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## **Intro to Clay – 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:

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- A basic working knowledge of ceramic forming and decorating methods.
- An enhanced ability to purposefully and effectively design and create interesting and original ceramic art objects.
- A basic awareness of historical/contemporary ceramics, and the ethnic and cultural diversity in ceramic form and process world-wide.
- An appreciation of fine craft as a critical connection between art and life.

### **Course Description**

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Our intention is to get your hands in the clay using a number of major forming and decorating methods. In conjunction with class assignments we will have demonstrations of forming and decorating techniques and digital slide-shows of those forms and techniques. We will use the four major clay-forming methods - pinch, coil, slab, and wheel in a variety of vessel and sculpture projects. When it is available we will use recycle clay made from a combination of powdered clay minerals and recycled scrap clay. When it is unavailable you will use the Mackenzie clay, which costs a little more per bag.

All ceramic objects must be fired by application of extreme heat to make the clay permanent. We will use several firing processes including low-fire earthenware glaze-firing, and high-temperature stoneware glaze-firing. Most of your potentially-functional wares will be fired to stoneware temperatures, approximately 2400 degrees Fahrenheit, rendering them as hard and durable as stone.

We will explore a variety of surface-decoration methods and materials. Some involve impressing into or carving away the surface of the clay to create pattern or texture, others involve adding clay to the surface. After completing all assembly and surface decoration of the damp clay we allow the wares to dry slowly. When dry they are bisque-fired, an initial firing that makes the clay structure permanent, impervious to water, allowing us to coat the surface with liquid glaze. Our glazes are composed of powdered minerals and chemicals suspended in water, and upon application to the porous bisque-fired forms, the water is absorbed, leaving a dry but fragile coat of glaze on the surface. A final glaze firing fuses the glaze materials into a hard, durable, glassy coating.

Consider that everything you make in this course is in some way a statement of who you are and what you think and believe. You have the opportunity to do things that are unique and original, and with that in mind, remember that ceramic objects can survive into eternity. Don't let this weigh you down. Let it inspire you. This could be your legacy.

### ***Preparing for Assignments***

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All of our assignments involve complex process and technique, and completing them effectively depends largely on your familiarity with the information and commitment to follow the correct steps. Read the appropriate sections in the text **before** we begin each assignment. Readings are identified in the schedule at the end of this syllabus. Keep the syllabus handy, check the schedule frequently, and make sure that you come to class already familiar with the information before we begin each assignment. It will be obvious whether or not you have done so.

### ***Controlling the Drying Process and Completing Steps at the Proper Stage***

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One of the challenges in learning to work clay effectively is controlling the drying rate of the clay and finishing each step of the process at the right stage, but this is part of the good craftsmanship required in this class. Clay comes out of the bag in the wet, plastic state, and we do most shaping at this stage. As it starts to stiffen it passes through the soft, medium, and hard-leather-hard stages and finally begins to bleach or lighten in color as it reaches the bone-dry stage. Soft and medium-leather-hard are ideal for cutting and joining component pieces to be assembled into more-complex forms. Stiff leather-hard is ideal for scraping or shaving the surface with a metal rib or Surform tool. If you score the surface with your serrated metal rib and the clay rises in ridges along the score marks or is smoothly cut away from the surface, the clay is fine for joining. If instead the surface feels very scratchy and the clay falls away as fine grit, it is too stiff for joining. If the clay has begun to bleach or lighten in color it cannot be joined or altered at all and if the piece is incomplete it's best to recycle it and start over. As long as you are still working on a piece, no portion should ever get so dry that it begins to bleach. We have spray bottles filled with water for spritzing surfaces that are drying too fast, but once they have started to bleach do not attempt to bring them back to a softer consistency. Be sure to carefully and completely wrap pieces in plastic or store in a snap-lid storage box to keep them from drying between class sessions.

### ***Expectations and Grading***

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Working with clay is inevitably fun and I want you to have a good time in this class, but expect a demanding class requiring a serious commitment and allocation of time. If you make that commitment you will be rewarded in many ways, not the least by a large collection of wares to do with as you please.

Most of class time will be devoted to hands-on work on assigned projects. You will need to put in additional studio time as needed to develop skills and complete the projects. The amount of studio time required outside of class depends on how much work you get done in class. You can put in quite a bit of extra time just by coming early and/or leaving late. If you find it difficult to come up here outside of class, plan to take work home with you, but that does involve special challenges and risks that can be avoided by doing all your work here at the studio.

