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ART/ARTH 260: Ceramics Traditions in Umbria and Central Italy

Course Syllabus

Summer Session 2019

Instructor: Philippa Stannard, MFA

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

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Course Type: Course with Service Learning

Lab Fee: TBA

Course Description

This is a beginning-level ceramics course that will introduce students to the technical and conceptual sensibilities inherent in clay. Students will learn about the ceramic traditions in Italy and Umbria as a springboard for learning various hand-building techniques, including coil, slab, and pinch methods, as well as the glazing and firing processes. These include learning about prehistoric pottery in central Italy, Etruscan figurative work, the Maiolica Method from Deruta as well as the classic terracotta and black slip glazed urns that are very popular and often associated with the Mediterranean. The class will explore first-hand the ceramics of the Umbria region by taking trips to archaeological museums, visiting local ceramics studios, and viewing work made by local ceramicists that use the Maiolica method.

As a service learning component for the course, students will be working with Orto Sole, a social cooperative that promotes social inclusion through community gardening. The class will be helping them beautify their outdoor spaces by making decorative tiles that can be used to indicate and promote their activities. Please see the Syllabus Appendix for more details.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- learn about the history and traditions of ceramics in Italy and Umbria;
- have a basic understanding of the properties inherent in clay, firing, and glazing;
- increase their proficiency in different hand-building techniques such as pinch, slab, and coil; and
- gain an appreciation and greater understanding of a ceramic form and the aesthetics of three-dimensional objects.

Course Materials

Handouts will be distributed in class by the instructor.

Supplies

All clay, glazes, and firing costs, as well as museum visits are included in the lab fee.

Assessment

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Ceramic Assignments (3)	75% (25% each)
Quizzes on Readings and Class Participation	10%
Service Learning Project	15%

Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Course Requirements

Grades are based on class attendance, class participation, quizzes, the quality and punctuality of turning in written and ceramic assignments, and overall improvement. Assignments are due on the assigned date. For every class that an assignment is late, the assignment grade will drop by one letter grade, unless the student has a written note from a doctor.

Ceramic Assignments (3) (75%)

Students are requested to finish all assignments given in the assigned time. The class will regularly make work that requires drying time between various stages (such as waiting for a pot to be “leather-hard” before applying a handle). This means coming into the studio outside of class to cover or uncover work to control drying and finish work begun earlier. Students might even want to consider taking their work home if they will not be coming to the studio for a few days. Students’ success in developing skills will be directly proportionate to the time spent on their work outside of scheduled class times.

Students will have three ceramic assignments due during the semester. Each assignment is worth 28% of their grade and will be graded three times. Work will be evaluated in individual and group critiques throughout the semester. Grading will be based on the *quality* of work achieved through student productivity, specifically:

- *Level of Challenge:* How far did they go beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment to produce more numerous and challenging pieces? How thoroughly did they explore the required techniques?
Note: Quantity alone will not raise student grade unless used pieces help to arrive at a higher quality, such as to work through ideas or improve handling of materials.
- *Concept/Aesthetics:* How original and personal is their solution? How effectively did they use principles of design to communicate their concept? How far did they reach beyond the obvious?
- *Craftsmanship:* Is their construction sound? Did they take time to finish and resolve surfaces, joints, edges, and other details in an appropriate manner for their design?

1st Grading

LEATHER-HARD/CONSTRUCTION – 70% - 90% of each assignment (depending on the assignment)

On the assignment due date, students will be graded based on the quality, time spent, level of challenge, concept/aesthetics, and craftsmanship of their work. They should be at the proper drying stage: LEATHER-HARD. This way, changes can be made if needed without starting again from scratch. Once work is at the bone-dry stage, additions and corrections are almost impossible to do well.

2nd Grading

BISQUE – 5% - 15% of each assignment (depending on the assignment)

Pieces will be graded again based on how well they fired. Did they dry properly (i.e., slowly and evenly to avoid cracks)? Did they crack during firing? How sound was your construction?

3rd Grading

GLAZED/FINAL PRODUCT – 5% - 15% of each assignment (depending on the assignment)

Students will glaze or decorate their work using different techniques, such as slip painting, Maiolica painting, waxing, etc. They will be graded on their piece as a finished product. Did they apply the glaze evenly? How much time and effort did they put into painting and/or finishing their work?

Assignment 1: Pinch Technique – Prehistoric Ceramics in Central Italy

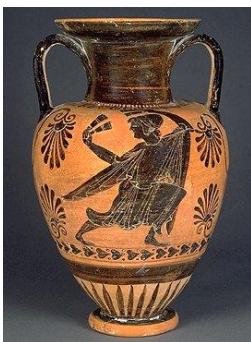


- One beaker form, one bowl form using the pinch technique. Pinch, squeeze, turn. Pinch, squeeze, turn...
- Dry the pots enough to hold their shape, scrape, and smooth surface with wooden ribs to even out any bumps. Smooth surface with hands, burnish, and finally, rub very fine slip lightly onto the pots to create as smooth as possible of a surface.
- When the slip is no longer shiny or tacky to the touch, begin to decorate the surface of pots with 'prehistoric' tools... shells, bones, combs, string bow stones, etc.

