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Visual and Expressive Form Qualities Attainable in Thrown Pottery Vessels by Use of Various Lips and Feet

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VISUAL AND EXPRESSIVE FORM QUALITIES ATTAINABLE IN THROWN POTTERY VESSELS BY USE OF VARIOUS LIPS AND FEET

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITONS OF TERMS USED

The effectiveness of a pottery vessel as an acceptable work of artistic craftsmanship depends greatly upon successful relationships between the lip, body, and foot of that vessel. Making a major change in contour or proportion of any one of the three will affect the visual appearance of the entire form.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to discover the number of various form qualities that it is possible to achieve within pottery vessels that are closely related by similar feet, bodies, and lips. The variety of form qualities sought for were of a visual nature; the entire pot seeming to appear more or less vertical or more or less horizontal than others with the same type of body but with different shapes of lips and feet selected to be used.

Importance of the study. Variety in pottery forms has always been of prime interest to the potter and his audience, whether his pottery was oriented toward aesthetic or utilitarian uses. Variety is catalytic and urges the potter onward to explore new possibilities of form relationships that can make significant and original statements in clay. The search for

a variety of pottery forms is continual and of prime importance to the potter for it is through new and different forms that he may best express his ideas and concepts. Wheel thrown pottery forms are limited to the extent they are round and cannot exceed the plastic limitations of the clay. Within these limitations the potter must find variety. In this study an attempt was made to find a large measure of variety within three, basic pottery forms by applying different shapes of pottery lips and feet.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Pot. For the purpose of this study a pot is a clay vessel, in any stage of dryness or firing, that has been formed on the potters wheel.

Lip. The uppermost, terminal portion of the pot, more or less distinct from the body.

Body. The large, middle portion of the pot, wherein lies the greatest volume.

Foot. The bottom portion of the pot, upon which the vessel rests.

Throw. To form a vessel using the potters wheel.

Trim. To complete the form, and establish the foot of a pot by trimming away excess clay from the base area.

III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

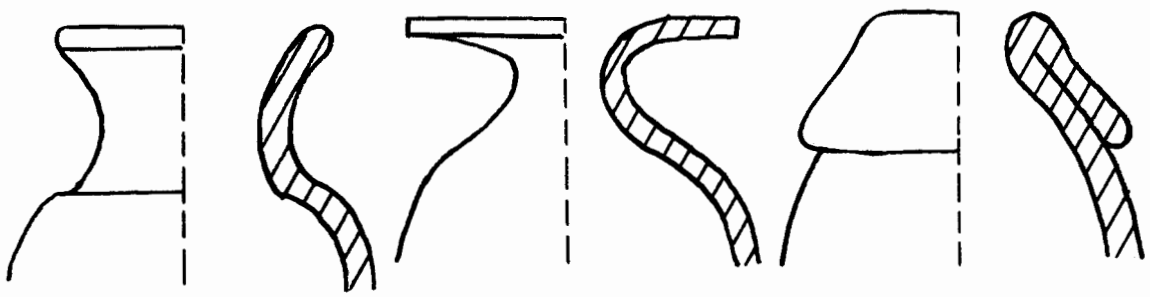
Three simple forms were used as bodies in the study: (1) elliptical-vertical, (2) spherical, and (3) elliptical-horizontal. In combination with these forms five types of lips were used: (1) concave, (2) flanged, (3) lapped, (4) flared, and (5) rolled (Figure 1, page 5). The three types of feet employed were: (1) round, (2) undercut, and (3) convergent (Figure 2, page 6).

The three body types used in this study were selected because they represent three variations of one simple form: the ellipse. The lips and feet were selected for the problem because they are the types most commonly used by the investigator.

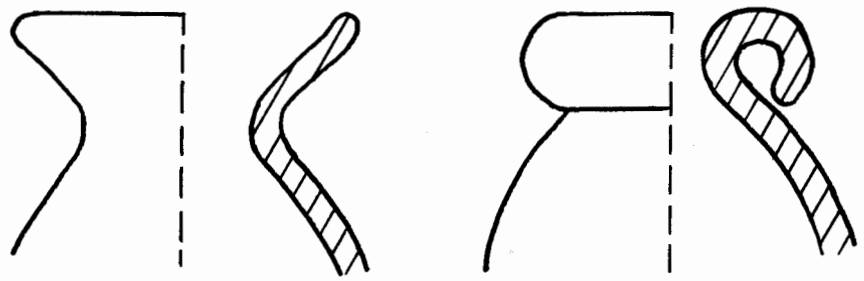
The same stoneware clay body was used throughout the entire study. All vessels were wheel thrown forms executed on a kick-type wheel. Trimming was done on the same wheel.

