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Decoration and Form

Holly Jones

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Decoration and Form

By

Holly Jones

Date: April 23, 1979
DEDICATION

To my mother for her understanding
To my father for his support
To Steve for his patience
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks to:

Hobart Cowles
Robert Schmitz
Tobi Miller
Penny Fleming
Mary Roehm
Judith Stiles
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Color Photography by Suzi Romanik
Black and White Photography by Holly Jones
INTRODUCTION

"Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest."¹

Georgia O'Keefe

The purpose of my thesis is to correlate decoration and form. Using a white clay body and casting slip, I constructed twelve decorative forms, my principal technique being hand building.

The content of my work deals with both the positive and negative space; the linking of the inner volume and exterior shape in relation to the environment.

FORM AND SPACE

"... Visually things are not located in an independently existing space; space, rather, is a quality or relationship of things that has no existence without them."²

Dorothea Rockburne

The space created by my forms is immediate and requires investigation. The viewer is encouraged to utilize both his space and that of the form. In this sense the space of the form becomes utilitarian in its interaction with the environment.

In many of my pieces I use mirrors to internalize the viewer; form, and environment relationships. The
viewer is confronted with the piece and his relationship in the environment to it. This space is personal and contemplation private. The purpose of the mirror is to act as a window through which we look into a space beyond. Here the viewer/form relationship is most important; not in his literal reflection but in his interpretation.

FORM AND VISUAL STIMULUS

"The unexplainable thing in nature that makes me feel the world is big far beyond my understanding - to understand maybe by trying to put it into form. To find the feeling of infinity on the horizon line or just over the next hill."  

Georgia O'Keefe

Of extreme importance to the development of my forms is what I call "visual stimulus." These are the things in my environment which I have found to be inspirational aids in my pursuit of forms. "Inspiration does not strike like lightening, it develops."  

Many of my forms echo everything from grids in a sidewalk to the remains of various sea life on the beach. I did not set out to recreate what I found in my environment. The fact that these objects stimulated the development of my forms, was both conscious and unconscious. I have developed a particular way of
seeing things in my environment which has led to their parallels, deliberate or not.

Having been brought up on Cape Cod, I spent numerous hours curiously studying treasures found on the beach. These objects are now surfacing as unconscious influences in the development of my forms. I hope I can continue with the naivete of my childhood to unintentionally search the shore.

For the past two years here at R.I.T. I have had the opportunity to study photography which has become especially pertinent to the development of my forms. The camera is an invaluable aid in learning to see my environment. I shoot numerous rolls of film, both color and black and white in which I concentrate on objects so closely that they become abstractions of textures, lines and space.

I find that whether I pick something up on the beach or shoot an entire roll of film dedicated to closeups of car grilles, that everything I see has common elements which on the surface seem unrelated because of the contrasting compositions and environments. I am looking beyond; I see pure forms in space, creating space.

We are all by nature curious individuals. As curiosity develops so does inspiration. The two go hand in hand in the pursuit of form.
FORM AND FABRICATION

"The potter speaks of the hard silica, the softer flux, the protecting glaze, as the bones, blood and skin of a pot, and there are indeed many human associations."5

In the beginning there were white-earthenware slabs, rolled on the slab roller and accurately cut from circular masonite templates to the diameters of my choice. A freshly rolled circular slab was then laid inside a shallow, bowl-shaped bisque mold and pressed firmly to its contour. The next step involved selectively cutting away shapes from the interior of the slab while in the mold. A fettling knife was used for this purpose. Sufficient area is left for the rim for ease in handling the piece, support of the delicate slip trailed areas, and later to house the mirror.

Ready to trail the slip into the cut-out areas of the piece, I fill my plastic condiment bottle (mustard, relish, catsup type - found in most department stores) with commercial casting slip (see appendix) and begin to trail first around the edges of the cut-out areas, then proceeding to create the interior structures.

Standing back I then witnessed the slip areas drying rapidly causing cracking where the slip met the slab rim as well as in the interior trailed areas. Stop here! It was a good idea but needed to be
Realizing the bisque mold absorbed the water from the slip too rapidly, I turned to plaster. So began a long, intense relationship between us.

