

Vince Pitelka, 2019

Advanced Slab Construction – Five-Day Workshop – Description and Schedule

Background

Slab construction is the “newest” of ceramic hand-forming methods. Mesoamericans including the Mayans and Aztecs had advanced slab-working capabilities, but that is very rare among ancient cultures. Most early cultures confined their work to coil and pinch methods. The potter’s wheel came into use around 2500 BC in the Middle East, but slab construction doesn’t become common until the 19th and 20th centuries, perhaps because of the increasing availability of truly flat working surfaces and smoothly rounded rolling devices.

Today, slab construction offers unlimited possibilities for functional and sculptural claywork, and a skilled handbuilder can match the output of a wheel potter. Slab-construction holds particular appeal to people who are spatial thinkers and those who like to construct clay forms from parts. Clayworkers who achieve a high level of proficiency in slab construction usually amaze themselves and others with the vessels or sculptures they are able to create. With advanced slab capabilities, you can built teapots and other complex vessel forms far beyond what is possible with wheel-thrown components. For those interested in architectural form in vessels or sculpture, no other clay-forming method compares with stiff-slab construction, in its potential for achieving crisp, rectilinear form.

Workshop Description

This workshop is specifically designed for those who have achieved basic proficiency in soft-slab and stiff-slab construction through the “Handbuilding: Tricks of the Trade” workshop or other instruction, and wish to pursue these techniques at a more advanced level. We will explore methods for making larger and more complex slab forms, both functional and sculptural, including various ways of supporting large forms during assembly. We will also cover methods of decorating slabs before construction, including slip-painting, slip-stenciling, and impressed pattern. Our primary concerns are design, construction, and decoration, but there may be the option to bisque-fire work to facilitate safe transportation. We will have a slide show exploring functional and sculptural examples of advanced slab construction. The last day and a half of the workshop will be spent constructing an elaborate architectural vessel or reliquary, and we will have a special slide show devoted to that project.

Schedule

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

- **First Day Morning** - Introduction to the class, general information about the studio, our work schedule, and safety considerations. Discussion/demo of slab design including making reusable pattern templates. Begin preparing slabs.
- **First Day Afternoon** – Demo of soft-slab pitchers and oval planters. Discussion of problems with clay-memory in slab-working, especially when combining different construction methods. Work on pitchers and planters.

- **Second Day Morning** – Discussion of stiff-slab covered boxes in complex shapes, and surface elaborations of covered boxes. Discussion/demo of X-shaped covered box. Prepare impressed slabs for X-shaped covered box. Work on pitchers and planters. Slide show "Advanced Slab-Built Forms."
- **Second Day Afternoon** – Discussion/demo of boxes that combine soft-slab and stiff-slab. Work on projects.
- **Third Day Morning** – Discussion of architectural reliquary project. Discussion of drawers and hinged components. Work on projects. Slide show "Architectural Reliquary."
- **Third Day Afternoon** – Demo – assembly of covered boxes combining stiff-slab and soft-slab components. Discuss stiff-slab reliquary ideas and start making parts.
- **Fourth Day Morning** – Demo of raised feet systems for boxes and other forms. Make component parts for architectural reliquary and work on other projects.
- **Fourth Day Afternoon** – Finish other projects and work on architectural reliquary. Possible slide show on Vince's work.
- **Fifth Day** – Finish architectural reliquary, clean up studio, discuss outcomes, possibilities.