

# Working with Clay Fall 2022

Prepared by Joe Germano

Clay is a very malleable and forgiving medium that is used to create various types of three dimensional art or ceramic pieces. It starts in a wet state which is then compressed by a clay roller, rolling pin or by hand. Pieces may be made from Slabs, coils or just lumps of clay, pressed into molds (inside or outside), or just free-formed into an object you wish to make. The slab should be ribbed before using to remove any air bubbles. Previously used clay bits and pieces need to be wedged before using to compress the clay and remove air.

## Texture

Texture can be applied many ways: using clay tools, kitchen tools (forks, spoons), lace, pieces of wood or metal, stamps, string, chains, etc. Use your imagination. This gives your pieces some life and interest.

## Clay States

Wet- as it is cut/sliced or pinched from the clay block ready to use.

Leather-hard – partially dried and firmed up some. Ideal for carving or sculpting. Best for detail work and texturing. Clay can be dried more quickly by using a hair dryer (if needed) for some projects.

Bone Dry – Must be completely dried before glazing or firing. Pieces are very fragile at this state. Pieces cannot contain any moisture before being fired or they can explode or break apart in the kiln due to the build-up of steam pressure inside the piece being fired. All hollow pieces must have a hole in them for the same reason.

Bisque – Also known as first firing. This is done at 1500 to 1700 degrees F. After firing, Bisqueware is ready to be glazed or decorated. Glaze painting has to be done prior to the first firing, provided that the piece is totally dry. Each coat of glaze must be allowed to dry thoroughly before applying the next coat.

NOTE: Solid pieces must be hollowed out to allow it to dry properly inside and out.

Enclosed hollow pieces must have one or two holes in them to allow gases to escape during firing.

Hollow pieces that are stuffed with newspaper also must have holes in them to allow the smoke to escape.

## Slip

Slip is made from clay, water and some white vinegar (which is added to reduce drying time and prevent mold). Slip is used for many things:

- Adding pieces of clay (a wing, fins, arms, legs or coil) to an object.
- Repairing thin areas or breaks while the clay still has some moisture content.
- Adding texture, or artistic elements to a piece, or drawing on clay.

**Note.** Slip should be used only when the clay object has some moisture. If the clay piece is too dry, the slip will dry at a different rate than the rest of the piece and eventually separate. When using slip make sure it is one that matches the type of clay you are using. We will be using Whitestone, Orangestone and Phoenix clay.

When adding slip to attach a piece of clay to an object, be sure to scratch the area where it is to be attached before applying the slip. This is called “knitting”, it will help it adhere and become a part of the piece.

## Finishing a Piece

Prior to the bisque firing, there are many ways to finish a piece.

- Leave it as is, in its natural Bisque state (usually white when using white clay or rust color if red).
- Paint with a Clear Glaze, this will leave a glossy white/red finish, depending on color of clay.
- Paint with Acrylic paints after firing. This should only be done after applying a sealer. There are several things that can be used as sealers: premixed sealers, a mixture of white glue and water, Acrylic Matte Medium, or commercial Art sprays or Fixatives. Once a piece has been painted, I often spray on a clear Matte or Gloss finish Exterior Acrylic spray. It helps protect those items you want to place outdoors and helps indoor items stay cleaner.
- Painted with Underglazes (this is a mixture of Slip and pigment which we purchase). The results are true colors that can be mixed like Acrylics to create shades/variations in color. These must then be fired in a kiln at low temperatures, same as bisque. They can also be glazed over with a clear glaze before firing. If you desire a glossier finish, a clear glaze can be painted over Underglazes once they are dried. The result is a glossy finish like china. I seldom use it for animals as it takes away the texture of the fur or feathers. It's very good to use for vases, cups, bowls, etc.
- Stain – We also have some masonry stain. Goes on like paint. Can be diluted with water after applying to give a shadow effect or a clear glaze can be applied over it.
- Note: all pieces should contain the school's initials (**OLLI**) scratched on it so that the finished piece can be identified as ours. You should also have your name or initials on it as well.
- Note 2: We've organized the glazes to better keep track of them. There is a book that shows you the box where the glaze is located. Return the glaze to the correct box. If a glaze is almost empty, let us know so we can purchase more.

## Clean-up

- When you're finished with your tools, please wash them off and wipe with a paper towel. Put them back in the tool jars on the table.
- When you're finished with a glaze, wipe off the rim with a damp sponge or towel before putting it back in the box.

**NOTE:** Materials fee is \$30.00. This is used for firing fees, purchasing clay, Glazes and other materials.