contemporary clay sculpture

modern ceramic sculpture as narrative, object, and decor

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Contemporary Clay Sculpture
Modern Ceramic Sculpture as Narrative, Object, and Decor

Contemporary clay sculpture is perhaps the most diverse range of sculpture in existence, perhaps because clay has been used to make art objects longer than any other material. In Contemporary Clay Sculpture: Modern Ceramic Sculpture as Narrative, Object, and Decor, we present four artists who approach clay with different messages through diverse techniques: Scott Ziegler’s highly detailed ceramic sculptures with intricate glazing details; Joseph Pintz’ bold clay sculptures of plain and ordinary objects; Lydia Thompson’s slip cast and handbuilt ceramic wall art; and Magda Gluszek working from a small maquette to a large, highly decorated ceramic figure.

Scott Ziegler’s Highly Detailed Ceramic Sculptures
by Julie Murphy

Scott Ziegler is an artist and teacher who understands the value of patience and concentration. His highly detailed ceramic sculptures are at times playful and at other times quite disturbing. Through his use of ceramic stains and clay slips he transforms clay into ceramic objects that seem not of this world.

The Everyday Clay Sculptures of Joseph Pintz
by Casey Ruble

On the other end of the ceramic sculpture spectrum is Joseph Pintz and his simple yet elegant clay sculptures – some in the form of utilitarian items and some duplicating common ordinary objects. Pintz carves away the clay to get the effect he needs and his application of simple underglazes further adds to the honest quality of the work.

The Ceramic Wall Art of Lydia Thompson
by Glen Brown

Lydia Thompson’s message is for us to see opposites around us in her work: purity and corruption, beauty and evil, attractiveness and repugnance. Through her use of white slip forms and handbuilt earthenware holders, she uses opposing techniques that contrast light and dark, earthenware and porcelain in her ceramic wall sculptures.

The Ceramic Art Sculptures of Magda Gluszek
by Magda Gluszek

Madga’s clay sculptures investigate ideas about consumption, self-preservation, and societal behaviors versus animalistic impulses. Her ceramic technique is to build a form out of solid clay then hollow out the inside. Her use of epoxy resins and acrylic paints allow her a great deal of flexibility for communicating through clay.
Scott Ziegler is an artist and a teacher. For the past several years, while teaching at the high school and college levels, Ziegler has become acutely aware that many students prefer the instant gratification of technologies like video games, iPods and text messaging to dedicating a few hours to complete a ceramics project to the best of their abilities.

As a sculptor of highly detailed pieces, Ziegler has sometimes been criticized for spending too much time on the intricate elements in his own work. Critics have suggested he find ways to speed up his process or look for alternate ways of achieving the same outcomes. But, believing in his process, and pleased with the results of his attention to detail, he continued spending countless hours creating each piece.

Though the criticism did not change the way he worked, he started to question whether he was dissatisfied with anything short of perfection, or if he held himself—and his students—to an unusually high set of standards. He also wondered whether working toward continuously exceeding his own expectations was beneficial.

These questions led him to explore the idea of perfectionism. When applied to the ceramic arts, and especially to his own work, Ziegler suggests that perfectionism is more about the evolution of an artist’s confidence in his processes—it takes courage to enter into new and unfamiliar territory rather than producing the same work repeatedly or simply replicating a process because it gains recognition. Mastery of material, attention to detail and flawless execution sets an outstanding piece apart from the rest.

Ziegler learned this lesson after graduating from college, while working as a toy designer for a small design firm in Chicago. Side-by-side with the owner, learning the detailed work required to produce objects to scale, he acquired the skills necessary to improve his sculpting ability. He explored materials, cultivated patience and discovered the many processes needed to take a project from inception to completion. He was encouraged to be part of the process, and taught not to accept his first idea, or even a good idea, as the gold standard. As he nurtured his creativity, and refined his skills, he sought to exceed his own expectations with the creative process and the outcome.

Ziegler saw a dramatic shift in his work. While his art had always been sculptural, his early years had been spent learning, exploring and pushing the boundaries and limitations of clay; his ideas were material-based, not idea-based. He created large-scale work, pushing the size limitations of his material. He experimented with surface decoration and the glazing process, and he developed work that combined throwing and hand-building techniques. As a toy designer, he developed and refined his meticulous attention to detail and gained confidence as an artist. He began applying the same level of precision to his own work, creating pieces unlike anything he’d ever produced before. Believing he had developed a reasonable understanding of the material, he focused on perfecting the form. He spent incredible amounts of time on each piece, concentrating on symmetry, detail and realism—elements critical to his success as a toy designer.

