

## ***Simply Formal and Past Forms***

### **Education Information**

ASU Museum of Anthropology

April-May 2009

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## **Contemporary and Archaeological Ceramics**

What is a ceramic? What is the difference between contemporary and archaeological ceramics? A ceramic is a piece of clay mixed with temper material that has been molded into the desired form, allowed to dry and 'fired' (cooked) to the final product. In contemporary ceramics, artists fire a ceramic twice, applying a glaze and other decoration between the firings. Archaeological ceramics primarily differ from contemporary ceramics in the kinds of temper used and the absence of glazes in archaeological ceramics.

Humans have fired clay to make ceramics for thousands of years. Ceramics can take many forms, the most recognizable of which is a pot. This is a vessel or container form that has been used for storage and cooking since pre-historic times. Other ceramic forms include figurines, flatware (such as plates), pitchers, and even parts in modern machines. Once the firing process is complete, ceramics are very hard and durable. Different types of clay create ceramics with varying characteristics and strength. Archaeologists can sometimes use the type of clay to identify where a ceramic came from, although sometimes clay was an item involved in ancient trade routes and could end up in pottery hundreds of miles from where it was dug up. Contemporary artists much of the time import the kind of clay they wish to use rather than utilizing the type of clay naturally in their area.

Today, ceramics are valued for their use as functional items and as art pieces. Technical advancements in firing techniques and materials available for tempers and glazes allow artists to use clay much like a painter uses paint on a canvas, if they were able to make their own canvas. The ceramic terms below are an overview of specific ceramic terms used in the exhibition. Please see the websites that follow for more information and resources on ceramics.

## **Helpful Ceramic Terms**

**Clay.** A natural, fine-grained earthlike material, the product of the geological weathering or aging of the surface of the earth that is used as the main element in ceramics.

**Coiling.** A method of hand-building pottery in which the clay is rolled out into long, narrow ropes of clay that are placed one on top of another and joined to build up the form. Either the coils are left visible or the joints are smoothed over.

**Earthenware.** A common type of clay, less strong than stoneware that is porous after firing. Generally requires a glaze to become watertight. It is one of the oldest materials used in ceramics.

**Glaze.** A liquid suspension of finely ground minerals that is applied to pottery and fired to form a glassy surface that seals the clay and decorates the piece.

**Kaolin:** pure clay, also known as china clay. It is used in glaze and porcelain.

**Kiln.** A furnace for firing clay. Studio kilns can fire up to 2500 degrees Fahrenheit.

**Porcelain.** A hard clay with glass-like characteristics, generally fired at high temperatures. In some cases, when thin, the clay will be translucent. The strongest of all clay bodies

**Salt glaze.** A glaze surface that forms on pots by introducing rock salt into the kiln at a high temperature. The salt volatilizes and combines with the silica in the clay to form sodium silicate.

**Slip.** A clay in liquid suspension used decoratively or as a binding agent.

**Stoneware.** High-firing, dense, and durable clay type. Closer to porcelain than earthenware, it depends upon its impurities for its color and texture.

**Temper.** A material mixed with the clay to reduce shrinkage during drying and firing and to add texture or color.

**Throwing.** The act of forming clay on the potter's wheel.

## Websites

### Teacher Resource Sites

<http://www.goshen.edu/~marvinpb/arted/clay-semblage.html>

This site is a resource for teachers with younger children learning to work with clay. It includes possible techniques and a demo video for teaching.

[www.teachpottery.net](http://www.teachpottery.net)

This site is a resource for teachers. It is an introductory site for pottery construction in a studio. It provides tutorials/units on different construction methods and includes online

activities, assignments, instructions, and even sample teacher lesson plans. Units 1-3 is free, but full site access can be purchased. Also includes downloadable documents/handouts/powerpoints for teachers to use.

<http://ceramics.sdsu.edu/articles/classmaterials.html>

This is a resource for teachers with downloadable class materials ranging from information on glazes and types of clay to the chemistry of clay and techniques. It contains links to all different kinds of ceramic related information on the main site:  
<http://ceramics.sdsu.edu/main.html#anchor29619877>

### **Sites for Elementary and Middle School**

[http://archaeology.asu.edu/vm/Education/AZpottery/intro\\_frame.html](http://archaeology.asu.edu/vm/Education/AZpottery/intro_frame.html)

This site is hosted by the Archaeological Research Institute at Arizona State University. Information is geared towards elementary school children and includes prehistoric ceramic information. Interactive pages teach children the steps of making pottery, the different kinds of pottery made by ancient tribes in Arizona. Includes a game page with a puzzle, maze, and quiz.

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/arts/pottery/>

This site is geared to elementary students. There is a general one-page intro with a history of the use of pottery. Hyperlinks for cultures mentioned allow students to find out more.

[http://www.clayzee.com/History\\_and\\_Tradition\\_of\\_Pottery\\_and\\_Ceramics/Pottery\\_History/index.html](http://www.clayzee.com/History_and_Tradition_of_Pottery_and_Ceramics/Pottery_History/index.html)

This site lists countries and time periods of pottery styles. This is a great way to find out the history of a region, see photos of examples, and read about particular techniques and styles. Links are to museum pages dedicated to a particular tradition or to some other research page. Pages and information are appropriate for older elementary and middle school students that are able to do a some research or have an idea of what they are looking for.

<http://www.goshen.edu/~marvinpb/throw/cover39.html>

This interactive site has pictures that illustrate all the steps involved in contemporary “throwing” of pottery. The captions are easy to read and appropriate for elementary school and older.

<http://www.studiopotter.org/articles/art0019.htm>

This page explains the chemistry behind clay and its properties as a substance. Content is more appropriate for middle school or older.

[http://www.ceramicstoday.com/articles/why\\_throwing.htm](http://www.ceramicstoday.com/articles/why_throwing.htm)

This one page article outlines and defines terms used in pottery and where they came from. Information is included from different cultures, appropriate for middle school or older

## High School, College and Adult Sites

<http://www.ceramicartsdaily.org/>

This is the site for the magazine of same name. Links to articles deal mostly with contemporary styles and artists. There is an extensive glossary on the site that outlines pottery terms. The “browse topics” tab is helpful in that it provides links to methods and techniques used in modern pottery, as well as the different ways that pottery is being created and used today. This site is most appropriate for interested adults and high school students.

<http://matse1.mse.uiuc.edu/ceramics/ceramics.html>

This site contains modules for high school and college students. Including the introduction of ceramic concepts as a material science. It also includes scientific principles, a glossary, historical timeline, lab activity suggestions, videos, and downloadable materials (quiz).

## Sites With More Links

<http://www.noteaccess.com/MATERIALS/Ceramics/Ceramics.htm>

This site lists ceramic related links.

[http://www.clayzee.com/History\\_and\\_Tradition\\_of\\_Pottery\\_and\\_Ceramics/index.html](http://www.clayzee.com/History_and_Tradition_of_Pottery_and_Ceramics/index.html)

This site lists links relating to history, archaeology, or museums that relate to pottery. A related page of this site is below.

<http://www.ceramicstoday.com/>

This site features articles concerning contemporary artists and styles, as well as cultural/historical pages. This is useful for someone who wants to browse different topics related to pottery and browse different art styles.