The dried vessels were first fired to a bisque temperature of 1600 degrees Fahrenheit (cone 010) before being glazed. Glazes were applied by means of two techniques: (1) dipping, and (2) pouring. After glazing, the pottery was fired in an HF-16 Alpine gas kiln in a reducing atmosphere to a temperature of 2336 degrees Fahrenheit (cone 9).

Tools used for throwing and trimming were: (1) an elephant ear sponge, (2) a chamois, (3) a dissecting needle, (4) a potters knife, and (5) a metal trimming tool.



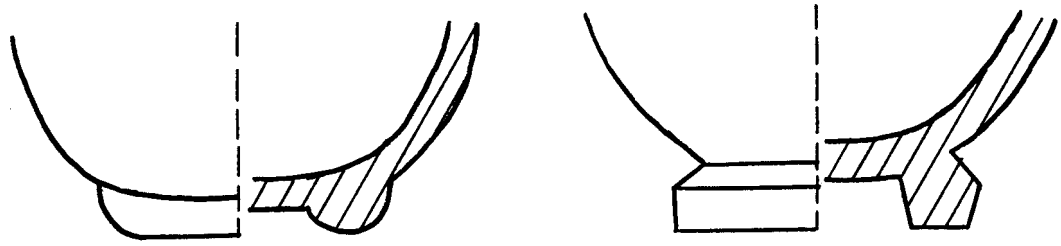
Concave Flanged Lapped



Flared Rolled

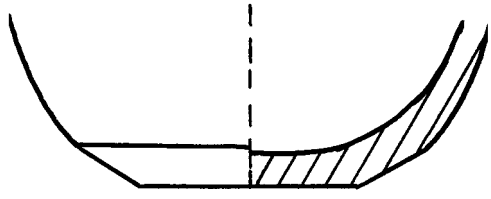
FIGURE 1

TYPES OF LIPS



Round

Undercut



Convergent

FIGURE 2

TYPES OF FEET

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Clay, in the plastic state, is a responsive medium and a direct reflection of any pressure that has been placed upon it. When subjected to intense heat it becomes a permanent statement of the individual who modeled it. In the hands of an artist it becomes a symbol of his reality. In order to express himself beyond a very limited scope it is necessary to find a variety of forms to act as a vehicle for his feelings and ideas. The forms of pots are infinite and there are no rules governing their shapes (8:173).

"The feelings, the concepts, that begin and end in yourself are only the starting points, and your creative richness is measured by the love and understanding with which you see and meet the world in its infinite variety and unexpectedness." wrote Henry Varnum Poor when speaking of the challenge to the potter (5:45).

Poor is speaking of the challenge that exists in the variety of the outside world and equally challenging is the search to find variety from within. Form in art arises from the impact of idea upon material and is manifested by technique. Forms come from the human wish to interpret ideas as entities, so meanings will not depart, as they do form the mind, so thinking and belief

and attitudes may exist as actual things (9:70).

The creative potter is continually searching for new forms in order to express his ideas as entities. In his discipline these ideas are manifested as pot forms. The importance of finding a variety of form in pottery cannot be understated. Marguerite Wildenhain places great emphasis upon the search for form:

> It takes years to find valid and genuine forms and it takes all the skill, intelligence, feeling, experience, talent, discrimination and integrity of a man. It is in the widest sense a problem of human development and of how to pour the sum of a man's experience of life into form (10:29).

> We shall thus try to formulate more specifically our problem in pottery, in the following way: it is to create forms out of a formless and boundless multitude of clay masses, forms that have originated in the conception of the potter, that have grown out of his idea of beauty, his skill as a craftsman and his total intelligence, feeling and belief as a human being (10:30-31).

The greatest problem which confronts the potter, beyond the problem of mastery of technique, is that of creating a variety of forms that will effectively express his ideas, feelings and concepts. The potter who settles for one basic form or "line" as his means of expression is not a true potter, a creative artisan; he is a victim of routine, a "routineer." The man who meets the problem of form variety and accepts it as a challenge will search for variety in form, and according to his own ideas, be capable of conceiving and inventing his own language (10:98).