I began by making plaster press molds from my bisque molds, creating a plaster concavity from the convex surface of the bisque mold. In my "Selected Bibliography" there are two excellent books dealing with plaster mold making. For making a one-piece plaster press mold, David Cowley's book, "Molded and Slip Cast Pottery and Ceramics," is the best source. As for mixing the plaster, both Cowley's book and "Plaster Mold and Model Making" by Charles Cherney and Stanley Skee are both informative. If one is real "intense" about plaster, information concerning plaster types and mixing techniques may be obtained from the United States Gypsum Company (see appendix). The material I researched indicated that "USG Pottery Plaster #1" was best suited for my purposes. A lesser grade called "Molding Plaster" could be used in a pinch but does not mix as readily, is less durable, and does not yield as nice a surface.

The procedure began once again, this time with the plaster mold which proved to be more successful than the bisque; the drying time of the slip being slower. I discovered that dusting talc into the mold with the
excess wiped away, was an excellent releasing agent. Following the same steps as previously with the bisque mold, I once again stood back waiting for the piece to set up.

A cup of tea later, the piece was drying nicely with no cracking. This was not a constant, however, but when cracking did occur in a piece, it was minimal and could be filled with slip before the piece was removed from the mold. Time is not of the essence. There is no accurate method of timing the release of a piece from the mold. Much depends on the atmosphere in the studio and the mold. If it is humid, or the mold has been used several times that day, releasing time will be slow due to the plaster's inability to absorb water from the slip, its own moisture content being high.

Of course, there are always two sides to every coin! If the plaster mold has sat idle for a period of time, it may be too dry and will cause cracking as it absorbs the water from the slip too rapidly. I always lightly sponge the mold's interior with either water or a 1:2 solution of vinegar to water before using it. This keeps the surface clean of any clay or foreign matter which would inhibit the mold's absorption and aids in slowing down rapid absorption.
When a piece is set up I then gently nudge the interior trailed areas with a pointed wooden tool or fettling knife and run a metal scraper underneath the exterior rim to assure release. Carefully lifting the piece out, it is then placed over the convex side of the bisque mold to dry slowly under plastic for several days.

Feeling the necessity to pursue a whim, I experimented with coloring the slip for the piece entitled, "Sea Spray." Fabrication here was also slightly different. Three colors were used along with the white casting slip. Using teaspoons as a measure, the ratios for the three colors were as follows:

- Rutile - $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. : 2 tsp. slip (liquid)
- Green Nickel Oxide - $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. : 2 tsp. slip (liquid)
- Yellow Iron Oxide - $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp : 2 tsp. slip (liquid)

The volume of these was increased to yield one cup of colored slip each, adding the dry colorant to the liquid slip, mixing with a mortar and pestle.

To fabricate "Sea Spray," the colored slips were placed into various condiment containers. Each color was then trailed separately onto a talced plaster bat which revolved slowly on the potter's wheel. Starting at the center of the bat, the color was slowly squeezed toward the outer edge until a disc was formed. Open areas were formed by ceasing to trail the slip at
random intervals. The process was repeated onto several bats, using one color for each to form the disc.

When the pieces were slightly set and ready for release, a metal scraper was run underneath the clay to aid its release. The discs are still flexible and are cut in half, slightly bent and joined to each other with slip creating the form. The piece was constructed directly on a kiln shelf for ease in handling and firing.

All the pieces were bisque fired at a higher temperature than the glaze firing. I bisque to cone 04 or 03 depending on my patience. Because of the differences between the water content of the slip (less) and that of the clay (more) there is some distortion of the form in the firing. This occurs in the trailed areas particularly if they had been cracked and repaired prior to the bisque firing. On several pieces, Standard Ceramics' "Jet Black" (K60) glaze stain was sponged directly into the recessed areas of the bisque as an accent. All pieces were glaze fired to cone 06 with CCTS Clear, the formula of which is in the appendix.

And now for the phenomenon of "Lusters." It is best to apply luster over a shiny, fired glaze as they will take on the characteristic of the glaze they are over. I purchased my lusters from Standard Ceramics
(see appendix), using the metallics, gold, platinum and copper, as well as the colored lusters, green and turquoise. Excellent information concerning the application and firing of lusters is described in a pamphlet which may be obtained from the Hanovia Company (see appendix). I found this information superior to any I have read in most ceramic texts. I struggled with lusters for two years before reaching any kind of consistency in their outcome.

"Cleanliness" is gospel. This is a steadfast rule which I follow. First I clean the table off and cover it with paper. Then the pieces and brushes to be used are cleaned by cotton balls, saturated with rubbing alcohol. Clean pieces are kept under plastic before and after luster application until the firing.

