Ceramic Art at Ohio State University

By The Department of Fine Arts, Ohio State University

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Introduction

In any consideration of the development of ceramic education in America, the names of two outstanding men immediately present themselves: Edward Otton, Jr., and Charles Fergus Blins. In 1884, Edward Otton, Jr., established the Ceramic Engineering Department at Ohio State University, the first venture in ceramic education in this country and the first in the world having collegiate degree courses of study.

Ceramic Art Training in New York

In 1909 Charles F. Blins was made the Director of the New York State School of Clay Working and Ceramics at Alfred University. In addition to specialization in engineering, ceramic art courses were offered at Alfred to students who wished to major in the design and craftsmanship of actual ware making. Engineers and craftsmen were trained side by side with mutual benefit; their curricula differing rather widely in emphasis placed on some subjects but all acquiring certain ceramic fundamentals. This was a studied and just combination of the ceramic craft schools of Europe and the strictly ceramic technology school as established by Professor Otton at Ohio State University.

That the combination of ceramic technology and ceramic art as established by Dr. Blins at Alfred was sound in principle and practice is shown by the great number of men and women of recognized achievement trained at Alfred. Some of the finest makers and the most noteworthy ceramic art teachers in America are those whose ideas were modeled and guided by Dr. Blins, as were some of our most prominent ceramic engineers.

Ceramic Training in Ohio

At Ohio State University specialized training in ceramic product making was not included in the original program, nor is it offered today as part of the engineering curriculum. Those in charge of the Department of Ceramic Engineering believe now, as then, that four years is all too short a time in which to present either engineering fundamentals or a sound training in the art and skill of product making.

Producers of all sorts of merchandise in which form, finish, and decoration are essential qualities have realized that technical and engineering progress alone will not enable them to keep the pace in a highly competitive market. Makers of clay, glass, and enamelled metal ware also realize this. Artists who know ceramic materials and processes, who can conceive attractive products, and who can design and compound ware to meet particular requirements are much needed.

Degree Courses in Ceramic Art

To train able designers to meet the requirements of the ceramic industries, a new ceramic educational venture was initiated at Ohio State University in 1907, although laboratory work did not start until January, 1920.

In 1923 Ross C. Purdy, General Secretary of the American Ceramic Society, began the campaign to organize an Ohio Ceramic Industries Association. He proposed a program of research and education at Ohio State University, featuring the establishment of laboratories and degree courses in ceramic art as one of the most important items. Even before the Ohio Ceramic Industries Association was formally organized, Mr. Purdy had indicated the support of ceramic industrialists and university officials for a ceramic art department. With George W. Rightmire, President of Ohio State University, George Arps, Dean of the College of Education, and James R. Hopkins, Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts, urging and guiding, the faculty committee finally submitted a plan which was approved by the general faculty and Trustees of the University. When the Ohio Ceramic
Industries Association was organized, the Division of Ceramic Art in the Department of Fine Arts was given unexampled and vigorous support.

Laboratories and workshops were completely equipped for practical work in the important clayware production processes. Courses of study were planned to give students a basic foundation in design, background, art history, English, and chemistry, together with fundamental courses in ceramic technology and extensive laboratory work in the actual making of wares, from the composition of bodies, glazes, and colors through the craftsmanship of forming and decorating processes to the finished articles.

An able student, after four years of these activities, will gain a knowledge of and a feeling for his craft which will enable him to think and design in terms of ceramic materials, processes, and fire, and to meet definite requirements and specifications. If he has exceptional talent he can relate his basic knowledge to factory demands and conditions with more speed and efficiency than can a student of equal talent who has received only specialized art training. Where design and decoration as well as special ware qualities are demanded, he can conceive and produce more readily than can a student equipped with training only in ceramic technology.

There seems to be a need for several different types of persons who can profitably use collegiate training in ceramic art. Not all students become first-rate industrial designers. Only the outstanding few can aspire to high rank as creative artists. But other related fields are open to trained, industrious ceramic art workers. Many factories can use glaze, color, and process technicians; small studio plants attract the craftsman whose preference is to produce with his own hands rather than to design for quantity production; the field of merchandising ceramic products can use salesmen and buyers who have a background of training in ceramic art; teachers of elementary ceramics in public and private schools are increasingly in demand.

