lecture on Korean and Japanese ceramics.*

Third Week - *Side lecture on ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian ceramics.* **Proposals for 2nd quarter project due by Friday.**

Fourth Week - **First quarter group review on Monday.** *Slide lecture on Aegean, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman ceramics.*

Fifth Week - *Slide lecture on Islamic ceramics*

Sixth Week – Slide lectures on European ceramics.

Seventh Week - **Midterm Group Review on Wednesday** - **Proposals for 3rd quarter studio projects due via email attachment by Wednesday**

Eighth Week - Work on studio projects.

Ninth Week - Slide lecture on Pre-Columbian and contemporary American and African tribal ceramics.

Tenth Week – Slide lecture on Pre-Columbian and contemporary American and African tribal ceramics, cont.

Eleventh Week – Third Quarter Group Review on Monday, Proposals for 4th quarter studio projects dues by Wednesday.

Twelfth Week - Slide lecture on North American ceramics.

Thirteenth Week - Slide lecture on North American ceramics, cont.

Fourteenth Week - Work on studio projects.

Fifteenth Week – Individual reviews, group reviews, studio cleanup. No formal class meeting on Mon. & Weds. **Friday – All-day Group Final Review with Pot-luck Lunch**