Regular on-time attendance is required. Try not to miss any of the demonstrations and slide shows, as it is difficult to repeat them. The class period lasts from 9:00 until noon. You can start cleanup at 11:45, but keep working productively until then. Unless you make special arrangements with me, always stay for the entire three-hour class. Make the most of the time, but take short breaks when

you need to. If legitimate difficulties or illness cause you to miss a number of class meetings, please contact me promptly so that we can make appropriate accommodations.

The purpose of a studio class is to learn by hands-on experience, and in order for this to happen, you must know what you did to each piece you create. Keep a notebook or sketchbook in your locker and use it to sketch the shape and record decorating techniques and glazes used on each piece you make. When we review your work, much of our response will be based on the success of the forming and decorating techniques, and you are required to answer our questions about forming and decorating methods, glazes, etc. Failure to provide this information will result in a reduction in the grade.

Much of what you learn is from each other, watching and listening. I have a player that will connect to your phone or MP3 player, but no headphones are allowed during regular class time because they isolate you from the group.

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.

Up to 80% of your grade depends on on-time completion of studio projects showing good craftsmanship in construction and finish, incorporating expectations identified in assignment handout, and incorporating methods and materials discussed and demonstrated in class. *The grade will also be affected by your awareness and knowledge of the techniques and materials you used on each piece when we review your work.* You are encouraged to bring personal influences and ideas into your work. Originality and innovation will be generously rewarded.

Project grades will be assigned as follows. Please note that good attendance and completion of all assigned projects does not guarantee an "A." To earn an "A," your work must show originality and **very good craftsmanship**, and your class participation must be very good, as explained below.

- "A" - Exceptional work, addressing all expectations specified, showing very high standards of craftsmanship and finish, and original/innovative design features, very good class participation.
- "B" - Good work, addressing all expectations specified, showing good craftsmanship and finish, but with less-imaginative design, good class participation.
- "C" - Adequate work addressing all expectations specified, but with unimaginative design and marginal craftsmanship, good class participation.
- "D" - Work only partially addresses the expectations specified, and/or design and craftsmanship are careless, and/or inadequate class participation.
- "F" - Work fails to address expectations specified, and/or design and craftsmanship are very careless, and/or work is only partially completed, and/or poor class participation.

**Note:** In addition to the above criteria, assignments turned in late without sufficient excuse will negatively impact your grade in proportion to how late they are.

At least 20% of your grade depends on attendance, studio behavior, and class participation. This includes studio cleanup and general cooperation with me and your fellow students. The above

percentages are flexible, at my discretion, in that excessive absences or other inappropriate behavior will seriously affect your grade, regardless of quantity or quality of work. I will keep track of attendance, and *after three unexcused absences each additional unexcused absence will result in one letter grade reduction in your final grade.* At midterms and again at finals we will schedule reviews to evaluate and document your progress. These reviews are the equivalent of midterm and final exams, and attendance is mandatory.

### ***Mark Your Wares, Put Finished Wares on the Greenware Carts***

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This class produces a great volume of work, and along with the other classes it can be difficult to identify your own work before glazing, leading to possible misunderstandings about ownership. To minimize this problem, *all wares must be signed with your initials or some other distinguishing mark in order to receive credit.* Be sure to sign or mark your work as soon as it is leather-hard, and make sure that all work that is on your shelf has been signed with your initials or mark. Greenware is very fragile, so as soon as work is finished and at least leather-hard, move it to the greenware carts by the electric kilns to be bisque-fired. After bisque-firing it is more durable and far less subject to damage.

### ***Contacting You via Email***

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

### ***Required Materials***

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Glazes, slips, and firings are provided. Purchase the handbook, clay, and clay-working tools (except where indicated) from the gallery. Get them right away or you will be unable to proceed.