The Ceramic Art Staff

Arthur Buggs

The control of the department was entrusted to Arthur E. Buggs. As a pupil of Dr. Rook, he was well grounded technically and artistically. The training which he received at Alfred was later supplemented by two year's study at the Art Student's League in New York City. At that time Mr. Buggs conceived the idea of the Marblehead Pottery, which later became well known. He relinquished part of his time at the pottery during the six succeeding winters to teach at the Ethical Culture High School in New York City. In 1925 he became affiliated with Guy Cowan and remained in Cleveland for the three years preceding his appointment at Ohio State University. During his last year with the Cowan Pottery he taught at the Cleveland Art School.

Mr. Buggs presents himself with no display. Humility and kindness are among his chief characteristics. His impartiality, sympathetic understanding, open-mindedness, and patience promote confidence in his students and dispel the self-consciousness which so often is a barrier to the production of creative work. Students respond to his attitude with little adjustment and soon develop the self-confidence which their craft demands. Mr. Buggs is a man of great tolerance and has the patience to learn one's own kind at a time, allowing time for what he has conscientiously acquired to become an unconscious habit of mind and hand. This, through association, he imparts to his students.

Edgar Littlefield

In the fall of 1926, Edgar Littlefield, a graduate ceramic engineer of Ohio State University, was added to the staff. Mr. Littlefield is found the rare combination of a keen mathematical mind and a deep feeling for sensuous form and color. By constant experiment and research he continually adds to his fund of knowledge. And his insatiable curiosity, coupled with an intelligent determination to realize his conception, makes him an excellent guide for students in search of technical information.

Mr. Littlefield's creative work also serves to stimulate the students. The influence of Mr. Littlefield's pottery in the development of student taste is most important. This unusual talent has not gone unrecognized; on two occasions his work has been awarded the first prize in the nationally important Robinson Memorial Ceramic Exhibition, sponsored by The American Ceramic Society.
Ceramic necklace and medallion made by Margaret Steenrod

The Students of Ceramic Art

In the Winter Quarter of 1929 a few students began working in the ceramic art laboratories at Ohio State University. Interest in the department has grown steadily until at present the laboratory space and equipment are inadequate for the demands upon them. The student group is made up of persons who are studying Ceramic Art with several different objectives. Some are enrolled in the regular four-year course and are looking forward to professional careers as designers, craftsmen, technicians, salesmen, or teachers. Others are taking one or several ceramic art courses as electives to supplement their general training in other lines. Many students majoring in Art Education, Practical Arts, or Ceramic Engineering find these courses useful extensions of their general fields of study. Other students elect the courses as additions to general cultural background or as a foundation for future industrial activities. Such a diverse student personnel makes it necessary to use considerable variety and individual consideration in the presentation of the material. As far as he is able to do so, each student is encouraged to work out his own salvation, to get what he wants and needs by taking part in some of observing others of the activities which are constantly going on in an atmosphere of organized industry.

The Ceramic Art Instruction

The basic working plan of the Ceramic Art laboratories has been somewhat like that of the old guild workshops. Instructors are not only helping students with their problems but are producing finished work of their own. Students learn from observation perhaps more than from formal instruction. Interesting experimental developments by instructors or students are open and available to the common fund of growing information. "Sherry," "private glasses," etc., are practically unknown in this community of potters, who seem quite content to share whatever is discovered and thereby avoid many of the petty jealousies which sometimes flourish in such groups.

In general the aims of the department have been these: to expose the student as thoroughly as possible to the processes of ceramics in all its varied phases and endless possibilities; to furnish a well-equipped shop in which he can go as far as he will in the pursuit of knowledge and skill through actual creation of products from the raw materials; to aid him by certain informative courses in the history and technology of ceramics and by fundamental art courses; always to provide help from instructors when needed, but to encourage initiative through independent planning and development of individual problems rather than to carry each student through the same specific routine.

This somewhat informal policy has worked well in many cases and has, as it is expected, failed in others. The opinion is held that only those students should choose ceramics as a career who are intensely interested in it. There is a doubt as to the ultimate success of a student in any specialized field who simply performs a required set of activities with consciousness of efficiency but fails to get enthusiastic about his subject that he wants to do far more than minimum requirements.

