

A PERSONAL EXPRESSION

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Problem in Lieu of Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

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The problem involves developing a method that leaves conventional form and form making and moves toward a spontaneous and intuitive approach. The thesis is organized into 3 chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction, statement of the problem and methodology. The second chapter describes the work in eight movements. The third chapter answers questions posed by the problem and includes a summary and conclusion. The findings are that a spontaneous, impulsive, and intuitive approach to the medium, clay, is a productive and artistic method. The medium is responsive and telling of the method and art is produced.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The fascination with art began, much the same, as with a child's experience and sense of awe with the color and shape of things. The child's mark making is spontaneous and simple, a yellow sun, a billowy green tree, and stick figures representing the persons in her life. This innocent, spontaneous energy is intimate, basic, and filled with a sense of wonder with the marks she makes on a piece of paper. The creative energy is free from divisive influences. The only motive is simply making the mark or forming the clay.

The style of this thesis is to be characterized by a naive and intuitive approach. A process enthusiastic and impulsive, which will lead from conventional ideas of form making to revolve around a sense of innocent spontaneousness.

Statement of Problem

The problem of this thesis is to develop a method that leads from conventional processes of form making to a more simplified, child like approach where decisions are few and the form making is impulsive.

1. Will the simplification of clay preparation, surface treatment, and firing techniques allow for a more fluid and spontaneous movement?
2. Will the clay be adaptive to spontaneous and impulsive actions?
3. Will shedding the more time consuming aspects of the processes create an atmosphere in which art develops?

Methodology

Preparation is essential for clay work, which is antithetical to actions of spontaneity. Clay mixing, glaze formulation and firing technique will be simplified as much as possible to remove obstacles inherent in more complex ceramics and to accommodate the impulse of the moment.

Essentially, three steps serve as a basis for the work: 1) Mix the clay. 2) Briefly inventory the materials in the studio that could act as support for the clay. 3) Make numerous sheets of clay. The kilns used are gas and salt, firing to varying temperatures. The project consists of eight movements composed of three to five pieces each.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

Movement I

The first movement began by draping sheets of clay across various objects in the studio. The objects were rigid and as the clay dried, it contracted and broke. The clay needed as it dried a surface across which it could slide. Even though the effort in this movement seemed at the time ineffective, several unbroken pieces were set aside. These pieces held no particular significance except as a beginning. Only after salt firing were characteristics emphasized such as lines suggesting direction, texture, and an evocative silhouette.



Fig. 1. Movement I

Movement II

The second movement began by choosing for support 1"x 2" scrap board of varying lengths. The method involved wrapping sheets of clay loosely around the boards. Twine, cloth, and tape held the clay in place and boards propped the pieces in a vertical position. Loosely

applying the clay to the board, gave the clay room to contract as well as slump at the base. In addition, wrapping or rolling the clay provided structural support. The method of restraint and support allowed contraction to occur without breakage.

Before rolling out the clay sheets, borax and colorants were sprinkled on the surface of the clay. The pieces were medium fired. Glaze technique, the slumping clay and the restraints resulted in patterns of color, foot, texture, and irregular line. These elements provided movement throughout the forms.



Fig. 2 Movement II



Fig. 3 Movement II

Movement III

The third movement was a search for a simple support for the clay. Clay cylinders of varying sizes, discarded from other projects served as support. Using the cylinders, which were larger in diameter than the boards and larger sheets of clay, helped to create forms with a greater surface area. Draping the clay around the cylindrical forms helped discouraged the slumping seen in Movement II and gave these pieces a less interrupted silhouette.

Moving the larger dried pieces from the studio to the kiln posed a problem. The larger pieces proved more fragile than the more tightly wrapped cylindrical pieces of Movement II and three of five pieces fell apart. The surviving pieces were sprayed and dashed with borax and colorants and

low fired. The two surviving pieces have a greater stature and a quieter presence than the second movement.



