

Ceramics
ART-231
Fall 2008
Thursday, 100-330pm
Casey McDonough

Office: Hartzel Hall basement
Phone: (610)606-4666 x3418
Email: casey.mcdonough@cedarcrest.edu

Course Objectives and Description:

The aim of this course is to provide students who are largely unfamiliar with the ceramics medium a chance to gain basic knowledge about the material as a means of creative expression. A truncated history of the material and its past uses will be addressed, as well as the current trend toward ceramics as a fine art medium. This beginning knowledge should allow students to approach the material as readily as any other art medium.

A strong understanding of the basic physical properties of clay and what must happen to the material to make it a ceramic object are the most important goals of this course. As a material that lends itself most readily to three dimensional forms, we shall approach it as such, providing students with instruction in several traditional handbuilding techniques such as pinch, coil, and slab building. Students will learn to mix glazes in order to achieve desired results, with special consideration given to the relationship between glaze surface, ceramic surface, and form. Kilns will be both loaded and fired as a class, with every individual learning the steps necessary to finishing ceramic objects.

Scheduled class time will be used for demonstrations, slide lectures, critique sessions, and studio work. Students are expected to come into the studio as much as is needed to finish any assignments, inside or outside the scheduled class time.

Tools, Materials, and Suggestions:

Clay will be provided, but with a catch. You will be mixing your own! If you run out of clay, simply make some more. This way you will not only learn how to make clay, but you will also learn to place greater value on the clay you mix.

Tools are available via the internet at sites like www.baileypottery.com and www.dickblick.com. There is also a Dick Blick art materials store at the following address:

3152 Lehigh Street
Allentown, PA 18103

The most that you really need for this class is a basic pottery tool kit, which I can describe. Feel free to purchase any extra tools that you may want to use. I will make suggestions about what sort of other objects make decent clay tools.

Any clear plastic (tarp, dry cleaning, or heavy trash bags are best) that students can scavenge or bring into the studio is much appreciated. This will help keep your clay moist while you work on particular projects, extending the workable time of the material.

It is recommended that you consider what you wear into the studio. Clay is messy, and some ceramic materials including red clay can stain clothes. If you have an apron, bring it. I promise not to make fun of you.

Please acquire a few paper dust masks and some rubber gloves for the days when we will be working with dry materials that present certain hazards.

A binder and a small sketchbook are not suggestions, they are requirements. I want you to organize handouts I give you, and I also want you to write down or sketch any idea you have that you think you can make in clay. A percentage of your grade will depend upon how well you keep track of your knowledge and ideas.

Any glaze/color/finish that you see and like can potentially (but not always) be recreated with the correct materials. If you want to know, simply ask and we can try to find a way to make it happen.

Expectations and Demands:

Students may find that clay is a much more demanding material than previously thought. It is expected of you to work as hard in this class as you would in any other. You might discover that the experiences gained while working with clay may provide you with new insight into whatever other things you might do (I am quite serious about this particular assertion). You are also expected to take risks in this class as well; do not hesitate to at least try any idea that you come up with. I will do my best to help you realize those ideas, but I insist that you ask any questions that you may have. No question is a bad question in this classroom, ever.

Students must follow any safety-related rules that are imposed. This is of the utmost importance and will be addressed periodically throughout the semester. I also demand that the studio is used as much as possible and respected completely. This means that individual work stations, storage shelves, and the studio as a whole should be cleaner when you leave than when you arrive. You will sometimes have to be in the studio early in the morning or late at night, but it has to stay clean and workable.

Attendance:

Because we only meet once a week, attendance is absolutely mandatory. Repeat absences will affect your grade. Though I sincerely appreciate when you call or email me to tell me that you will not be in class, this will still count as an absence. Absences will affect your grade as follows:

3 absences and your grade is reduced by one letter.

5 absences and you will receive a failing grade for the course.

If you do need to miss a class, you are responsible for acquiring missed materials from other students. If a student is unable to progress due to absence (or for any other reason really), please contact me and we will remedy the situation.

