New Ceramics Out of Brunei Darussalam: A Teaching Exhibition

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Abstract
"New Ceramics Out of Brunei Darussalam: A Teaching Exhibition" was a recent studio-based exhibition of ceramic pots and sculptures fashioned from local clay found primarily on the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) campus, Brunei Darussalam. Geiger-Ho's solo exhibition represented a body of work and its relationship to Brunei's creative industries. Geiger-Ho's exhibition was intended to be a teaching model for her ceramic students and the public as a means for introducing the concept of using found clay as opposed to already processed commercial clay. Furthermore, her exhibition also included digital photography showcasing the techniques and skills involved with locating, excavating and processing ceramic materials, along with images about the methods involved with the making and firing of her experimental ceramic sculptures. Geiger-Ho's paper also examines the methodology, content and outcome of her practice-based research and its importance for producing artwork that is essentially made from clay that is the same as the kind used for making bricks. Geiger-Ho's exegesis highlights how her exhibition at the FASS 1.89 Teaching Gallery, UBD campus, from 11 January to 6 February, 2016 demonstrated the concept that practice as research in art not only produces knowledge but also the capacity to show how that knowledge is revealed, acquired and expressed. A lesson plan for teaching her AR-4305 Ceramics and Product Design students on how to locate and use local Bruneian clay to make functional pottery and sculpture, starting with a pinch-pot, is included in her paper.

Keywords: Ceramics, teaching-artist, art exhibition, practice-based research

Introduction

"New Ceramics Out of Brunei Darussalam: Dr. Geiger-Ho's Reconstructed Landscapes," shown in Figure 1, is a studio-based exhibition of ceramic sculptures made from local clay found on the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) campus, and the nearby location of Berakas Beach recreational park, Brunei Darussalam. Geiger-Ho's solo exhibition represents a body of work that can be, through its material, connected to Brunei's creative industries. Geiger-Ho's exhibition is intended to be a teaching model for her ceramic and sculpture students because she will use both her pottery and a special teaching display as a means for introducing the concept of using found clay, as opposed to processed commercial clay, to produce art. Furthermore, her exhibition also includes digital photography intended to accompany her special educational displays, which showcase the physical resources and outcomes involved with processing raw ceramic materials into fired clay articles.

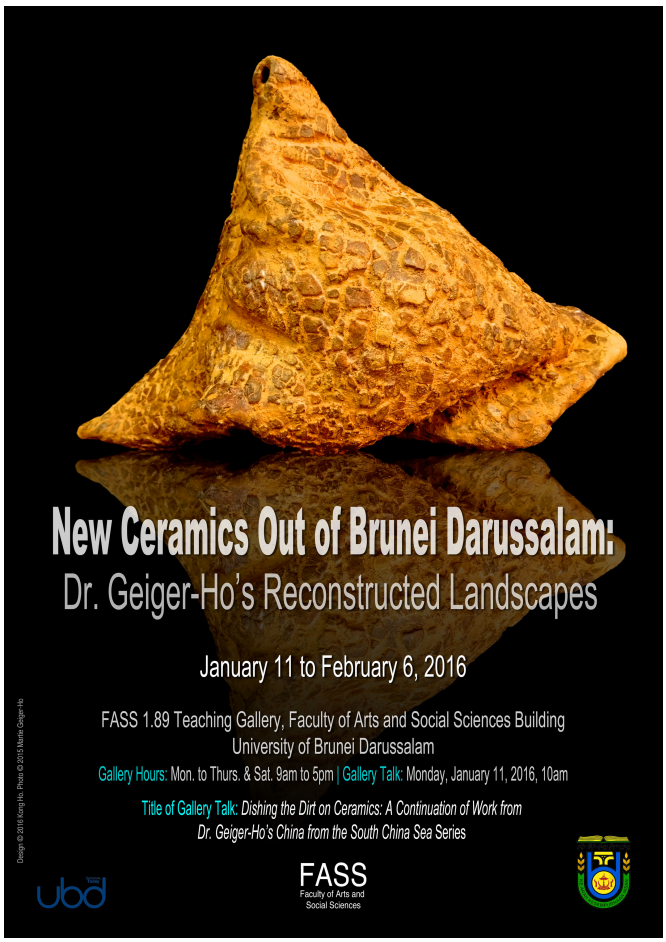

Figure 1: Martie Geiger-Ho's "New Ceramics Out of Brunei Darussalam: Dr. Geiger-Ho's Reconstructed Landscapes" poster.