It is quite possible that the casual, indifferent student would accomplish more under a definite detailed, specifically prescribed system of things which he must do one after the other. But the student who is thoroughly convinced of the value of his chosen field progresses very well under a less restricted program, and he may develop more initiative, responsibility, and creative imagination than if his tasks were all a part of a set routine. Considerable variations in the programs of individual students is permitted in the effort to give to each the thing most needed and to develop each along the lines of his major abilities. One student with an experimental bent may be encouraged to give him as much attention to glaze and color development work as the average student. Another who seems to have real creative design ability may be allowed to spend only a minimum of time on glaze experiments and to give extra time to special design studies. A potter who needs more experience in modeling may be allowed to learn much of his fundamental ceramics by producing ceramic sculpture, if he can do that with greater enjoyment than he would get from throwing pots on the wheel or jiggering plates.

After all, one can learn how to handle clay and glasses and fire, how to create and combine good forms and colors, how to evaluate true and honest ceramic quality, by instructing several groups in various phases of study and practice all leading, through related though not identical experiences, to about the same total of basic ceramic knowledge and taste. All that a college course in ceramic art can be expected to give to a student is a sound foundation on which to build as later experiences and opportunities come to him. At graduation he is not a finished designer, craftsman, or technician. But if he has acquired a real enthusiasm and respect for his chosen profession, a basic knowledge of materials and processes, a growing skill in drawing, modeling, and design, and at least the beginning of a critical faculty which will help him to choose the best from his own or others' work, he is ready to start.

Many varied ceramic projects are constantly going forward as special studies by individual students or groups or instructors. Experimental work is heartily encouraged. As long as useful knowledge and experience in regard to the behavior of materials seem likely to result, the student is urged to "try it out and see what happens." The accepted and proved types of bodies, glazes, and processes are taught to the student as safe and standard procedures, but exploration away from the beaten track are frequently made, sometimes with results which open interesting possibilities for further work. The feeling that one is exploring, inventing something, is tremendously provocative and exciting, and it is believed that alert-mindedness looking for new things to try in materials, processes, or design ideas is a desirable quality to encourage in a student.

A few developments of the art referred to are outlined briefly: self-glazing bodies, low-fire white bodies transmuted and otherwise: high-fire bodies; sculpture bodies; low-fire underglaze colors, etc., one-fire.
gold, copper rods from SIC, modified slip glazes, tableware from red brick clays, historical research and analysis, and tableware design.

Results

The graduates of the Department are working in many phases of the field. A pottery which produces decorative ware has as its art supervisor one of the graduates. Another former student has developed a small but flourishing pottery of his own and has organized a series of classes in connection with the plant. One of the large glass manufacturers employs a graduate in the design department. A graduate ceramic engineer working in the Ceramic Art Department has perfected photographic relief processes which offer new and promising decorative possibilities in the tableware industry. The research in tableware design, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation was carried out in the Department. Some of the graduates are teachers; others have workshops where they ply their craft. Perhaps one of the most encouraging and gratifying things to those in charge of the Department is that none of the graduates is unemployed.

Department of Ceramic Art, Dept. of Fine Arts
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
Co-sponsored by OSL's Hopkins Hall Gallery and Department of Art.

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Reception: Monday, October 3, 5-7pm

October 3-14, 1994

Attention, Baggs, Bogaty, Fetzet, Litlefield

Clay Archives:
OSU offers entertainment for everyone

By Rebecca L. Skeeles
Lantern Staff Writer

The entertainment opportunities on campus are virtually endless, and Fall Quarter is the prime time for activities.

The Wexner Center for the Arts on campus offers a wide range of exhibits and shows, including major exhibits, videos, films, a book shop and an eating area.

The center will welcome OSU students Sept. 21 with an open house "bash" from 4 to 11 p.m. The event is free and will feature food, live entertainment and prize giveaways. The first 1,000 students through the door will be given a free T-shirt.

All students at Ohio State automatically become student members of the Wexner Center and will receive a Wexner Center Student Membership card with their fee statements.