The earliest Neolithic remains found in Umbria near Lake Trasimeno date back to 6000 B.C. Pottery production came into being as these primitive people settled and started growing their own food and building structures to live in. The pots with rounded bottoms are generally the earliest forms of prehistoric pottery, as the round bottom could stand up easily on most uneven ground or stones. Flat bottomed pottery is usually an indication of later, more evolved living conditions where they would have had flat surfaces on which to place pots. These pots had functional purposes, mainly for food and drink, and holding the remains of cremations. They were decorated using instruments at hand: bits of flint (triangular indents), combs (dotted lines), bones, shells, and stones.

The class will visit the Archaeological Museum in Corso Cavour to see some excellent examples of these pots found near Lake Trasimeno and other nearby parts of Umbria.

Assignment 2: Sculptural Coil Technique – Black Figure Vase



- One vase, using the coil technique. The vase should have a handle(s) and a foot.
- Burnish vase when leather-hard.
- Design motif and decoration, paint with colored slips while leather hard (not bone-dry).

Etruscan vase painting was produced from the 7th - 4th centuries B.C. It was strongly influenced by Greek vase painting.

Make the base of vase by making a spiral from one coil, pressing the sides of the coils closely together and smoothing inside and out to make a smooth base of uniform thickness. Begin building up the vertical walls of the pot by adding one coil at a time, carefully joining each coil to the one below it by smoothing with thumb. Coils should

become invisible as sides are built smoothly and uniformly. If coils are not joined carefully, they will separate as the clay dries and the pot will fall into a series of clay circles. Forms will be burnished when leather-hard, then painted using slip glazes to create color contrast between the terracotta and the different slips that are applied to the surface of the piece. The vases may be waxed after the bisque firing or glazed with a thin layer of transparent

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glaze and fired a second time.

Assignment 3: Maiolica Technique – Inspired by Deruta



- *One plate, one tile*
- *We will glaze these works using Maiolica method.*

Deruta began producing ceramics around 1300 and is located about 9 miles south of Perugia. Deruta continues to be world famous for their production of ceramics using the Maiolica technique. Maiolica is a type of ceramic decoration that is painted or applied to the piece. Pouncing is often used. Pouncing is a traditional way to transfer patterns onto the unfired white glaze. Charcoal or graphite is rubbed through a series of small holes punched in a paper pattern to transfer the design to an item to be decorated.

Quizzes on Readings and Class Participation (10%)

Students will be given quizzes on their readings and on what they have learned in class. Class participation refers to active participation during class time. This includes studio time, critiques, discussion of readings, keeping the studio clean, clay recycle, help during firing, and any other activity during class time.

Service Learning Project (15%)

The class will be working with Orto Sole, a social cooperative that promotes social inclusion through community gardening. The class will be helping them beautify their outdoor spaces by making decorative tiles that can be used to indicate and promote their activities. Students will be graded on their participation and quality of the Community Engagement Presentation at the end of the semester during Special Academic Events Week.

Additional Course Information

Clean up

Students are **REQUIRED** to clean and pick up after themselves. This includes cleaning up their work space, tools, etc. Any clay on the floor should be wiped or swept up. Spilled glazes need to be wiped up, and the lids should be put back on the containers. Store all artwork in designated areas. Leave it cleaner than it was found!

Stages of wet clay

Greenware – wet, leather-hard, and bone-dry

Bisque – fired in the kiln for the first time

Glaze – fired for the second time with a glaze or glass like coating on the surface

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed one “free” absence during the summer semester, which they do not need to justify. Each additional absence, unless it is for a very serious reason, will lower students’ final grade by one grade level (e.g., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B). It also the policy of the Institute that any student who has three or more absences automatically fails the class.

If students miss a class, it is their responsibility to find out what they missed or what work they must catch up on from the teacher or from colleagues.

Absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students’ final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without

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acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

NOTE: This is a preliminary schedule that is subject to change.

WEEK 1

Introductions.