Geiger-Ho considers all of her exhibited work, from her semi-functional bowls, to her sculptural pieces, to be experimental works because each object was fashioned from a small batch of hand gathered and prepared clay that yielded new and slightly different and unpredictable results. Also, instead of using commercially blended clay that would offer consistent results every time, Geiger-Ho chose to work in a less predictable manner because she wanted to pay homage to the landscape that yielded

the clay that was gathered one small bucketful at a time. By touching and experiencing each small landscape area that displayed a different kind of clay, Geiger-Ho became familiar with the qualities of that place and then worked towards using her precious ceramic materials to their full advantage to make sculptures and wheel-thrown vessels that resonate back to the character of their original location. This is why all of the work in her exhibition has a rugged, natural quality to it, shown in Figure 2.

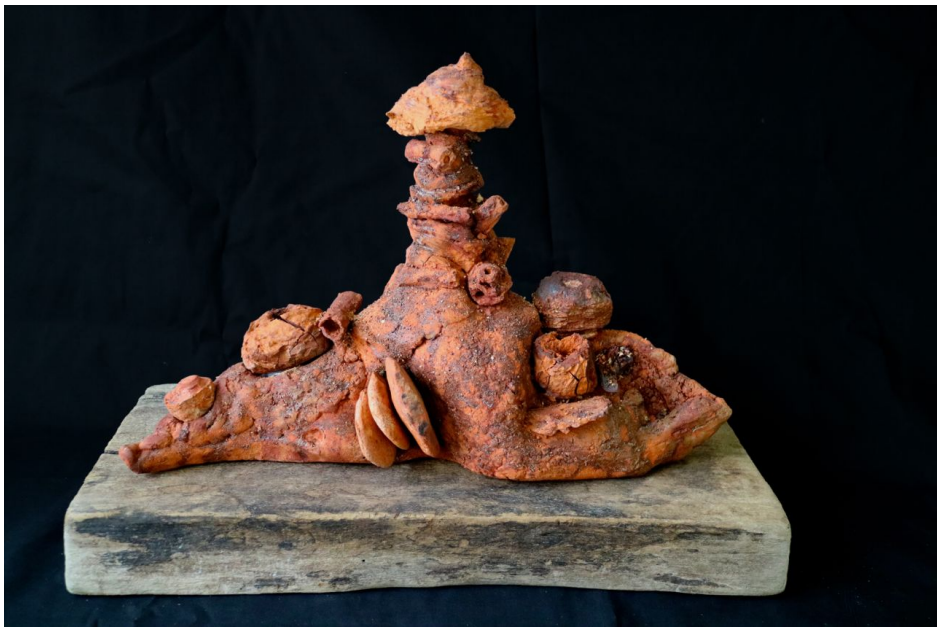

Figure 2: Martie Geiger-Ho. *Thrown Hill-Draped Vessel*. 2015. Cone 04 electric kiln fired red earthenware clay, unglazed with colored oxides. 9.5”H x 7”W x 7”D.

Geiger-Ho considers all of the ceramic art work that she exhibited in her exhibition, "New Ceramics Out of Brunei Darussalam: A Teaching exhibition" to be experimental in nature because each object, from her semi-functional bowls, to her sculptural works, was fashioned from a small batch of hand-gathered and prepared clay that yielded new and slightly different results from all previous work. Instead of using commercially blended clay that offers consistent results every time, Geiger-Ho chose to work in a less predictable manner because she wanted to pay homage to the landscape that yielded the clay that was primarily gathered from a freshly exposed clay seam at a construction site on campus.

