

Materials and Process, Week 5- Clay

After the last few weeks of trying out unusual materials and asserting different physical and thought processes on them we are returning to a much more traditional material- clay.

In the state in which we will be using it, it is quite wet and malleable, when left uncovered this will go hard and turn solid. But it will still be changeable. A dried out piece of clay can easily be made malleable again by applying water to it and allowing it to soak in.

When it is fired (heated up at a very high temperature) chemical reactions occur which cause the clay form to become a permanent and stronger material and in the case of stoneware waterproof too.

Because of these properties clay has been used over 1000s of years since prehistoric man to make decorative and utilitarian items.

The earliest known clay items are Gravettian figurines like the one below, found in the Czech Republic. They have been dated to between 29,000 and 25,000 BC. These have been found all across Europe and are figurines of women portrayed with similar physical attributes. An umbrella term of Venus Figurines is applied to them.



The oldest known vessels to have been found are dated to around 12000 BC. They were made by the Incipient Jomon people of Japan. They used sticks and rope to decorate the vessels. It is thought that vessels appeared so much longer after figurines because this is when people started to create settlements and develop agriculture, instead of being nomadic hunter-gatherers. Staying in one place allowed them to try different techniques and store what they made.



A vessel of the Incipient Jōmon people of Japan dated to 12000 BC

Clay also formed the BlackBerry of ancient times. The fact that it can be altered, left to dry and then reworked/recycled meant that it could be used to write on. These items, clay tablets, could also be fired meaning they were permanent, strong and water resistant and could be used to record information and stories. Clay tablets date back to 5000 BC and there have been many fired (ie. permanent) versions found in the Middle East.

From 29,000 BC to the present day, that's 31000 years, the use of clay has been central to civilisation and how we live our lives, as civilisation develops so does the use of clay.

Your introduction to clay is going to be the making of geometric vessels.

Brief:

Geometric clay vessels

You are required to make a series of 3 geometric vessels, which exhibit a simple change throughout. This can be the size, or a slight change in the shape. Apart from this one simple change, your vessels should be as alike as you can make them.

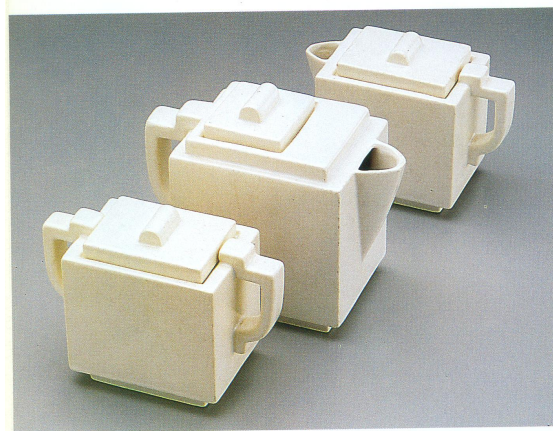
By geometric we mean your object should be composed predominantly of simple forms, points, lines, curves, surfaces and shapes such as circles, rectangles, triangles, etc.

The technique you should use is to create your shape and hollow it out. The hollowing out serves 2 purposes- it allows you to create vessels and it will also prevent your items from exploding when they are fired, as that is what would happen to a solid block of clay.

The finished result should be a visually aesthetic well designed, well planned, well finished series of 3 geometric vessels which all exhibit a deliberate difference.

This project will require you to make deliberate decisions with the material and will test your making abilities.

As reference and to help you think geometrically I have attached some Art Deco examples..



Top: Eva Snicker, late 1920s

Above: 'Thea' service, GME Bellefroid, De Sphinx; 1935

The movement took place between the two World Wars and was well known for using geometric shapes. Art Deco design manifested itself in the form of decorative Futurism, Cubism and Modernism. They had a number of main influences, which fed the style. They were influenced by the new machine age and the developing technologies of the time. They also took inspiration from what is referred to as the 'primitive arts' of the Greeks, Aztecs and Ancient Egyptians.

The aim of Art Deco ceramics was to produce objects of high quality material and aesthetics so that the pottery of the everyday could be used as a vehicle for the communication of modern taste.



Clarice Cliff, shape 515 bowl

References:

- Italian Ceramics 1900 - 1950**, by Valerio Terraroli, 2007
- Ten Thousand Years of Pottery**, Emmanuel Cooper; 2000
- Clarice Cliff: The Art of Bizarre**; Leonard Griffin; 2001
- Art Deco and Modernist Ceramics**; Karen McCready; 1996