

Diana Kersey—Artistic Process

Before I begin creating my vessels I first visualize the form and surface design. Then I prepare the coarse earthenware clay by wedging it. This action “wakes up” the clay and makes it easier to shape on the potter's wheel. The rhythm of wedging also ritualizes the process and allows me to mentally prepare to work.

Next the clay is centered on the potter's wheel with a coning up and down motion. Once the clay is centered I open the mound by forcing my hand down the center. Then the walls are pulled up and shaped, allowing the clay to become taller and thinner with each pull. During this process I am paying careful attention to the diameter of the rim versus the height and shape of the form, balancing the proportions until they become harmonious. Attention is then paid to the rim and foot of the vessel. Sometimes this means refining the shape, and sometimes it means making it more loose or energetic, depending on the shape and feel of the body of the pot. The pot is then textured with a metal serrated rib, (this texture plays an important role in the attachment of sprigs and provides for a contrasting background field for the translucent glaze) cut off the wheel, and set aside to dry until it reaches the leather hard stage.

At the leather hard stage final evaluation of the form is considered and appropriate sprigs and draw tools are laid out. I begin the design of the pot by adding coils of clay to the surface in a symmetrical pattern. I then wet my draw tools, which are thin sheets of stiff plastic with “u” shapes cut into the edges, and drag the tools over the surface of the pot: making the coils conform to the shape of the draw tool. This creates a consistent raised line decoration and is the foundation of all the design work on the vessel. Next, sprigs are applied to the pot by loading small plaster molds with soft clay and firmly pressing the molds against the side of the pot. I make my sprig molds in advance and currently have over 75 different designs in use. Ideas for sprigs come from hikes in nature, books, historical design references, birds that frequent my yard, and sometimes suggestions from friends and collectors. Design work continues on the vessel until the design becomes unified. This is my favorite and intellectually most challenging part of the process because it involves constantly making decisions and reevaluating the decisions after each element of design is added. It is through this process that creativity and inventiveness are rewarded. I learn something new with each pot I produce. Finally, handles are attached if visually necessary and the pot is left to dry slowly.

Once the pot is dry I smooth off any extremely rough edges on the pot and paint some areas of the pot with colored underglazes and slips. The pots are then loaded into my kiln and fired in oxidation to a temperature around 1900 degrees Fahrenheit. This firing

is called a bisque and permanently hardens the clay.

After the bisque the pots are carefully inspected and then dipped into a thick mixture of alkaline glaze (Alkali is the opposite of acid. It is a non-coloring metal oxide that reacts with acids in the presence of heat to produce glass). This glaze fires to a beautiful translucent, glossy glass. I specifically developed this glaze to emphasize the texture and sprig designs on the vessels. The only colorants in the glaze are copper oxide for the turquoise, iron oxide for the yellow, a mixture of iron oxide and copper oxide for the green, and manganese oxide for the purple/brown. I choose to work in the earthenware temperature range and use only earth oxides because I want to pay homage to all the folk pottery from around the world that I profoundly admire and feel a deep sense of kinship. Earthenware pottery and these four colors: blue, yellow, green and purple/brown seem to be the most plentiful and consistently used colors throughout ceramic's 10,000 year history.

When all the pots are glazed, they are once again loaded into the kiln and fired to over 1940 degrees Fahrenheit. When the kiln is cooled I unload the pots and examine them, take notes about what to try next, and prepare to send them off into the world.

I want my pots to be:

joyful

process evident

inventive

wabi-sabi

casually symmetrical

incomplete references to folk pottery from around the world

I hope to walk the line between technical competency, and yet still allow the material and process to be the guiding force in the making of the vessels. I hope to never attempt to impose total control and dominance over the materials, but to consistently give them voice.

beautiful in their imperfection