Clay imposes certain limitations of size, proportion and form. But within these limitations the potter can express his ideas as forms (4:3). By continual work with his materials,

the potter does not regard any restrictions imposed upon him as limitations. Limitations simply become guides and a mere matter of fact.

CHAPTER III

THE INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE MATERIAL

The forty-five pots used for the study are presented in Figures 3 through 11. Each group is classified according to basic body shape and type of foot employed. Figure 3 is elliptical-vertical with the round foot; Figure 4 is elliptical-vertical, undercut foot; Figure 5 is elliptical-vertical, convergent foot; Figure 6 is spherical, round foot; Figure 7 is spherical, undercut foot; Figure 8 is spherical, convergent foot; Figure 9 is elliptical-horizontal, round foot; Figure 10 is elliptical-horizontal, undercut foot, and Figure 11 is elliptical-horizontal, convergent foot. By viewing from left to right in each figure group it is possible to consider the five types of lips in combination with one type of foot on one basic body shape. By looking from top to bottom, it is possible to consider the three types of feet employed in combination with one type of lip on the same basic form.

II. THE INVESTIGATION

Upon observation of the maximum number of variables (within the limitations of the study) placed upon the three basic shapes, it became apparent there was no appreciable effect upon

A B C D E

FIGURE 3

ELLIPTICAL-VERTICAL BODY - ROUND FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 4

ELLIPTICAL-VERTICAL BODY - UNDERCUT FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 5

ELLIPTICAL-VERTICAL BODY - CONVERGENT FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 6

SPHERICAL BODY - ROUND FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 7

SPHERICAL BODY - UNDERCUT FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 8

SPHERICAL BODY - CONVERGENT FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 9

ELLIPTICAL-HORIZONTAL BODY - ROUND FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 10

ELLIPTICAL-HORIZONTAL BODY - UNDERCUT FOOT

A B C D E

FIGURE 11

ELLIPTICAL-HORIZONTAL BODY - CONVERGENT FOOT

the total form relative to visual leanness and verticality or stoutness and horizontality. Vessels were grouped according to the basic form employed. This resulted in three major groups of fifteen vessels each. In this way it was possible to make visual comparisons between pots within any major vessel group or between the major groups themselves. Consider, for example, the elliptical-vertical group displayed in Figures 3, 4, and 5, page 11. Each vessel is definitely a separate entity, possessing characteristics unique unto itself. This observable difference is apparent because no one pot has the same lip and foot combination as any other. While variety is evident, variety of a variously lean and vertical or stout and horizontal visual nature is not evident. Compare Figures 3A and 4A, page 11. In this example, Figure 4A is definitely leaner than Figure 3A, however, the leanness is attributable to the difference in the basic forms, not because Figure 4A has an undercut foot and Figure 3A has a round foot. Consider Figures 4B and 4E which have very similar body profiles. Due to the two types of lips used these two pots are distinctly different. However, there is one highly unifying factor: the similarity of the body of each pot. Attention is called to Figure 11, page 13, pots C and D; while the lips create totally different vessels relative to general appearance, stoutness and horizontality are not affected to any appreciable amount; they both retain a horizontal, stout character. It is not difficult to point out many other examples. The above stated observation

may be applied to any basic form group with the same results. Consider Figure 6, page 12, pots B and E; Figure 7, page 12, pots A and D; and Figure 8, page 12, pots C and E. Even within a selection of total forms of this size, with the various lip and foot combinations, the vessels maintain the basic spheroid form. The type of visual variety sought in the investigation is overshadowed by the unity inherent within the basic body form of the vessel groups.

Variety of an expressive nature other than that sought is possible within the limitations of the study. This variety relates to the expressive character of the terminal portions of the vessel and does not affect major visual changes within the total basic form.

Attention is drawn to all of the forty-five vessels displayed in Figures 3 through 11, pages 11, 12, and 13. Every vessel has something in common with at least twenty-six other vessels: the same lip or body or foot. Regardless of these relationships each vessel is unique. For example, there is a convergent foot on Figure 5E, page 11, an undercut foot on Figure 4E, page 11, and a round foot on Figure 3E, page 11; as a result they are three different pots even though unified by the same types of lips and bodies. Figure 5E terminates smoothly at the base, employing only one angle which repeats the direction already established by the body. Figure 4E, employs two angles, one of

which is perpendicular to the lower curve of the body. The angle on Figure 3E is also an abrupt one, though not nearly so oppositional as 4E, nor as integrated as 5E. These three feet possess different angles resulting in a totally different expressive character of the lower termination of each vessel. This principle of angular contrast may be applied also to the spherical vessels (Figures 6, 7, and 8, page 12) and the elliptical-horizontal group (Figures 9, 10, and 11, page 13) with similar results. Each type of foot determines a different type of base termination and therefore a different vessel.