Formative Research and Studio Work Leading to Geiger-Ho's Teaching Exhibition

According to the *Teaching Artist Handbook* (Jaffe, N., Barniskis, B., & Cox, B. H., 2013), Geiger-Ho is a teaching artist with an active international exhibition record. Her work always has a conceptual component that is the driving force in her ceramic art. Very often, the country and the material that comprises her work supplies the meaning and outward look or appearance of her work. The content of her work is derived from the landscape and materials found embedded in that landscape. Other influences in her ceramics come from the ceramic world itself and she is a leading researcher into the beliefs and customs surrounding the ancient and modern firing of Chinese pottery.

It took Geiger-Ho over three years of researching natural clay materials and teaching ceramics at UBD before she felt comfortable enough with her new body of work to launch a full scale solo exhibition of completed pieces. The gestation of her work needed such a lengthy time frame because several major technical problems needed-to-be-overcome before she and her students could begin making fired ceramics at all. The most pressing problems were clay and an electric kiln in which to fire it. Secondary to having a reliable source of commercial clay (commercially blended moist clay that is ready to use without lumps and is suitable for handbuilding small sculptural objects) and a kiln was the lack of tools. The large overshadowing problems were solved when Geiger-Ho found a way to have clay imported from Singapore for her classes, and an electric kiln was procured from the United States by UBD. However, now that she had the basic equipment and materials needed to properly teach ceramics (she had been giving paper-mache and air-drying clay assignments to her students up until the end of her first year of teaching at UBD) her own desires as a ceramist were left unfulfilled because to her the processed clay was sterile and what she really needed was something new and interesting to explore in her work, or "dance with clay".

The answer to her need for inspiration and meaning for her clay work came when she realized that almost all of the "soil" in Brunei is either sand or clay. Since, at this point Geiger-Ho was already teaching ceramics on a limited bases (one module per year) and that she only had limited ceramic materials, she realized that adding a lesson to her module about using local clay to produce ceramic articles would greatly enhance her teaching and allow her to more effectively teach students about the science of mixing clay and glazes on a more experiential learning level.

The two major reasons why Geiger-Ho chose to present her research and body of work through the lens of education and not through the concept of fine art and personal expression, was firstly: she felt that much of the impetus behind her work stemmed from her desire to learn more about the Bruneian landscape and to share that understanding of geology and working with the earth with her students; and secondly, there was, and still is, a strong teaching emphasis placed on UBD's faculty to lead students towards using the skills learned in their various disciplines to become entrepreneurs, or innovators in Brunei's expanding creative industries. Since Brunei has no cultural history of ceramic making, the notion of adding a new material as part of Brunei's arts and crafts movement using available clay found everywhere throughout the country seemed like an idea that was exciting and doable.

Gathering and Processing Found Clay

The gathering and processing of clay where UBD facility contractors either dumps, or collects clay earth for construction projects on campus is an easily accessed area that is not usually busy, shown in Figure 3. Geiger-Ho hand gathers the clay in a bucket that she carries to the ceramic studio/classroom, where she breaks it into pieces that are allowed to dry on boards in the back of the room.

Figure 3: UBD campus clay used for road construction and by Geiger-Ho as material for making various kinds of ceramic art. Similar terracotta clay deposits are used to manufacture ordinary building bricks.

Geiger-Ho works with small batches of clay because she enjoys working with various mixtures of sandy and smooth clays, and because she does not have much room in her area to process large batches of clay. Next the dry clay is placed in a plastic container and covered with water so that it can slake down into a mud-like slurry. This part of the process takes about 24 hours to complete. The next step is to sieve the clay through a coarse regular kitchen sieve. Finally, the clay is dried on a piece of cloth laid on top of a thick board until it is the right consistency for use. Of course, a dry thick plaster slab with a piece of cloth on top would dry the clay much more quickly than it does on a wooden board. Moist clay is then stored in plastic bags until it is needed.

An Exhibition to Inspire Students

In addition to her artist statement and other signage about her work, Geiger-Ho also gave several talks to her ceramic students along with other Art and Creative Technology (ACT) majors about her art and its significance for laying the foundation for a possible new direction for a new kind of creative exploration that could by undertaken by anyone looking to add a new resource and art form to Brunei's creative industry, shown in Figure 4.

