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Intermediate Handbuilding - Syllabus

Required Text - Pitelka, Vince. *Clay: A Studio Handbook*, American Ceramic Society 2016 (get it online from amazon or Ceramics Arts Daily bookstore)

Course Objectives - *To build in the student:*

- 1) Intermediate-level competence in ceramic hand-building, decorating, and firing.
- 2) An enhanced awareness of creative visualization and possibilities for self-expression in visual art.
- 3) An appreciation of historical and contemporary ceramics, and the inherent ethnic and cultural diversity in ceramic form and process.
- 4) An appreciation of fine craft as a critical connection between art and life.

Course Description

Our focus is an exploration of handbuilt form in both vessels and sculpture, with the goal of achieving intermediate-level ability. Primary emphasis is hands-on studio work, with frequent slide shows and demonstrations. The assigned projects are designed with considerable flexibility to encourage personal creativity and expression.

Materials and Processes

We will explore coil, pinch, and slab-formed vessels and sculpture, press-molded tiles, and carved slab wall-reliefs. We will work with the Mackenzie stoneware claybody. Firing processes will include lowfire, mid-range electric oxidation, high-fire reduction, salt/soda, and wood.

All projects will involve a continued exploration into surface decoration, including slips and engobes, glazes, and oxide stains. Our engobes, glazes and oxide stains are available for your use, and if you have a particular need, you are welcome to mix up custom slips, glazes, or stains, but always check with me or the artist-in-residence first to make sure you are not duplicating something we already have. Anyone wishing to go beyond our available palette of slips and low-fire glazes is welcome to purchase commercial underglazes, glazes, lusters, etc.

The Question of Scale

Working large is a necessary part of skill development in handbuilding, but in ceramics it is too easy to impress with scale alone, and the work must communicate more than that in order to be successful. Standards of design and craftsmanship must be consistent regardless of size. It is a challenge and a good exercise to make small things which are well resolved and command our attention. With that in mind, and in order to guarantee a smooth-flowing series of projects, we will work on a variety of large and small forms through the semester. This will keep us thinking about scale at all times. Scale is limited only by kiln size, firing process, and your ambition and ability. Very large work can be built and fired in sections, and assembled after the final firing.

Creativity and Originality

Ceramics is a wide open field, with unlimited possibilities for innovation and expression in almost any direction imaginable. Traditionally, clay was generally viewed as a medium of functional craft, but cultural and aesthetic barriers have diminished, and in contemporary ceramics both sculptural and functional directions are thriving. Whether you are making sculpture, non-functional vessels, or functional pots, the work fits somewhere into the broad spectrum of art and craft. Ultimately, the true worth of your work depends on a combination of technical fluency and creativity. Think about these issues when designing and making your work, and be prepared to talk about them.

In considering design issues remember that all ceramic objects are sculptural forms. In your projects consider the elements of 2-D and 3-D design – the physical nature and visual implications of line, plane, volume, space, color, value, pattern and texture, and the expressive qualities of mass, balance, visual radiation, perceived movement, and gesture. Think about how these qualities affect the viewer/user, and manipulate them to your advantage.

Watch the slide-shows carefully, make appropriate notes in your sketchbook, take from what you see and hear, incorporate the techniques and information discussed and demonstrated in class, but at the same time always try to be original and inventive. Remember the famous maxim from jazzman Clark Terry - "Imitate, assimilate, innovate." There is nothing wrong with imitating work you see as a learning experience, as long as your purpose is to assimilate design and technique with the goal of original innovation. Bring personal influences and ideas into your work, and consider the possibility of using mixed media materials.

Barring catastrophic forces, fired clay objects can survive into eternity. Art conservators can reassemble any broken ceramic piece that hasn't been crushed. Don't let this realization weigh you down, but consider the possibility that someone may unearth and examine your work thousands of years from now. Above all, do work which is important to you.

Access to Information

Efficient learning depends on access to information. New information can spark your creativity and prove very useful during completion of assigned projects. I will supply information to get you started on projects and to help you along the way, and I am always available for consultation, but you have unlimited resources available online and an excellent resource available right here in the Craft Center library. We have a good collection of books, and we subscribe to the major clay magazines. I expect keep up with what is going on in the clay world. It will please me greatly if you are able to discuss your work and the work of others within the context of historical and contemporary clay.

The Sketchbook

Purchase a good sketchbook, and always bring it to class with you. Many of our assignments will require preliminary drawings as part of the assignment, and you also need a place to take notes and to keep track of specific forming and decorating techniques you use. When we are glazing

work, you will want to record the glazes you use, so that you can build upon your successes, accelerating the learning curve. Bring your sketchbook to all slide shows so that you can do quick sketches of things that interest you.

Contacting You via Email

I will occasionally 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 the one you are checking. You are responsible for any information I send you via email.

Expectations and Grading

Prompt and regular attendance is mandatory. Discussions or demos will begin at the start of class. Be on time and don't leave early without permission. If illness or other serious problems cause you to miss class, get in touch with me and we will do our best to work around it.

No texting or cell phone usage during class. Do not answer your phone during class under any circumstances unless you are expecting a genuinely important call, and in that event go outside the classroom to answer.

