Ceramic Sculpture

Inspiring Techniques

Ceramic Arts Handbook Series

Edited by Anderson Turner
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Preface

As an artist, educator and gallery director, I’ve spent many hours looking at and thinking about art and art making. Often I’m looking for inspiration for my own work or for a curatorial idea I have brewing. Many times I’ve sent students to look someone up, so they can better understand the artist’s ideas and techniques in order to better inform their own work.

This book is a great tool for exactly that process. From beginning to end it contains details about the making process. As a gallery director I’m forever reintroducing patrons to people and ideas that everyone should hold dear. While in my own art I may stick to a certain aesthetic, as an educator/curator I find, as I grow older, a fondness for all art making. Most importantly I feel my students and patrons often lack an understanding of the value of their education and are more worried about what it can get them than what they can learn.

I also feel strongly that art making is a research driven activity. The information contained in this book is written by some of the more innovative and interesting minds working in ceramics today. While not all of the ideas are necessarily groundbreaking, they are unique in their individual approach to the use of the material. How these artists researched and successfully used the processes they set out to is inspirational, informative and important. I hope you find the research contained in these pages as exciting as I do.

*Anderson Turner*
Through their work, artists communicate a full range of emotions, perceptions and spiritual explorations. George McCauley shapes these varied life experiences into clay forms that are assembled as wholly personal and revealing sculpture. Prior to studying art, his vocational positions included carpenter, concrete inspector, waiter and chef, mechanic, horse trainer and aluminum-siding salesman.

Like many of his contemporaries, McCauley was drawn to clay after his initial introduction, a classic case of the “love at first touch” syndrome. Ron Meyers at the University of Georgia, was a significant role model. At the University of South Carolina, Meyers fostered an environment of experimental freedom, instilling in McCauley a sense of discovery and excitement for the medium.

The work of Peter Voulkos also has been a strong influence. “Voulkos works as if the pieces come out of him, not by him,” observes McCauley. “His devotion to making art, breaking new ground and his abilities to make works that are about what he wants to make are

Candelabrum, 43 inches in height, wheel-thrown and handbuilt earthenware, soda fired.
inspirational. The seemingly casual appearance and freedom evident in his work are what I strive for in my own creative endeavors.”

George Ohr’s persona and art also hold a particularly strong fascination for McCauley. Billing himself as the “Mad Potter of Biloxi,” Ohr was a nonconformist who created a distinctive body of work that challenged the status quo of the day. Both McCauley and Ohr share a hirsute sensibility as well, sporting ample mustaches reflecting flamboyant personalities.

Having spent the greater part of his childhood residing in Georgia and South Carolina, McCauley absorbed the rich history of folk-art traditions of the South, particularly those of the Jugtown potters. For a time, he emulated these artists—inhabiting a rustic home in the country, surrounded by yard art and integrating his creative endeavors with the art of everyday living. “I have fancied myself as a kind of folk artist, not as a primitive or naïve practitioner, but relating to the complete sense of freedom in their work. Folk artists make what they want to make and create their art completely from within.”

Myths and archetypal symbols, some relating to his childhood growing up in a strict Greek Orthodox home, play a significant role in McCauley’s work. He has a strong interest in the rituals and ceremonies found in world cultures. He is fascinated with religious objects such as icons, shrines and vestments. Universal symbols—concentric life spirals, the mati (an open palm with an eye)—are incorporated in his work to express needs or desires. This implies a personal narrative invoking historical significance.

Compositionally, McCauley is drawn to an unconventional organization of objects, disturbing juxtapositions and, at times, fantastic extravagance. Fleshy figures cavort with a menagerie of barnyard animals, fish, a jumble of cups, saucers and other miniature pots. He interweaves dopey-eyed reptiles suffering from heatstroke in the arid desert and skeletal remains on cylindrical candlesticks. His totemic candelabra and house sculptures are similar to trees of life, a marriage between the animal and human worlds.
Covered jar, 26 inches in height, earthenware, iron wash and glaze, soda fired.
There is a narrative quality to the work, begging for a story to unfold. McCauley denies any strict interpretation, but, rather, places a deeper importance on the meaning of the subject matter. “My work is narrative in the sense that I am saying something about my feelings, not always telling a story.”