Each of the five lips has a different shape and as a result the uppermost, terminal portion of the vessels express characteristics that are established by the use of a particular lip. Consider the lips displayed in Figure 4A, B, C, D, and E, page 11. Figure 4A, the concave lip, moves in a simple concave curve, slowly inward then snapping abruptly outward. As a result, vision is carried upward and outward into space. Figure 4B, the flanged lip, shifts even more abruptly than 4A, and establishes a character of a sharply terminal nature. The lapped lip (Figure 4C) maintains the greatest angle by doubling back onto the body, yet the relationship between the lip and the body is so closly linked there is little visual variance: the direction of the profile is continual. Figure 4D, the flared lip, maintains an angle that is nearly in direct opposition to the body; the upward angle of the lip is almost the same as the downward

angle of the body. The lip creates a reaching, "semi-terminal" effect. The rolled lip in Figure 4E maintains a tight, circular direction. The line of the profile turns completly back onto itself, bringing the eye back onto the main body of the pot, thus a continual effect is achieved somewhat akin to that characterized by the lapped lip. The five lips maintain these inherent visual characteristics regardless of the body type with which they are used. Consider any figure in the spherical or the elliptical-horizontal groups of vessels. The lip does not change; it is the body type that changes, thereby creating a measure of variety within the total character of the pot. Vision is still carried upward by the concave lip in Figures 7A, page 12, or 10A, page 13, just as it is in Figure 4A, page 11. The eye is carried back into the main form by the rolled lip in Figures 6E, 7E, 8E, 9E, 10E, and 11E, pages 12 and 13, just at it is in Figure 4E, page 11, which was used in the previous example.

The type of variety that can be discovered within a set of strict limitations was the main concern of this investigation. It was not the purpose of the investigator to find significant or "successful" or "unsuccessful" relationships between various lips, bodies and feet. Proportional widths of lips to each other and to the three body types obviously affect the expressive character of the pot. However, these widths are inherent within the type of lips chosen and need little commentary since they

are considered as part of the total character of the lip under consideration at any particular time.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary. The purpose of this study to discover a variety of form within the three basic vessel shapes that is of either a vertical or horizontal visual nature by the use of each of the five lip forms (concave, flanged, lapped, flared, and rolled) and each of three foot forms (round, undercut, and convergent) in connection with three basic body forms (elliptical-vertical, spherical, and elliptical-horizontal) proved to show neutral results. Any change that is noticeable is due to an actual physical change in the profile of the body and not because of any specific combination of the five lips or three feet that were employed in the study.

Variety, it was discovered, can be found in the terminal portions of a group of vessels, and as a result, each vessel is unique. Upon examination, it was found each type of lip and foot used in this study displays expressive characteristics that are different due to the shape or angle or angles established by any particular lip or foot. Because no two vessels have the same lip, body, and foot relationship, each of the forty-five pots is a distinctly different vessel.

Conclusions. The basic body form of any fifteen vessels with that same body form is such a strong unifying factor that

visual change of a lean and vertical or stout and horizontal nature is unachievable unless the basic form itself is made more vertical or horizontal. It may be possible to achieve visual variations in the same basic form by greatly increasing proportional relationships of the types of lips and feet used. However, by increasing the size of the lips and feet to such a degree that a visual change is accomplished, it is possible they will have become so large that they may subordinate the body to the extent it no longer functions as the body of the vessel.

Each of the forty-five pots used in this study is a unique entity, displaying characteristics that are distinctly its own. This distinction is accomplished because there are expressive characteristics peculiar to each type of lip and foot used in the study. The three body types obviously affect total form and because no one pot employs the same relationship of lip, body or foot, forty-five seperate vessels can exist. It may be possible to consider each type of lip and foot as "embellishment," subordinate to the vessel, yet giving that vessel its own personality.

While there seems to be no formula by which a mechanical placing of an assortment of "pot-parts" together may achieve a desired visual effect, it does seem evident that a large measure of variety that relates to the expressive character of the terminal portions of pottery vessels is possible from a very few simple shapes.

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APPENDIX

GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF VESSELS USED IN STUDY