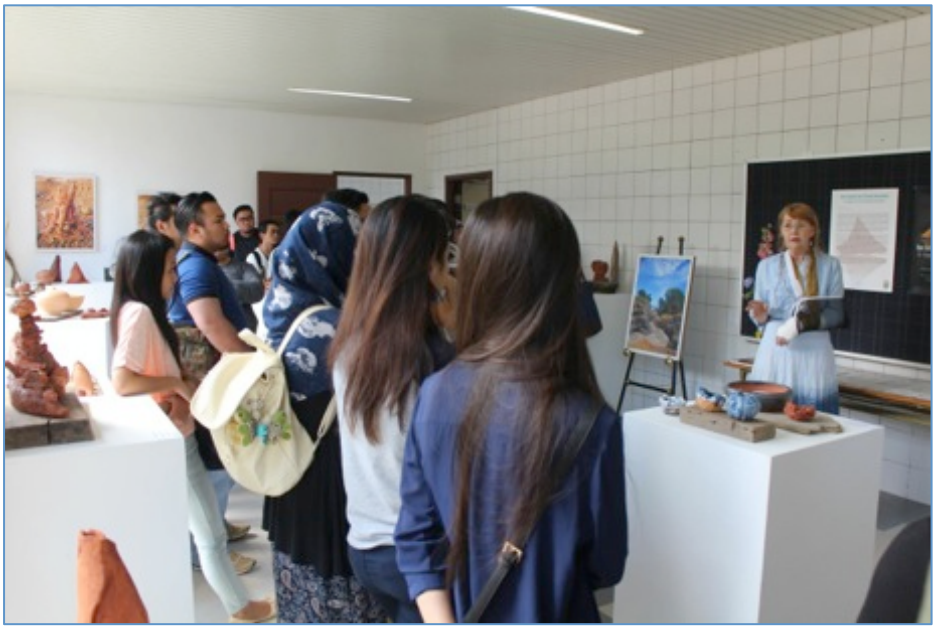

Figure 4: Martie Geiger-Ho gave a gallery talk to her ACT students at the opening of her exhibition at FASS 1.89 Teaching Gallery, UBD, in January 11, 2016.

Geiger-Ho found that the students were very interested in the textures of her artworks and in the knowledge that the clay could be found on the ground not far from the FASS building where the exhibition was held. Geiger-Ho made a point of explaining to the students and other attendees of her talks that a natural mineral called iron-sulfide, which occurs in large quantities along with the clay, leaches out of the processed clay and forms a surface that can be stretched to create unique surface textures. Instead of lamenting the problem of the scrumming clay and seeing it as a problem, Geiger-Ho produced shapes out of stretched slabs that could accentuate the clay's unique property. The shapes of her hand-built exhibited forms were greatly influenced by the natural clay and its unusual composition. An example of this kind of stretched surface can be seen in the earthy finishes of her sculptural forms in Figure 5 and 6.