The precision of his forms and surface detail shifted his attention to glazes and glazing techniques. His work had always been fired in gas kilns, soda kilns and salt kilns.
using traditional cone 9/10 glazes, but because of the inconsistent results these glazes produced, they weren’t practical for the detailed work he was creating now. He experimented with a variety of low-fire materials (cone 018–01), including underglazes, glazes and lusters, drawn to them because of the wide range of vivid colors available. The low-fire materials met his expectations, producing consistent results and allowing him to be more precise. He began using them exclusively.

Ziegler had taught community art classes and, though he found working at the toy company satisfying, realized he missed teaching. He had enjoyed the connections formed with students and missed watching a student grasp a process for the first time, to be inspired and put forth the effort required to be thrilled with their result, so he decided to return to school to pursue an M.Ed. in Art Education. While completing his degree, he was invited to join the fine arts faculty at a high school with a strong arts program. He received his M.Ed. during his first year of teaching there and later continued his studies in art by pursuing an M.F.A., believing one of the best ways to develop as an artist is through exposure to different and unfamiliar styles, techniques and schools of thought.

He knew he would be challenged, and that his work would be critiqued and criticized, and he welcomed the process, hoping it would encourage him to continue testing the limits of his materials.

As a graduate student, he developed a body of work that pushed him outside his comfort zone as he began to confront childhood experiences he had ignored for years—Ziegler grew up in a dysfunctional family, one rooted in alcohol addiction. Building on the precision he had learned as a toy designer, his pieces became more detailed than ever before. Because he spent so much time working with and mastering his materials, he felt a sense of control over his work for the first time. He realized the detail he put into his pieces was as much for himself as it was for the viewer. It was a way for him to counteract the chaos he experienced growing up; the detail gave him a feeling of control. He had finally discovered a way to express his experiences in a way he was comfortable with.

In his quest for control over his art, he revisited his glazes. While pleased with the colors, stability and level of detail he was able to achieve, the porous low-fire materials he had been using were attracting fingerprints, smudges and dirt—highly undesirable effects when work is designed to engage the viewer, draw them in and encourage them
to interact with it. Ziegler began looking for commercially available, alternative glazes and tested numerous options, but none met his needs. Frustrated with the lack of options, he investigated making his own cone 6 underglazes and glazes. After months of testing, he started using commercial stains mixed with slip. He applied it to his pieces in the same way he had been using the low-fire underglazes and lusters, and was able to achieve the same results with none of the limitations. He was also able to produce a wider range of colors than ever before.

Though he has learned an incredible amount about himself and his materials, and has developed and refined techniques that will last him a lifetime, his journey has just begun. He knows he must continue to evolve today to get where he wants to be tomorrow. After all, to Ziegler, the perfect piece is a result of a multifaceted, always evolving process and perfection is always one step away.

*The author* Julie Murphy is a writer living in Chicago, Illinois.

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**STAINS, SLIPS, AND PATIENCE**

*by Scott Ziegler*

When my work is bone dry, I use a variety of grades of sandpaper to smooth out imperfections. After it is completely smooth, I begin to lay in my color. I create my own colored slips by adding different percentages of commercial stains to the same porcelain clay body used for my pieces, adding water until they become quite fluid. It’s generally not wise to add wet clay to bone-dry clay, because it will crack off, but since the clay in the slip is really just an agent for binding color onto the surface, I can get away with applying many thin layers. That is the trick, but the process is very time consuming. Each area requires three to four brush coats per color. When all the color has been applied, I’m finally able to bisque fire the piece. For the glaze firing, I add glossy and matt glaze and fire to cone 6.
When talking about his work, Joseph Pintz often begins by describing his childhood in Chicago—a place most people associate with gritty urban life. But Pintz’ story differs from many Chicago natives. He was born the third of four children to immigrants who, during World War II, fled from the Russian army as it advanced on the rural Hungarian countryside his ancestors had settled some 300 years previously. Both sets of Pintz’ grandparents made a living working with their hands—his maternal grandfather as a blacksmith and his paternal grandparents as farmers. In Chicago, Pintz was similarly raised to value a close connection to the land: He grew up harvesting vegetables in the narrow suburban plot behind his house, picking cherries for homemade jam and baking loaves of sourdough in the drywall-mud pans his father brought home from his job as a union painter. Holidays and other celebrations were spent with many generations of family and friends, and preparations for the feasts began days in advance.