Fig. 4. Movement III

Movement IV

The fourth movement began after an especially frustrating session at the pottery wheel. Throwing a failed pot on the floor not only relieved some frustration but also created an intriguing shape. Following the impulse, slices of freshly made clay were thrown on the floor creating a composition of pieces approximately 4'x5'. Two compositions were made by this method and three compositions were made by arranging sheets of clay on a flat surface, overlapping edges, and modeling the surfaces. Premixed glazes and colorants were sprayed and dashed onto the surfaces of

four compositions and chunks of Egyptian paste were embedded in the surface of the remaining composition. All five pieces were high fired.

The illustrations below show, except the first, parts from larger compositions. The decision not to use each piece in its entirety was made for safety reasons. Mounting the compositions on a vertical surface was a challenge not anticipated but enthusiasm about the possibility for large wall compositions remains. Due to the unforeseen difficulty of hanging the works, the most provocative pieces of each composition were chosen for the thesis exhibit.



Fig. 5. Movement IV



Fig. 6. Movement IV.



Fig. 7. Movement IV

Movement V

This movement began with a search for a support material that would move with the clay as it dried. The answer was newspaper; it was strong yet pliable and allowed enough air circulation for the clay to dry without being altered. Rolling the clay sheets into tubes and wrapping others around rolled and wadded balls of newspaper produced four pieces.

Attaching pieces of clay on and around the tubes created extra interest. Two pieces were lightly sprayed with pre-mixed glazes and dashed with dry colorants and fired in the gas kiln. Two were fired in the salt kiln, one without glaze and one sprayed with colorants.



Fig. 8. Movement V.

Movement VI

The next movement continued the successful use of newspaper: A floor piece constructed from approximately one-hundred tubes. The movement of laying the flat clay sheets on the newspaper and then rolling the ensemble into long slender tubes of clay was infectious. A finished composition was secondary to the movement of rolling the tubes. The parts were arranged in a circular fashion, with the tallest in the middle of the arrangement and the shortest on the outside. Several of the more irregular tubes were laid on the floor. The composition was tied together with burlap twine. Firing in a salt kiln produced colors varying from white to rust to dark brown.



Fig. 9. Movement VI



Fig. 10 Movement VI

Movement VII

The firing process alone contributed to the success of this movement. Stacking the dried sheets of clay in the salt kiln was an experiment. This was motivated by an understanding that color from previous firings deposited in the kilns interior could be transferred to pieces in future firings. The thought was that unglazed raw clay would be more accepting of salt and color vapors.

Sheets of clay were placed one on top of the other interspersed with handfuls of salt. During the firing, the salt ate and boiled through the layers of clay. This boiling convulsed the clay, creating the undulations and variations in color and surface texture. These pieces are remarkable because of the texture and movement created by the chemical reaction of the clay, salt, and heat in the kiln. There is more evidence of the action of the salt and heat than of a residual color transfer.



Fig. 11. Movement VII

Movement VIII

The form, in this movement, refers to forms in Movements V and VI. The clay was rolled into tubes supported by newspaper and stainless steel rods with the addition of a base. In the kiln the vertical shoots bent as gravity and heat willed. The rods burnt black and wilted adding a second material to the clay. These pieces were sparsely dashed with borax and dry colorants producing a dryer surface. The overall surface treatment gives a soft warm appearance.