Using a separate soft-bristled brush for each luster, one thin stroke is laid next to another, never over the preceding. This procedure is the same with both the metallic and colored lusters. When the application is finished, the pieces are kept covered to dry over night.

"Ventilation" is the gospel of the firing process. It is important to stack the kiln loosely and keep the vents and door open during most of the firing. I fire both metallic and colored lusters to cone 018. The firing is done slowly beginning with the kiln on low,
the vents open and the door cracked about four inches. The kiln then is left in this state for one hour, after which the top (roof) vent is closed, the door cracked to two inches, the door's vent remaining open, and the kiln is switched to medium. One hour later, the kiln is switched to high and the door cracked to approximately one inch. Once again, the kiln remains in this state for one hour, after which the door is closed, its vent remaining open until the cone drops. When temperature has been reached, the kiln is shut off and immediately the remaining vent is closed.

CONCLUSION?

"... but I cannot yet make the clay speak – so I must keep on."⁶
Georgia O'Keefe

It is inappropriate for me to begin this paragraph with "In conclusion..." as I feel that I am in no way ending my pursuit, but continuing from this point to seek and develop further solutions. I avoid the word "conclude" because its connotation is negative in relation to artistic development. "Movement in ideas and forms should continue .... Situations change, needs change, conditions of life change; and the clay-worker should be attuned to these changes."⁷

As an artist I believe that one should never be
satisfied with the end product, but should continue to improve and develop a concept toward a better solution. This is direction; upon which ideas develop in continuum.
FOOTNOTES


3Georgia, O'Keefe, Georgia O'Keefe, p.185.


6Georgia O'Keefe, Georgia O'Keefe, p.207.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX - MATERIALS
Clay:

Bob Palusky - White Earthenware

Kaolin (#6 tile or EPK)  21
Ball Clay (OM#4)  35  Bisque 04
Neph. Syen.  10  Glaze 06
Talc (New York)  50
Bentonite  4  120

* age a good month if possible

Casting Slip:

Seeley's White Velvet  06-02
Seeley's Ceramic Service, Inc.
9 River Street
Oneonta, N.Y. 13820

locally - University Craft Service
University Avenue, Rochester

(a note about the pieces - The main structures of the forms are slab built from the White Earthenware. The linear sections are the casting slip applied by trailing slip into a plaster press mold).

Glaze:

CCTS Bright Transparent

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<tr>
<td>Frit 3396</td>
<td>15  lead safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit G-14</td>
<td>45  06-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaolin</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>15  100</td>
</tr>
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* may possibly substitute Frit G24 or G23 as Frit 3396 may be no longer manufactured
Lusters:
Standard Ceramics
P.O. Box 4435
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15205

locally - Woodside Ceramics
    Northfield Commons
    Pittsford, N.Y.

- Excellent information on the application and firing of lusters may be obtained from:
  Hanovia Liquid Gold
  Engelhard Industries Division
  Engelhard Minerals and Chemicals Corp.
  1 West Central Avenue
  East Newark, N.J. 07029

Plaster -
* Two of the most complete sources on plaster mold making are cited in my bibliography.

Complete information concerning plasters, their types and mixing methods may be obtained from:
United States Gypsum
101 South Wacker Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60606

- I found USG no.1 Pottery Plaster to be sufficient for my needs.

Mirrors -

    Flower City Glass Co.
    Corner of Alexander and Mt. Hope
    Rochester, N.Y.

(Mirrors were adhered to the pieces by Silicone Rubber Caukling which is available at most hardware stores).
Plate 1
Branches
Plate II
Branches
Plate VII
Fence
Plate VIII
Car Grille
Plate IX
Shell Structure
9"h x 9½"w

Plate X
Sea Spray
9"h x 12½"w
Plate XI

Victorian

9 3/4" h x 18 3/4" w
Plate XII
Bone Arch
9\(\frac{1}{2}\)"h x 18\(\frac{1}{2}\)"w
Plate XV
Sternum Complex
9½" diameter

Plate XVI
Ribs
8" diameter
Plate XVII
Cross Bones
16½" diameter

Plate XVIII
Sand Dollar
19½" diameter
Plate XIX
Rochester Winter in April
19\(\frac{1}{2}\)" diameter

Plate XX
Rib-Caged
17" diameter
Plate XXI

Sea-quence

16\frac{1}{2}'' diameter