Attendance requirements also extend to firings when required. As previously mentioned, we will load, fire, and unload kilns as a class or on a schedule; I will not be entirely responsible for finishing your work for you. This attitude forces students to partake in these class activities.

Safety:

This aspect of ceramics will be continually addressed throughout the semester. Concerns range from dust inhalation to chemical usage to heavy lifting to firing kilns. It is important that you take these concerns seriously as we approach each one.

Assignment information:

Expect to receive a number of assignments throughout the semester. These projects will be outlined thoroughly in handouts and will be the core of what we do in this course. Assignments allow for the development of skills and material understanding within specific parameters and under concrete direction. The final assignment will be a largely independent project, with increased time to work toward completion.

All assigned projects will have a designated due date, and these dates are not flexible. Any late project will be reflected in the final grade. If a project is not turned in within a week of the due date, it will be considered incomplete and will not be accepted. With a sufficient reason (death, serious illness, etc.), a compromise may be discussed.

You will see in the schedule that you are to bring a short written statement or reflection on critique dates. This is designed to help you learn now how to write about your work (which helps later in talking about your work). I only expect a few short sentences on these days.

During the semester you will be asked to prepare a short presentation with two pages of writing discussing a ceramic artist of your choice. This should be fun and easy, because you get to write and talk about whomever you want. I will help to provide images, information, and books to draw from for this project if they are needed.

Honor Code and Classroom Conduct:

We who accept the honor of the membership in the Cedar Crest College community recognize our obligation to act and encourage others to act with honor. The Honor Philosophy exists to promote an atmosphere in which the individual makes her own decisions, develops a regard for the system under which she lives and achieves a sense of integrity and judgment in all aspects of her life. It is with faith in such a system that I have accepted membership into this community. Representative of such, I hereby pledge to uphold the spirit and the letter of the Honor Philosophy.

Appropriate classroom behavior is implicit in the Cedar Crest College Honor Code. Such behavior is defined and guided by complete protection for the rights of all students and faculty to a courteous, respectful classroom environment. That environment is free from distractions such as late arrivals, early departures, inappropriate conversations and any other behaviors that might disrupt instruction and/or compromise students' access to their CCC education.

semester grading sheet:

Projects (500 points)

<i>Greenware</i>		<i>Fired</i>	
Appropriateness of Technique	(10 pts)	Strength of Overall Design	(10 pts)
Concept / Idea	(10 pts)	Quality of Construction	(10 pts)
Deadline	(10 pts)	Finishing Details	(10 pts)
Surface Resolution	(10 pts)	Surface Resolution	(10 pts)
Ambition/Creativity	(10 pts)	Ambition/Creativity	(10 pts)

#1 - greenware (50 pts) ____ + fired (50 pts) ____ = ____ (100 pts)

#2 - greenware (50 pts) ____ + fired (50 pts) ____ = ____ (100 pts)

#3 - greenware (50 pts) ____ + fired (50 pts) ____ = ____ (100 pts)

#4 - greenware (50 pts) ____ + fired (50 pts) ____ = ____ (100 pts)

Final - greenware (50 pts) ____ + fired (50 pts) ____ = ____ (100 pts) project total = ____ (500 pts)

Presentation/paper (100 points)

Presentation ____ (50 pts)

Paper ____ (50 pts)

Sketchbook (100 Points)

Source material ____ (40 pts)

Class Notes ____ (10 pts)

Idea Sketches ____ (10 pts for each project, 50 pts total) sketchbook total = ____ (100 pts)

Class Participation (100 Points)

Use of Class Time ____ (50 pts)

Participation in Critiques ____ (50 pts) class participation = ____ (100 pts)

Semester total = _____ pts

Evaluation Criteria

Greenware Evaluation Criteria:

1. *Appropriateness of Technique*

- Is the technique being used the best technique to achieve the specified intent?
- How successfully is the technique being used? Were other techniques employed to enhance the form or idea?
- Is command of the technique demonstrated in the work?