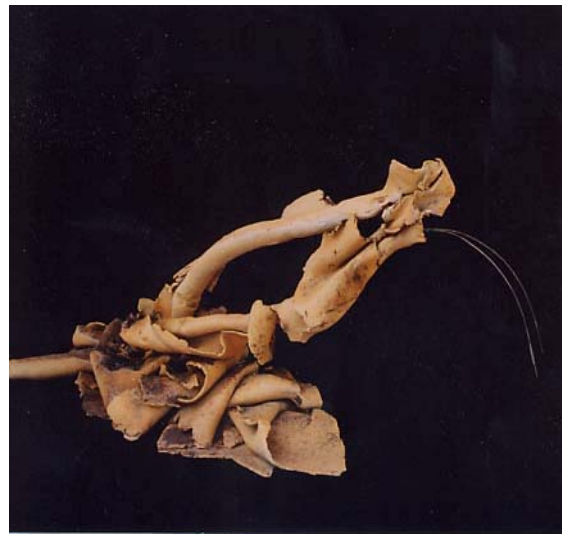


Fig. 12. Movement VIII

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The approach to this project was about the simplification of a process and a change of attitude toward the medium. The guides throughout this project were consistent use of clay sheets and avoiding conventional methods of form making. Working within the confines of the clay sheets defined the scope of the project and thus provided continuity and movement within the shapes.

A simplification of the processes did create an atmosphere in which movement was a matter of reflex, not an act of will, a naturally occurring sequence of events that allowed for a more fluid and spontaneous movement from one piece to the other. Clay is a medium most suited to the whims of impulse. The medium has proved to be responsive within the limits of this project and clearly adaptive to spontaneous and impulsive actions. The more time consuming aspects of the ceramic process, context developing and glaze formulation, were put aside to allow for a more immediate and impulsive reaction to the clay. These tasks interrupted the flow and movement of form making. This approach created an atmosphere in which art resulted and a more eclectic style and form was developed.

The thought was to use the clay as an artistic resource, not being specific to any technique. This may seem inconsistent with the complexities of the medium but just the thought was liberating even though the demands, throughout the project were basically the same. A sense of freedom came from discarding adherent methods and using simple manipulation and a reliance on the medium's characteristics of plasticity, mass, and weight.

The glaze application and choice of firing techniques resulted in a soft, warm flow of color. Surface impressions came from cloth and plastic sheets used to protect the slab roller. The

movement of the roller pulled these materials across the surface of the clay impressing irregular patterns with an abrasive texture.

The results with the gas kiln were provocative but familiar. The salt kiln posed a challenge. Little experience intensified the anticipation and the excitement of dealing with a firing method that required no glaze. With a light, spray of two colorants the salt firing produced a beautiful glaze with depth and color.



Fig. 13. Movements IV and V.

The most spontaneous and unpredictable forms, surface texture, and color came from the salt kiln as shown in figures 14 and 15.



Fig. 14. Movement V



Fig. 15. Movement VI

The gas kilns higher temperatures burned out the raw oxides creating a metallic gray to black. The previously prepared glazes resulted in a finer vitrified finish and a structurally stronger piece. The lower temperatures left a visually and tactilely rough body with splashes of color.



Fig. 16. Unidentified Movements

Honest creativity comes from a sense of unburdened, child-like spontaneity. There is a sense of this innocence conveyed in the work. Even though previous experience interfered with an innocent approach; these pieces have the appearance of innocence, as in a volcanic eruption or an image in a cloud, or cave formation made by dripping water.



Fig. 17 Movements IV (on left) and VI (2 on right)

“When your painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge.”

(Jackson Pollock, Arneson. 442)

These unexpected gifts are forms that surround us. They are the shapes of the earth and our minds. The resultant shape, no matter how casual the method, will inevitably, be compared to experiences and images.

Clay’s eclectic properties and relationship to the earth, plus its utilitarian and decorative uses suits an intimate sense of life and living. Its plasticity allows a tactile interaction, stimulation, and reaction. Its characteristics and the steps involved in bringing the pieces to their finish allowed for impulsive changes that affected color, texture, and form. Each variable altered its final appearance. The works display clays ability to respond and retain the marks and forms of the moment, making permanent the most spontaneous, trivial, or profound movement.

“I just bumped into clay. It felt good. The decoration was subconscious too.”

(Jun Kaneko, Peterson. 290)

The forms are the result of this simplified and impulsive method. However, clays plastic qualities always produced an asynchronous movement of line and edge creating gentle and tense rhythms representing a moment in time when the force of action was transferred to the clay. This thesis was a visit to the simplicity of form making, as a child with the knowledge of an adult and the understanding of an artist..

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