Determining Your Grade

You are strongly encourage to seek interesting and unusual interpretations of the assignments and incorporate individual content. Originality will be generously rewarded. 80% of the final grade is based on completion of assigned projects done with originality and good craftsmanship, utilizing information from the text and from class handouts and discussions. 20% of your grade is determined by involvement in critiques/discussions, loading, firing, and unloading of kilns, studio cleanup, etc. The above percentages are flexible, at my discretion, in that frequent lateness, excessive absence, or poor class participation will seriously affect your grade, regardless of quantity and quality of work. I will take roll, and after three unexcused absences each additional unexcused absence will result in one letter grade reduction in your final grade.

Individual and Group Reviews

At midterm and finals we will schedule group and individual reviews to evaluate your progress. We will also have occasional informal group reviews to discuss what everyone is doing. I believe in structuring reviews around constructive dialogue and information exchange, without confrontation or embarrassment. The end result is that negative criticism is often made by omission, which can be confusing. If no one says anything about your work in a group review it may be because they are not in a talkative mood. It may be because they cannot see anything to talk about. It may be because they are so impressed that they do not feel up to commenting about the work, or do not know where to begin. Often, the only way for you to get the information you need is to ask specific questions of the rest of us. It is your responsibility to contribute to every review, and when we are discussing your work to seek comments and suggestions. If you all participate equally in sustaining the momentum, then each review will be a productive experience.

Required and Recommended Materials

Stock slips, glazes, and oxide stains (or the materials to mix your own) and firing costs are provided. Clay materials, pre-mixed clay, and some tools are available in the sales gallery. Other tools and the textbook are available online. Purchase the following immediately, as you will be unable to proceed without them. *We will be mixing clay right away, and you must have a proper dust mask to mix clay.*

- Text - *Clay: A Studio Handbook*, Vince Pitelka, American Ceramic Society, 2016
- Sketchbook (*not lined paper*)
- Packaged tool kit including trimming tools, sponge, cut-off wire, wooden knife, needle tool, metal and wooden ribs
- Flexible black rubber kidney-shaped rib/scrapper
- Toothed stainless steel rib
- Several wooden modeling tools of your choice
- Pencil-handle razor-knife with 1"-long tapered point - ***no substitutions***
- Surform file - looks like a cheese-grater - available from hardware store - get either the "file" type or the "plane" type, or better yet, both types
- One length each of 1/4, 5/16, 3/8, and 1/2" wood dowel (Lowes, builder's supply)
- Several soft-bristled watercolor brushes, including ½" round and 1" flat
- Small plastic bucket for water
- Good quality dust-mask with soft rubber face unit and replaceable P-100 dust filter
- Sturdy 30-gallon plastic trash can ***without wheels*** for clay storage.
- 5-gallon plastic buckets for recycling scraps
- Toolbox or other container for storing tools
- Plastic snap-lid storage box to use as personal damp box
- Apron (optional)

Class Projects in Sequence

These projects are designed for intermediate to advanced competency in handbuilding.

1. One dozen bisque stamps and rollers.
2. Coil-constructed sculptural head (can be a vessel) at least 20" tall.
3. Nesting set of stiff-slab covered boxes made from slabs impressed with bisque stamps.
4. Slumped soft-slab dinnerware place setting with dinner plate, salad plate, soup bowl, desert bowl, and mug.
5. Carved/modeled sculptural wall relief, minimum 16 by 20"
6. Plaster press-mold for 3-piece set of relief tiles, with four sets of finished tiles.
7. Decanter/ewer set with cups, made from textured/stamped slabs
8. Final project - soft-slab or stiff-slab tea or coffee set, including teapot or coffeepot, creamer, sugar bowl, and stand to hold all three.

Course Schedule

First Week - Review of syllabus, tour of studio (for new students), mix clay. Discussion/demo of bisque stamps and rollers. Mix clay, work on bisque stamps and rollers.

Second Week - Slide discussion/demo of coiled big giant heads, slab boxes. Finish bisque stamps, mix clay, work on big giant heads, slab boxes. Bisque-fire stamps.

Third Week - Slide discussion/demo of slumped slab dinnerware. Work on BGH, slab boxes, slab dinnerware.

Fourth Week - Finish nesting boxes. Work on BGH, slab dinnerware.

Fifth Week - Slide show of wall reliefs. Finish slab dinnerware, work on BGH, slab dinnerware.

Sixth Week - Glaze discussion/demo. Glaze nesting boxes and dinnerware.

Seventh Week - Finish BGH, work on wall reliefs. Mid-semester review on Wednesday.

Eighth Week - **Spring Break**

Ninth Week - Slide discussion/demo on tile press-mold project. Work on tile project, sculptural relief.

Tenth Week - Slide discussion on ewers, teapots, and coffeepots. Demo of soft-slab ewers and cups with pre-textured slabs. Finish colored clay plates/boxes, work on tiles, plaster molds, relief, ewers, teapots.

Eleventh Week - Finish relief. Pour tile molds. Work on tiles, plaster molds, ewers, teapots.

Twelfth Week - **Last Wet Clay Day on Wednesday**. Bisque firings.

Thirteenth Week - Finish all remaining work. Glaze all bisqueware. Bisque and glaze firings.

Fourteenth Week - Glaze all remaining work. Glaze firings.

Fifteenth Week - **Group Final Review on Wednesday**