

1971

# A Project in Ceramics

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H738  
REY

SCULPTURE

A PROJECT IN CERAMICS

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In fulfillment for the course

H492

Honors Special Studies

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Presented to

Mr. Phares Raybon

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by

Sherry Gail Reynolds

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## A Project in Ceramics

The objective of this study was to experiment in a new media of art. The probable success or failure of the project was equal from the start, never having worked in the media of clay sculpture. It was a journey of exploration, mistakes, discovery, but most of all self-satisfaction. In art, it isn't entirely necessary to be able to paint like da Vinci. The only requirements are to be willing to relax and let yourself show through in the work--painting, drawing, sculpting--. The finished product may not even be recognizable. . .but it is yours.

Through art, I have learned patience. Oils require time to dry, and, as we shall see, clay takes time to dry and fire and fire. . .

In choosing the media to be used, I wanted a 3-D canvas. . .a painting that people could not only look at, but feel. Oils and even acrylic seemed impractical because of their drying time and fragility. Sculpting didn't appeal to me, so I combined the two and came up with a canvas of clay to be carved out then painted with ceramic glaze. I would have a 3-D canvas with

the advantage of clay's sturdiness.

The first step in my "exploration" was to select the type of clay to be used. I chose Arkansas White Clay which was easy to work with, slow in drying up, and readily available. The clay was purchased in Hot Springs from the pottery plant, in a ten pound length. The clay was stored in wet newspaper and towels until I was ready to roll it into the shape I desired. I chose to use 8" by 10" blocks or tablets mainly for convenience sake, this size being the largest that would fit the kiln.

The rolling was first started by slicing the clay length into half and then rolling and hammering the clay into shape between wooden frames tacked on a work table. The clay needed to be smooth and hard-packed. This process took around 30 minutes.

After the clay was rolled, it had to dry for at least four days before it could be lifted and removed from the frames. During this time it was necessary that it not be touched.

After one tablet dried, the other half of the clay was rolled to make a second 8" by 10" tablet.

The dried tablets were very fragile and easily chipped. Great care had to be taken in transporting

the tablets. They had to be carried on a piece of wood for support.

The tablets were to be carved using linoleum cutting tools. These sets consist of six tools, which have to be used with extreme care so as not to chip the clay. A wrong cut creates the danger of breaking a long section of clay and thus destroying the design.

A preliminary design was sketched on paper then on the clay in soft lead pencil.

By using the smallest tool, the design was outlined then using the larger tools, it was gradually cut either out or in.

This cutting process is one of the messiest, dustiest, most nerve-racking jobs ever. Every few strokes with the tools requires removal of dust. The whole process of cutting required about ten hours of slow work per tablet. Once started, the design cannot be changed but slightly.

After completing the cutting process the tablet must be fired in the kiln for 24 hours, up to a temperature of 1830°. The actual heating time is 5 hours, but the kiln must be allowed to cool to room temperature before the tablet can be removed.

After this first firing, the tablet is ready for glazing. This glaze must be applied carefully--not stroked on as in painting, but dabbed on. This glaze melts together when heated. One disadvantage of the glaze is that it has no color or almost a dull gray color in the liquid form. There is really no guarantee of the final color. Clay can be reglazed and refired until the desired color is achieved. After all glazing is finished, the clay is again placed in the kiln to be fired for another 24 hours, at 1830° temperature.

After these firings, the clay is very hard and almost unbreakable. The resulting object is something that will last and be admired for many years to come.