Clay: Origins, Stages, Processes/Prehistoric Pottery/ Archeological Museum

- Give everyone a piece of clay
- Introduction in pairs
- Create a likeness of your partner in clay
- Introduce partner (along with your figurine of them)
- Throwing name game
- Go over syllabus
- Definition of ceramics: A brief introduction
- General information on materials being used in the studio, the kiln, studio rules, common terminology, safety issues, etc.
- Examples of different stages of clay: wet, leather-hard, bone-dry
- Walk to Archeological Museum on Corso Cavour to see prehistoric tools and pottery from the surrounding area
- Prehistoric pottery: Before the wheel. Analyze function and construction of pieces
- Discussion
- Bring sketch book or pad and paper to draw ideas for your pinch pot form and decoration

To do before next class:

- Bring drawings of the shape/form/decoration for your pinch pot.
- Research an artist/technique/style/period that you might be interested in doing your report on.

Readings

Reading on Cardium pottery/impressed ware

Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots: Construction/Refining Shape and Surface

- Name game
- Assign tools and shelf space
- Correct studio use
- Demo: Preparing clay for work: wedging and kneading
- Demo: Construction of pinch pots, bowl vs. beaker
- Problem solving
- Demo: Smoothing the surface with wooden rib and fingers
- Terra Decantata – difference between terra decantata and Slip. What function does it have? When is it appropriate?
- Demo: Covering surface of pinch pot with terra decantata
- Work on Assignment 1
- Cover work appropriately
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Assignment 1: Pinch pots surface smoothed with wooden rib and fingers, covered with terra decantata. Should be at leather-hard state by next class. Cover work appropriately.
- Bring drawing or photograph of design you would like to use to decorate your pots.

WEEK 2

Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots: Decorative Techniques/Grading

- Introduction to prehistoric tools used to decorate pottery
- Demo: Shining the surface with a soft cloth
- Decorate pinch pots
- Self-Critique/Group Critique
- Grading of Assignment 1: Prehistoric inspired pinch pots (2) – one bowl and one beaker pot. They should be between leather-hard and bone-dry, painted with slip, and decorated using the “prehistoric tools”
- Place finished work on the shelf to be fired
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Read about Greek and Etruscan vase forms, black/red figure painting.
- Identify a vase form that you would like to make and bring a sketch of your desired vase form to next class.
- Be prepared to discuss the choice and function of your vase shape and the accompanying decorative motif and its meaning.

Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Construction

- Discussion and critique of shape/form of vase in relation to function and decorative motif
- Demo: Making a guide for desired vase shape
- Demo: Coil technique
- Demo: Using guide to make your vase
- Demo: Smoothing coils
- Demo: Creating shapes that increase and decrease in circumference
- Discussion: Strength of different clay states - wet, partially leather-hard, leather-hard, partially bone-dry, bone-dry - and how they can help us or make it very difficult/impossible to construct of our vases.
- Construction of vase
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Draw/print out pattern/design to be painted on your vase. It should be the right size to fit on your vase appropriately

WEEK 3

Refining the Etruscan Vase and Coil Technique Making and Attaching Handles, Feet, and other Decorative Elements, Burnishing and Painting Vases with Colored Slips

- Evaluation base of vase
- Demo: Height and the coil technique
- Demo: Creating shapes that increase and decrease in circumference
- Paddling and smoothing vase surface
- Demo: Making handles, feet, and other decorative elements
- Demo: When and how to attach handles, feet, and other decorative elements
- Working on vases
- Your vases should be completed with handles, feet, and other decorative elements by the end of class
- Demo and discussion: Burnishing vase when dry

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- Evaluate drawing/pattern/design in relation to your vase
- Demo: Transferring drawing/pattern/design to your vase
- Slips – what are they? How do we use them?
- Demo: Greek/Etruscan vase painting techniques
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Finish Etruscan vase.
- Bring a design/pattern that you would like to paint onto a plate using the maiolica method
It should be printed on a sheet of paper (you can use the copy machine next to the library).

Assignment 2: Etruscan Vase Due/Introduction to Maiolica Method

- Self-Critique/Group Critique
- Grading
- Introduction to Assignment 3 and Maiolica Method
- Demo: glazing and painting tiles for Orto Sole
- Demo: Making a stencil for pouncing
- Glazing: Tile and Plate
- Clean up

WEEK 4

Maiolica Method; Glazing, Pouncing and Painting Designs

- Discussion and evaluation of stencils
- Glazing tiles/plates
- Pouncing
- Painting decorative motifs on plates
- Glazing and Painting plates for Assignment 3

To do before next class:

- Read about the Maiolica method.
- Complete stencils for plates, start same process on plate, transfer design by pouncing and begin to paint the decoration on your plate. Your plates and tiles must be finished and ready to take to be fired half way through next class.
- All work must be dried completely before next class, we will be taking it to the kiln to be fired.

WEEK 5

Evaluation of Fired Work

- Pick up fired work from ceramics studio in Via dei Priori
- Discussion and evaluation of work
- Wax Etruscan coil vases
- Grade of all completed work

Community Engagement Activities and Preparation for Art Show

Art Show

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Bibliography

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