Students should bring their cards to the center, and

Membership benefits for OSU students include:
  • 50 percent off performance tickets
  • Discount film tickets
  • Free admission to galleries and lectures
  • Special sales in the bookshop
  • Opportunities to meet and work with artists

Darnell Lautt, coordinator of public relations for the Wexner Center, said the center will also have various exhibits and a complete film/video program from the media and visual arts departments.

The center's exhibition program encompasses the full spectrum of artistic inquiry, ranging from painting and sculpture to photography, video and architecture.

The film and video program consists of documentaries, classics, films and works by established and emerging artists of diverse aesthetic, social and political backgrounds.

Film and video screenings are often introduced by the artists who created them, and more than 125 new works will be presented.

In the performing arts department, the season will open with the Michael Nyman Band performing Oct. 7 in Woogel Hall Auditorium.

Britain's Nyman composed the score for the award-winning film "The Piano," and the occasion is a unique one because the 10-piece Nyman band has rarely performed in North America.

The Students Events Committee is also planning numerous activities for Fall Quarter, according to Jason Skin- ner, vice president of marketing for SEC.

At this time, activities that have been confirmed are Welcome Week during the first week of classes; the Student Organizations Fair on Sept. 20 — an open house for the whole university; and the "Just Say Hi" picnic on Sept. 22, which is open to anyone on campus.

Two contrasting exhibitions this fall will be featured at the Hopkins Hall Gallery, where the art program at Ohio State is centered.

The first, which runs from Oct. 3 through 14, is titled "Clay Archives: Atherton, Baggs, Bogdany, Fetzer and Littlefield."

OSU's Ceramic Arts Department, as the program was known then, was founded in 1928 and was one of the original programs of its kind in the country.

This exhibit pays tribute to the early years through a special presentation of works by members of the original faculty from the 1920s and 1930s.

The second exhibition, running from Nov. 14 through Dec. 2, will celebrate the season when Hopkins Hall Gallery presents "Gridiron Replay: The Paintings of Greg Storer."

Drawing from his memories of Woody Hayes and the Ohio State vs. Michigan games of the 1970s, Storer, former Buckeye lineman and Bachelor of Fine Arts recipient, presents his latest works.

A public reception will be held from 5-8 p.m. on Nov. 18, the night before the OSU vs. Michigan football game.

The OSU Department of Theatre has announced its first main stage productions, two of which are in the fall.

"Arms and the Man," a play by George Bernard Shaw, will open the season and will run from Oct. 26 through Nov. 12 in the Stadium II Theatre in the Drake Union.

This satire on war and the "professional fighting man" is a witty classic featuring the OSU Theatre Company and director Kathleen Conlin.

Daniel Sullivan's "Inspecting Carol" will be staged in the Thurber Theatre from Nov. 9-19 and will be guest-directed by Steven Anderson.

In this spoof, an amateur actor is cast in a midwestern theatre company's production of "A Christmas Carol" and everything goes wrong.

The OSU School of Music will treat audiences to a wide variety of music, performances, from Broadway classics and jazz to chamber opera and symphonic masterworks.

The Men's Glee Club will team up with the Opera/Music Theatre program Oct. 27-29 to present Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific."

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The School of Music will also offer its second annual Musical Celebration on Dec. 2, which is a holiday extravaganza showcasing the school's various performing ensembles.

Innovative and creative presentations will also be offered by the OSU Department of Dance.

Dance faculty members Davi-Covey and Victoria Uris will present a concert of their works Oct. 27-29 in...
Ceramic exhibit
recalls early days

Founded in 1926, the Ceramic Arts Department, as it was then known, was one of the original programs of its kind. Clay Archives: Atherton, Baggs, Bogatay, Fetzer and Littlefield through Oct. 14 in Hopkins Hall Gallery commemorates the early faculty.

Carlton Atherton, Arthur E. Baggs, Paul Bogatay, Margaret Steenrod Fetzer and Edgar Littlefield remain names of renown as teachers, artists, technicians and pioneers in the development of contemporary American ceramics.

The exhibition is co-curated by Prudence Gill, gallery curator; Michael Chipperfield, associate professor; and Tom Turner, potter and ceramic historian. The Department of Art is co-sponsor.

A reception will be held from 5-7 p.m. Oct. 3 in the gallery.

For more information, call 292-5072.