Some of the relationships impart humor, at times salacious, and he feels this is a good enough reason to create.

A freedom of process, where revisions and changes are evident, not hidden or refined to the point of obscuring the hand of the maker, also appeals to McCauley. “I am process oriented in most of my endeavors. The act of making and the vitality of the construction are very important to me. I alter my work when it is soft

Wall sconce, 21 inches in height, wheel-thrown and handbuilt earthenware, with terra sigillata, soda fired to cone 02.
so that I can keep all the nuances of the construction—I want the working process to remain evident in feeling and posture. Techniques have become less important as the years go by—giving way to a looser method of working.”

McCauley is primarily concerned with the making of objects, so his work is mostly wheel thrown, then altered and accented with handbuilt additions. Earthenware best suits his needs, and “soda firing completes the soft, sensual feel I strive for.”

Most of his glazes are cone 10 reduction recipes that are fired in the cone 08–02 range in a soda or vapor atmosphere, as well as in an electric kiln. The dry and irregular surfaces enhance the imagery. Some of his works, particularly those with hues of purple and deep blue, take on an apocalyptic cast, looking like post-nuclear relics.

The color palette is generally muted. Some of his glazing strategies include undercoating with slips and terra sigillatas on leather-hard or bisqued surfaces, then pouring glaze overall and wiping off most. Occasionally, he simply applies a kaolin wash, then fires to cone 02 in a soda kiln. Other times after firing, a sprinkling of dry glaze, dirt or grog is applied, and the work refired.

Fundamentals and technique are merely a means to an end. McCauley chooses to do whatever is necessary, disregarding efficiency or practicality over a path that will achieve the results that best reflect his sensibilities.

McCauley has concentrated on creating a body of work composed of personal statements and expressions about a life dedicated to the creative act. His sculptures convey the idea that a magical dimension of life—partly lost in the rush of modernity—can be recaptured and embraced without hesitation.
### Recipes

#### Blood on the Saddle Earthenware

Cone 08–02

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custer Feldspar</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbondale Clay</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireclay</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grog</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
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Add 25% Cedar Heights Redart for a darker body to be used in oxidation.

#### Blue Barium Matt Glaze

Cone 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spodumene</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Add: Black Copper Oxide 4%

Bentonite 2%

For a green variation, replace the copper oxide with 5% iron oxide.

#### Green Barium Matt Glaze

Cone 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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</table>

Add: Black Copper Oxide 2%

Bentonite 2%

When using barium compounds, be aware of the toxic nature of this chemical. Always wear a respirator and gloves when mixing glazes. To avoid the barium risk, McCauley has begun to substitute strontium carbonate for barium carbonate in a ratio of ¾ to 1.

#### Blue Barium Matt Glaze

Cone 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spodumene</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Add: Black Copper Oxide 4%

Bentonite 2%

#### Purple Barium Matt Glaze

Cone 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
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Add: Copper Carbonate 3%

Bentonite 2%

#### Green Glaze

Cone 08–6

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>G-200 Feldspar</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPK Kaolin.</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
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Add: Zinc Oxide 11%

Copper Carbonate 10.5%

Bentonite 2%

#### White Glaze

Cone 08–1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferro Frit 3124</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</table>

Add: Opax 18%

Bentonite 2%

#### Mottled Brown Glaze

Cone 08–6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta Slip Clay</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Terra Sigillata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>6 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mix 50 grams sodium silicate into the water, then add the clay. Decant mixture for 24 hours; siphon off water. Lift out the top layer of slip with hands. Yields 1 quart of thick slip. For application, thin with additional water. Variations include adding 5% Gerstley borate without decanting, colored stains added by eye, or using throwing water.