

Advanced Clay Studio – Surface Design – Syllabus

Please Note - This syllabus is like a brief course handbook, and includes important information of use throughout the semester. Keep it handy and review it often. Pay close attention to the schedule in order to do required reading and anticipate important events and the approach of midterm and final reviews.

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

- An improved sense of personal artistic content, style, and direction.
- A solid working knowledge of ceramic surface design and decorating techniques at all stages from damp clay to glazing and post-firing mixed-media.
- A familiarity with professional studio practice.
- An awareness of the evolution of ceramics through history worldwide, 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, and self-directed in the studio. Primary emphasis is hands-on studio work, while secondary emphasis this semester is an exploration of surface design and decorating techniques.

We will have scheduled demonstrations of surface-decoration techniques, and I am happy to do additional demos when you request them or I recognize a need. For the sake of comparison and critique it is helpful when groups of students are working on the same kinds of forms at the same time, especially when studying surface-design, and we will work to orchestrate this.

The Technical Emphasis This Semester – Surface Design

Central to all successful studio ceramic work is the design of surface appropriate to particular form, concept, and narrative. Your ability to effectively design and produce your work depends greatly on your personal vocabulary of surface decoration options. As with all material-based art media, this vocabulary is developed by exploring mark-making and surface development at all stages of the ceramic process. Designing the physical form of an artwork is just the beginning, and a large percentage of poorly realized ceramic work suffers from a lack of adequate consideration and planning in surface design. Through the

semester we will have a series of slide lectures, readings, and assigned projects exploring surface-design techniques at five distinct stages:

- Relief effects on wet/damp greenware
- Slip effects on wet/damp greenware
- Engobe, patina, and glaze effects on bisque-ware
- Surface effects resulting from different firing processes
- Post-glaze-firing mixed-media effects

The fourth category will inevitably be discussed, but coverage will be minimal and is not tied to any specific assignments, since all of your work will be fired, and the surface effects associated with firing processes will be covered in depth another semester when this class addresses kilns and firing theory.

The assignments are fairly flexible in that they allow you to choose between throwing or handbuilding. Each surface design technique must initially be conducted separately from other techniques unless there is a compelling or necessary reason to combine them, such as the mishima technique, where an incised design is inlaid with contrasting slip. Later in the semester, we will address the layering of different surface-decoration techniques and the resulting effects in the finished work.

In order to expand the range of possibilities, it is essential that you examine a broad range of ceramic surface effects. We are fortunate that all the best ceramics galleries have extensive websites featuring imagery of vessels and sculpture, and you are required to spend time perusing these sites. Do Google searches for Akar Design, Crimson Laurel Gallery, Trax Gallery, Ferrin Gallery, Charlie Cummings Gallery, Red Lodge Clay Center Gallery, and Anthony Schaller Gallery. In each case, look at the coverage of current exhibitions, but also look at the list of artists represented. In most cases that list will be extensive, and will lead to collections of images of each artist's work. Many of the world's great museums now have extensive collections online, including the Victoria and Albert, the British Museum, the Ashmolean, the Metropolitan, the Sackler-Freer, and many others. Once you come up with a particular technique or type of work or the name of a particular artist/artisan, do a Google image search. That in turn will lead you to other museum collections. Such searches can be infectious, so have fun with this.

Of course it would be far more desirable to see the work in person in museums and galleries, but out here in the wilderness we make do. While perusing gallery and museum websites, whenever you find work that displays especially interesting and/or intriguing surface decoration effects, save the images of those pieces on your computer, smartphone, or tablet and transfer them to a file on a flash drive. When you find such images, we can look at them in class and do our best to figure out what surface decoration techniques were used.

Try not to think of this component of the Advanced Studio course simply in terms of completing assignments. It is essential that you approach this work as a proactive, involved artist, seeking knowledge and experience in order to expand your vocabulary of surface design and thus your capability in the studio. There will be no exams or written assignments. Your participation in the class and critiques and your fulfillment of the assignments in the ceramic work you produce will clearly display your level of involvement in surface design techniques.

Inventorying Your Knowledge and Skills

As you proceed through the advanced studio series, it is important to periodically inventory the skills and techniques you have explored and to 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 the broad range of skill levels in a single class group presents a special challenge, and I rely on you to deal with this in a responsible fashion and to ask for help when needed. 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 limited materials and techniques without ever experiencing a broad range of 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 an expert in all these areas, but if clay is your area of concentration, you should become acquainted with all of them during your BFA or certificate studies. The pursuit of knowledge is habit forming, and when you already know a little about something it is far 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, process, and form. It is what you don't know that holds you back.

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 specific requirements, but the general expectations are explained below. As much as possible I have tried to make the assignments flexible so they can be adapted to the aesthetic/conceptual direction and inclination of individual potters and sculptors, and I am excited to see what comes of this. For those taking this class concurrent with the first semester of senior thesis, I am happy to accept project proposals that adapt this work to fit in with your thesis direction.