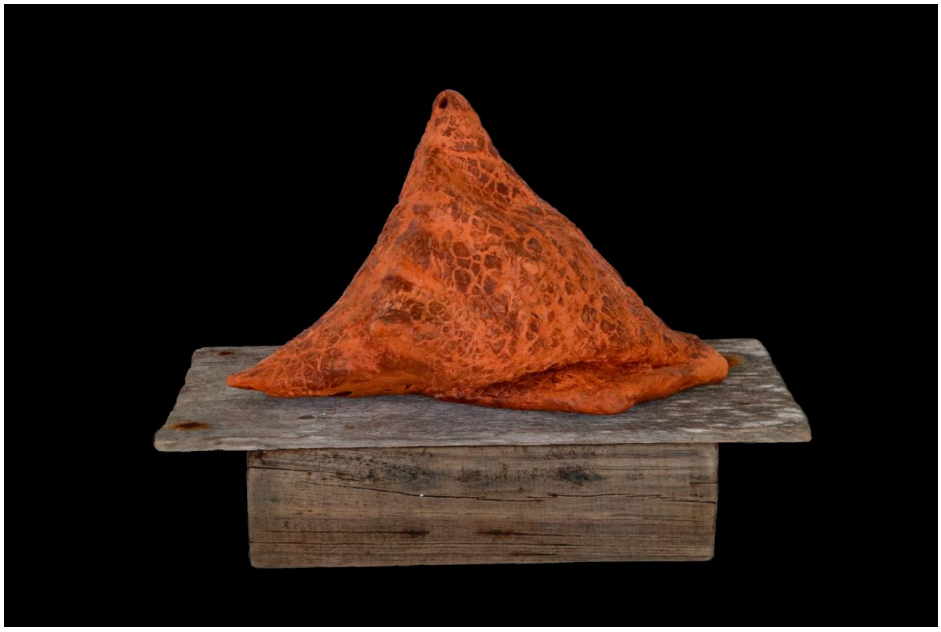

Figure 5: Martie Geiger-Ho. *Iron Crusted Cone-Vessel*. 2015. Cone 01 electric kiln fired earthenware clay with slips. 7.5”H x 11.5”W x 5”D

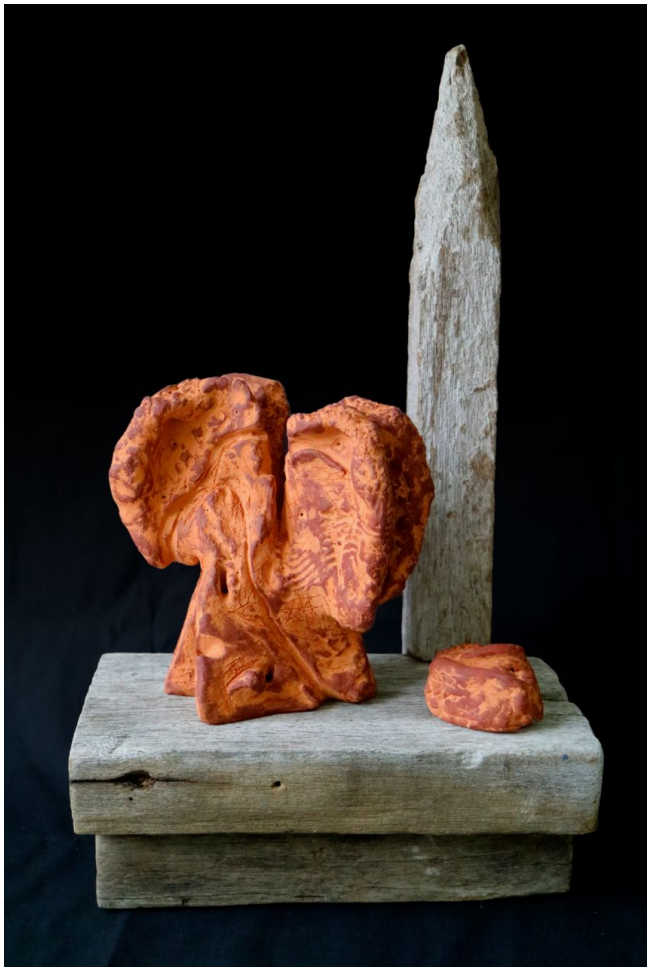

Figure 6: Martie Geiger-Ho. *Elemental Sculpture*. 2015. Cone 04 electric kiln fired earthenware clay, slip and found wood. 15”H x 14”W x 7”D

Figure 7: Martie Geiger-Ho. *Three Trays of Ceramic Related Teaching and Production Materials*. 2016. Collected from the University of Brunei Darussalam campus and Berakas Beach.

Tray No. 1 (Left) contains raw clay and minerals for making pottery.
Tray No. 2 (Middle) looks like a dry riverbed, only because it displays dried clay that was processed for use in the studio for the production of pottery articles.
Tray No. 3 (Right) holds an arrangement of electric kiln fired clay tests and experiments. Without carefully calculated and controlled experimentation, a ceramic artist will not be able to predict the outcome of the chemical interactions of the clay(s) with the other minerals from the earth that he or she mixed together to fire on the surface of the ceramic ware in order to decorate and sometimes glaze it. This display was included in Geiger-Ho's teaching exhibition, 2016.