- Required text – *Clay: A Studio Handbook*, American Ceramic Society, 2016
- Notebook or sketchbook for class notes, etc.
- Kemper Basic Tool Kit - includes band-loop trimming tools, sponge, cut-off wire, wooden knife, needle tool, stainless-steel rib (scraper), wood rib
- Kemper RB-4 or RB-6 wood rib – this tool is essential for use in coil construction
- Stiff black rubber kidney-shaped rib/scraper
- Kemper S-10 serrated stainless steel rib
- X-Acto knife with pencil-thin handle and 1"-long tapered point - ***no substitutions*** - (Wal-Mart, stationary store, Lowes)
- Small plastic bucket or other container for storing tools – something that will fit in your locker!
- Apron (optional)
- Snap-lid storage box to use as your own personal damp-box (optional but very useful)

### ***Class Projects in Sequence***

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1. Twelve pinch forms, including six with appendages as specified in handout
2. Two coil forms minimum 6" diameter and 10" tall
3. At least four bisque stamps and/or rollers to be bisque-fired only
4. 16"-tall/wide (minimum) head-and-shoulders bust
5. Two slab masks, glazed and low-fired

6. Six soft-slab forms, including at least two covered boxes with raised feet and at least two mugs with handles.
7. Six stiff-slab forms, at least three with raised feet or other appendages, including at least two covered boxes
8. Reliquary/final project - any combination of pinch, coil, and slab construction, any combination of surface decoration. No thrown form except small component parts.
9. Minimum four wheel-thrown forms

**Course Schedule** – This schedule must remain flexible because every class group is different, and various things affect the requirements or due date of an assignment. I will always let you know in advance if there is a schedule change.

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**First Week** – Introduction to class. Studio tour. Pinch-forming, coil-forming, bisque-stamp demos. Slide-show on pinch and coil forms. **Bring your notebook to the slide shows.** Work on pinch forms, coil forms, bisque stamps.

**Second Week** – Demo of head-and-shoulders bust. Slide show on busts and figurative sculpture. Finish bisque stamps. Work on pinch forms, coil forms, busts.

**Third Week** – Demo of soft-slab masks. Slide show on masks. Work on pinch forms, busts, coil forms, soft-slab masks. Bisque-fire bisque stamps.

**Fourth Week** – Finish four pinch forms and first coil form and place on ware carts for bisque-firing. Work on bust, second coil form, masks.

**Fifth Week** – Demo of soft-slab cups/boxes. Finish masks, work on second coil form, slab forms, busts. Bisque-fire masks.

**Sixth Week** – Finish second coil form and remaining eight pinch forms and place on carts to be bisque-fired. Discussion/demo of low-fire glazing. Glaze both masks, four pinch forms, and first coil form. Work on bust, soft-slab forms. Glaze-fire masks, four pinch forms, and one coil form.

**Seventh Week** – Finish busts, work on soft-slab forms. **Mid-semester Review** - have finished in greenware – head-and-shoulders bust; have bisque-fired – four bisque stamps, eight pinch forms, one coil form; have glaze-fired – two slab masks, four pinch forms, one coil form.

**Eighth Week** – Demo of stiff-slab construction. Discussion/slide show about reliquary/final project. **Start on reliquary now!** Work on soft-slab forms, stiff-slab forms, reliquary.

**Ninth Week** – Work on soft-slab forms, stiff-slab forms, reliquary.

**Tenth Week** – Wheel demo. Work on reliquary, soft-slab forms, stiff-slab forms, thrown forms.

**Eleventh Week** – Work on reliquary, soft-slab forms, stiff-slab forms, thrown forms.

**Twelfth Week** – **Last Wet Clay Day on Thursday. Finish reliquary by Thursday.** Work on soft-slab forms, stiff-slab forms, and thrown forms. Put all finished work (except reliquary, unless it is already dry) on greenware carts to be bisque-fired.

***Thirteenth Week*** – Finish all remaining work by Wednesday and put on greenware carts to be bisque-fired. **Last bisque-firing loaded on Friday.** Lowfire glaze head-and-shoulders bust, and glaze other bisqueware for highfire.

***Fourteenth Week*** – Finish all glazing by Wednesday. Cone 04 and cone 10 glaze firings. **Last cone-10 glaze firing loaded Sunday.**

***Fifteenth Week*** – No formal class on Tuesday, but before Thursday's review you must finish completing any post-firing effects and grind any glaze drips or defects. We only look at finished wares at the final review, and we will start as soon as everyone puts out their work. Feel free to bring a cloth to place under your work. It improves the presentation. **Thursday - Group Final Review – mandatory attendance.**