2. *Concept / Idea*

- Is there a complete and competent idea being conveyed in the work? Is there a concise conceptual framework to the work?
- What is the level of personal idea generation? Are you challenging the boundaries of your ideas?
- How well can you articulate the concept of the work?

3. *Deadline*

- Has the specified deadline been met? (2 points off for each class late)

4. *Surface Resolution*

- How well have different surfacing techniques been used? Have you effectively used texture to enhance your work?
- Have surface details been left unattended?
- What is the level of attention to detail? Have you thought about every single element of your work?

5. *Ambition / Creativity*

- How ambitious is the idea? How ambitious is the work? Are you working to push your own boundaries with the material?
- Have you worked to add an element of creativity in the project? How does the creative aspect of the project manifest itself?
- Have you strayed away from challenging yourself and moved in a "safe" direction?

Finished Project Evaluation Criteria:

1. *Strength of Overall Design*

- How successfully are various design elements organized? Does the work demonstrate balance?
- Is the artist's intent evident? Are the surfaces intended to be really smooth? Are textured surfaces convincingly textured?
- Does the design meet the criteria defined in the original problem?

2. *Quality of Construction*

- Is the form constructed well (no unintended cracking, warping, or separation of seams)?
- Does the completed work demonstrate an awareness of the physical properties of the medium?

3. *Finishing Details*

- How well are the structural and surface details addressed and resolved? Are the seams, edges, base, etc. all finished cohesively?

4. *Surface Resolution*

- Does the surface treatment enhance / reinforce the form or detract from it by establishing awkward and/or uncomfortable tensions between the form and its surface?

5. *Ambition / Creativity*

- How ambitious is the overall project? Are you working to push your own boundaries with during every stage of the project?
- Have you worked to add an element of creativity in the project? How does the creative aspect of the project manifest itself?
- Have you strayed away from challenging yourself and moved in a “safe” direction?

Sketchbook Evaluation Criteria:

Your sketchbook will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. *Source Material*

- Have you collected drawings, notes, etc. to use as a starting point for your ceramic work? How much source material has been collected / created?
- Is there evidence of outside creative or technical research (not from class material?)

2. *Class Notes*

- Have you kept and organized your class notes and handouts?
- Did you take notes about how your work was completed (glazes, colors, etc.)? Or notes about the conceptual development of your work?

3. *Idea Sketches*

- Have you completed your idea sketches BEFORE each assignment?
- Do ideas seem complete and thought out? Or do your sketches appear haphazard and incomplete?

Class Schedule (tentative):

August 28

Syllabus and course overview
Building tour
Safety overview
Tool overview
Clay mixing demo

September 4

Demonstration, Slab building
Introduce assignment 1
Slideshow

September 11

Glaze mixing demonstration
Mix class glazes in groups
Slideshow (?)

September 18

Demonstration, coil building
Assignment 1 due for bisque firing
Introduce assignment 2
Kiln room overview
Load bisque kiln (1)

September 25

Glazing overview
Assignment 1 glazed
Load glaze kiln (1)

October 2

Demonstration, extruder
Assignment 2 due for bisque firing
Introduce assignment 3
Load bisque kiln (2)

October 9

Assignment 2 glazed
Load glaze kiln (2)
Slideshow (firing types?)

October 16

Presentations and short Written assignments due
Introduce assignment 4
Assignment 3 due for bisque firing
Load bisque kiln (3)

October 23

Introduce Final assignment
Assignment 3 glazed
Load glaze kiln (3)
Slideshow (?)

October 30

Midterm Critique, bring finished assignments 1 and 2
Approval of final assignment ideas

November 6

Assignment 4 due for bisque firing

Load bisque kiln (4)

November 13

Assignment 4 glazed

Load glaze kiln (4)

November 20

LAST DAY OF WET CLAY!!

Final Assignment due for bisque firing

November 27

Final assignment should be glazed

Load a glaze kiln (Final, plus whatever might be left)

December 4

Last day of class!!

Final Class critique, bring remaining finished assignments (3, 4, final)