Conducting Arts Research and Producing Work as a Role Model for Students

Geiger-Ho knows that research in art can be generated and classified in many ways. However, this research is almost exclusively qualitative in nature. As a teaching artist she believes that her professional development as both a creator of visual art and as a researcher of historical and tangible and intangible culture, is such that her various methods for producing work and undertaking research informs and supports each other.
Visual art production can sometimes be a thorny problem in terms of how a college or a university's academic department evaluates it as part of a faculty-members appraisal. Understanding the importance and impact of visual art is not easy, especially when it is bound-up with research output, its impact on teaching and service or usefulness as part of the social climate of the university. However, it is standard practice for studio art faculty to be hired on the strength of their exhibition record along with their ability to produce avant-garde work that in some way influences and propels prevailing global art concepts forward.

Research in art begins as a kind of qualitative enquiry called “practice-led research”. Qualitative art research is undertaken through inductive reasoning for understanding a particular concept, situation, historical period, or style. Qualitative enquiry or practice-led research or artistic research is no less demanding or rigorous than regular quantitative or qualitative research that is specifically undertaken as discourse.

Haseman (2007) notes that a new paradigm for the visual and performing arts that teaching artists use to illicit meaning and knowledge from their art practice based projects is the 'performative research paradigm' (J. L. Austin 1962: 121 as cited in Haseman, 2007, p. 150).

Usually, practice-based research includes four major components: production of physical artworks, research presentation; dissemination of knowledge; and publication (either by the artist or a critic). The production phase of art making by teaching artists includes: documentation of processes, both intellectual & physical; outlining ideas (sketchbook, journal writing, photographs); collecting data; creating and constructing artworks; exhibition brochure publishing (artist's statement, exhibition statement, biography & selected artworks description); curating the exhibition (booking exhibition venue, organizing related workshop, promoting exhibition, setting up exhibition); and conducting gallery talks (presenting creative ideas behind the artworks to the audience). In research presentation, teaching artists present their research discoveries (findings) and performative research (data) in the form of research papers to be given at conferences, symposiums or workshops. In dissemination of knowledge, teaching artists incorporate new knowledge to students through teaching concepts and techniques. Students learn to research art concepts, identify who their influences are, and write about their own art as part of their visual art making assignments. Publication of work may involve articles with images of the art. Teaching artists publish their conference papers or research papers in recognized peer-reviewed journals and authored or edited books.

According to Haseman (2009), "Practice-led researchers operating within the performative paradigm have found they too, need to engage a range of mixed methods, especially those which are instigated by and led from the demands of their practice". Haseman (2009) also states that:

With its emergent, but nevertheless systematic approach, practice-led research promises to raise the level of critical practice and theorizing around practice in a more rigorous and open way than professional practice alone is able to achieve. And as evidence of this, while the outputs of performative research will certainly include the material forms of practice: images music and sound, live action digital code and so on, there will be an additional commentary commonly referred to as an exegesis (p. 156).

Finally, Haseman (2007) explains that, "It is common for practice-led researchers to compliment their exegesis (explanation of their artistic work) with appropriate documentation drawn principally from the methods they use to map and interpret the progress and findings of their research" (p. 156).

Conclusion

No lesson ever taught is a repeat experience for either the teacher or the student. Always students and teachers are engaging in new and unique learning situations that call for flexibility in the learning environment and a willingness to try new approaches to problem solving. One of Geiger-Ho's primary goals as a teacher is to provide her students with multiple possibilities for creative problem-solving through critiques and interactive dialogue. She also does not believe in absolute answers or

final solutions. As an artist and teacher Geiger-Ho finds that absolute answers often lead to closed and predicable conclusions.

Clay is a versatile medium with links to both sculptural and functional heritages. In the climate of today's postmodern and pluralistic art world, it is essential that students understand the relationship of ceramics in the context of this multiple inheritance. Without a firm grasp of the fundamentals of art theory, along with the practiced skills of art making learned in studio courses, future ceramists will not be equipped to develop their own conceptual ideas and strategies for making art later on in their professional careers. By using naturally clay on the UBD campus, Geiger-Ho was able to produce an exhibition of work that showed students the way to conducting research into a material that can in turn lead to a body of work with a strong content. That research and work then was parlayed into an International Academic Forum (IAFOR) Japan presentation and paper, which is the expected outcome for most research in academia.