First Quarter Project

- At least 24 bisque stamps and rollers, plus a minimum of sixteen thrown or handbuilt plates and jars/vases or a series of sculptural forms emphasizing 3-D surface relief focusing on pattern and

texture. Quantities must necessarily be a bit flexible dependent on what you do, but the intent is to adventurously and aggressively explore relief pattern and texture, and that is more important than creating a unified set or theme. If you are interested in doing sculptural forms, talk to me about it. This work must be completed in greenware by first quarter review.

Second Quarter Project

- A series of tiles plus a series of plates and or other vessels exploring slip-decoration methods including slip-painting, sgraffito, slip-trailing, feather-combing, slip layering, traditional mishima, and wax mishima. Minimum 16 tiles plus 16 thrown or handbuilt plates or other vessels. If you have an idea for a series of sculptural forms for this assignment, talk to me about it. The objective is to seriously explore all of the slip decoration techniques mentioned rather than to focus on one or two. This work must be glaze-fired by midsemester review, including work from first quarter review.

Third Quarter Project

- A series of small and large thrown or handbuilt vessels or sculptural forms appropriate for exploring patinas and glazes. This will require some surface relief to possibilities of the patinas and glazes. Minimum 24 thrown or fourteen handbuilt vessels or a minimum six sculptural forms (dependent on size and complexity – more if small). Must be glaze-fired by third quarter review.

Final Project

- Work emphasizing combined surface effects and/or clay-mixed media. There is considerable flexibility in the final project and you will submit a project proposal specifying what you plan to do. Make it ambitious. It could be a series of vessels or sculptures that focus on the combined layered effects of various surface-decoration methods we have explored this semester, or it could be ceramic work that combines these methods with mixed media materials installed/applied after the firing. The latter is wide open – any sort of mixed media that fits your concept in combination with the clay as long as clay is still the primary part of the piece.

Studio Time

This class meets from 1:15 to 4:15. We will spend part of in-class time on lecture/discussions, and they will always begin just after 1:15 unless I schedule them otherwise. There will always be studio work time in every class period. Put it to good use, and be in your studio area working after every lecture or discussion and for the duration of the class period. You are required to put in a minimum of six hours per week outside of class to make satisfactory progress on your work. Establish a practical and efficient work schedule and stick to it. The studio is accessible 24/7. Security will come around and lock the front doors at 11:00, but you can stay and work as long as you want.

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. You are welcome 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 variety available online. A variety of interesting and unusual tools imported from East Asia are available at websites like www.chineseclayart.com. To save money, consult "Making, Finding, Improvising Studio Tools and Equipment" in the text.

Required Tools and Supplies

- Text - Clay: A Studio Handbook
- Clay as needed (you'll pay for materials in the gallery and mix your own)
- Speedball Underglaze Kit #1081 – composed of 12 one-pint bottles including White, Yellow, Melon, Royal Blue, Sky Blue, Aqua, Med Green, Tan, Black, Sea Blue, Red, and Purple. You are welcome to go in with one or two other students and share a set.
- Good sketchbook (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 wooden modeling tools
- Needle tools
- Metal, wood, and rubber ribs
- Pieces of chamois if you are throwing
- Fettling knife
- Xacto #1 knife with #11 blade (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 – try to get ones with very fine pointed tips
- Selection of brushes for slips, patinas, and glazes - the bamboo handle long-bristled brushes are best, including the wide hake brushes
- 30-gallon trash can for storing clay - avoid the ones with the built-in wheels - they cannot take the weight of a full load of clay
- 5-gallon plastic buckets with lids for recycling clay
- Professional-quality twin-element respirator that fits your face and has replaceable filter elements.
- 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 Shimpo, 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 – they're available through 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 discussion - Surface Texture. Discuss texture/relief assignment.

Second Week – Work on studio projects, texture/relief assignment.

Third Week – Work on studio projects, texture/relief assignment.

Fourth Week – **First quarter group review on Monday.** First quarter project due in greenware or bisqued. Slide discussion - Slip Decoration. Discuss slip decoration assignment. Slip-decoration demos. Work on texture/relief project, slip decoration project.

Fifth Week - Slip-decoration demos. Work on slip decoration assignment.

Sixth Week – Work on slip decoration assignment.

Seventh Week – **Midterm Group Review on Wednesday** – first and second quarter work must be glaze-fired.

Eighth Week – Slide discussion - Engobe, Patina, and Glaze Types and Effects, Part 1. Discussion of patina/glaze assignment. Work on patina/glaze assignment.

Ninth Week – Slide discussion - Engobe, Patina, and Glaze Types and Effects, Part 2. Work on patina/glaze assignment.

Tenth Week – Fire work for patina/glaze assignment. Discussion of final project. Slide discussion on mixed media in ceramics.

Eleventh Week – **Third Quarter Group Review on Monday.** Third quarter work must be glaze-fired. **Proposal for final project due via email by Tuesday, November 2.** Work on final project.

Twelfth Week – Work on final project.

Thirteenth Week – Work on final project.

Fourteenth Week – Fire/finish all work.

Fifteenth Week – Finish all work. Individual reviews, group reviews, studio cleanup.

No formal class on Monday or Wednesday, **Group Final Review on Friday from 9:00-noon and 1:15 to 4:15 with potluck lunch.**