As a teacher I feel it is my responsibility to be available for my students, and to challenge them with my own working methods and art ethics. I believe that by regularly working and demonstrating side by side with my students, I can foster an exciting and open exchange of ideas between them and myself. I highly value a learning environment where students are encouraged to push the physical and creative limitations of their work in order to seek deeper solutions and meanings within the content of that work.

Addendum

Lesson Plan
Instructor: Dr. Martie Geiger-Ho

Pinch Pots from Found Clay

Description
No one learns to make pots on the potter's wheel without learning how to first work the clay. This also holds true for handbuilding. Generally speaking it is best to learn how to hand build before attempting to throw on the wheel because becoming sensitive to the clay's working properties before tackling the skill of throwing. Knowing how the clay responds to the movements of your hands and learning at which stages of wetness, or drying allows for various forming techniques is important for understanding how to make anything out of clay that will give you immediate satisfaction because your artwork will not fall apart and properly dry. Working on the potter's wheel takes a lot of skill and it may take a while before you are able to make something that is very personal.

Preparing Your Hand Gathered Clay

1. After locating a good source of clay (road-cuts, river-banks, and construction sites that are not dangerous places) are good places to look. Dig, or pick-up chunks of clay.

2. Lay the clay chunks out on boards to dry. After drying, break the chunks up into smaller pieces and soak them in a plastic pan with enough water to cover them. The clay will "slake" down to form muddy "slurry" or "slip".

3. Using a plastic or metal kitchen sieve (the kind for straining the lumps out of gravy) strain the clay slurry into a clean catch bucket. Use a rubber scraper to push the thick clay through the strainer.

4. Pour the slurry onto a large piece of canvas or bed-sheet that has been placed on a dry plaster slab or even a thick piece of wood.

5. Depending on the weather, the clay will start to dry and thicken, so keep an eye on it and work the dry edges into the soft wet middle as needed.

6. After the clay is the proper consistency it is ready to use or to be stored for later in an air tight plastic bag.

Pinch Pots—Fashioning A Pot Into Shape.

Please do not try to make pinch pots with bases or added handles at this time. I will demonstrate how to add coils onto your pinch pot in another assignment to make a larger vessel. Attaching clay parts together requires the use of the "slip-and-score method" that will be taught along with the coil pot making method. Be patient! Also, check out YouTube for short videos on how to make pinch pots.

1. To make a large pinch pot, begin with a ball of clay that looks like a soft-ball or round orange, but will fit comfortably in the palm of one hand. Everyone's hands are a different size, so for this assignment you should learn to make a small bowl that uses an amount of clay that is comfortable for you. Sometimes a bigger ball of clay does not mean a bigger pot if you cannot control the clay.

2. For this project you will need a small board on which to place your pot. Cover the wooden board with a piece of newspaper to keep your pot from sticking to it.

3. After wedging or slamming your clay down on the board (without the newspaper) to get out the air pockets, press and mold your ball of clay in your hands until it forms a nice round ball.

4. Press your thumb into the ball of clay while holding it in your other hand. If you put the clay on the board and press it you will not end up with a nice bowl because you will squish the clay and in the end you will have a pancake!

5. Do not press your thumb all of the way through the ball. Leave about half an inch on the bottom. Now, with your thumb still inside the ball of clay, start pressing out the sides of the bowl a little at a time as you turn it gently in the palm of your other hand.

6. Remember to keep turning your work and to look at it from all angles as you work.

7. Do not add water to your pot. Use your fingers to smooth out flaws and cracks.

8. Decide on how the rim of your pot should look and create the rim. Now turn you pot over and indent the bottom of it or it will have a rounded bottom that will cause your piece to roll around after firing.

9. Put your name somewhere on your pot before setting it out to dry. Remember that dry work cannot be altered or handled. It is simply dry mud and can easily crack. Never re-wet dry work. Please do not touch the dry or wet work of others.

10. Have patience during the drying process. I will only fire work that I deem dry enough to make it though a kiln firing. Remember that steam is a very strong force and that its presence in the walls of damp pots or sculptures is the reason why these works sometimes explode in the kiln.

Always handle greenware (newly made pottery) with two hands. Cradle the artwork in your hands. Never touch the work of others. Dry, unfired pottery is even more fragile than wet pottery. Please be respectful of the work of others.

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