The combination of groundedness and generosity that marked Pintz’ upbringing also comes through in his ceramic work, which explores the role that domestic objects play in fulfilling our needs on a physical and emotional level. Made from a coarse, high-iron Nebraska brick clay, Pintz’ pieces—plates, cups, and bowls; bakeware and kitchen utensils; toolboxes and feeding troughs for animals—are devoid of decorative embellishment and craftiness.
Their character is humble and straightforward, reflecting a basic tenet of Shaker design, and one of Pintz’ major influences:

*If it is useful and necessary, free yourself from imagining that you need to enhance it by adding what is not an integral part of its usefulness or necessity. . . . If it is both useful and necessary and you can recognize and eliminate what is not essential, then go ahead and make it as beautifully as you can.*

For Pintz, making it as beautifully as you can entails foregoing the wheel in favor of carving most pieces out of solid clay—a process that lends his work literal and symbolic weight and, by virtue of the trimming marks and subtle inconsistencies of the hand, accentuates the negative spaces, giving them a physical presence and emotional charge they wouldn’t otherwise have. His surface treatments range in color from neutrals to earthy pinks, greens, yellows, and blues, and they contribute to the handcrafted feel. He layers a combination of terra sigillata, slips, and brushed-on glazes, which produces a patinated effect where the red of the clay peeks through in places. The overall aesthetic sensibility seems guided by an appreciation of the material’s raw form and its possibilities; when looking at Pintz’ “pots,” one doesn’t forget that they, like the food they hold, originate from the earth itself.
Pintz’ work ranges from functional to nonfunctional. His bowls, for example, are the perfect size for morning oatmeal, whereas his toolboxes are more metaphorical—too heavy to be carried to a work site. But the two groups of work don’t occupy extreme ends of the spectrum: The nonfunctional objects still speak of utility, and the weight of the functional pieces renders them unwieldy, pushing them toward sculpture. Adhering to sculptor Isamu Noguchi’s belief that “everything is sculpture,” Pintz considers himself both a craftsman and an artist. “I don’t believe in a hierarchy of one type of work over another,” he comments. “I see my functional dinnerware and my sculpture as different sides of the same coin.”

Interestingly, Pintz’ interest in clay grew out of his undergraduate studies in anthropology at Northwestern University. It was there that he first noticed how the medium of clay has been used across centuries of civilizations, running the gamut from the mundane to the extraordinary—from the simple pottery of early cultures to the high-tech heat-shield tiles used on space shuttles. After finishing his undergraduate degree, Pintz undertook post-baccalaureate studies in ceramics at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and then attended graduate school at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he broadened his scope by researching a variety of utilitarian objects from around the world. In 2007, he was awarded a residency and Lincoln Fellowship at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts—a former brickyard and a fitting place for someone who works with brick clay. From the beginning of his work with clay, however, Pintz was drawn to making pottery with a close relationship to food. “Sharing meals with others and making the time to eat well are ideals I try to live up to in my daily life,” he explains. Indeed, the stubborn physicality of his pieces forces the user to slow down and pay close attention to the moment (coffee in one of his cups is best sipped using both hands) and their uniformity and seriality take on metaphoric potential, with connotations of community, abundance, and prosperity. Further, the symbiotic relationship Pintz eloquently establishes between volume and negative space reflects the basic nature of sustenance. As the English poet Philip James Bailey wrote, “Simplicity is nature’s first step, and the last of art.” Pintz’ work embodies this idea with a down-to-earth directness, reminding us that the container is just as essential as what we put in it.

Hand-Hewn Pottery
by Joseph Pintz

During graduate school, I began experimenting with clay from a local brick manufacturer (Endicott Clay Products, Fairbury, Nebraska). Their “potting clay” has great working characteristics—plasticity, density and a rich color. It also has the benefit of not being over-processed. With a few minor alterations, the clay that was sent down the conveyor belt to make bricks has become the backbone of my clay body (see recipe on page 5).

I employ a handful of rudimentary handbuilding techniques to create my forms. I pound soft clay over bisque molds with a mallet to establish basic shapes, such as bowls. Paper patterns are used to create more delicate forms, such as cups, and thicker forms (toolboxes and plates) are carved from a solid block. Although working reductively is not always practical, it allows me to find the form more intuitively. Once the clay stiffens to a leather-hard stage, forms are trimmed and refined further. This dredges up the coarse grog within the clay and creates a unique texture. Once the clay dries to a bone dry state, I brush on several layers of slip or terra sigillata. After bisque firing, I apply glazes to create subtle, weathered surfaces that suggest a history of use. The work is then fired in an electric kiln to cone 02.
A field of blooming cotton under a blue sky can be dazzling, even disorienting as its snowy appearance conjures associations radically at odds with the dry heat of a summer day. This curious confounding of the senses is perhaps only fitting, since cotton is enveloped by other, more troubling, contradictions as well. Fleecy white cotton bolls are visually and tactically among the most appealing of all natural forms, and there is little wonder that an artist should find them formally inspiring. To the eye, what could better exemplify purity? As a crop, however, cotton is haunted by a troubled past of prolonged association with imperialism, slavery, forced migration, and class exploitation. Historically, it is intertwined with the misery of Africans in North America, the bleeding of India under the British Raj, the bankruptcy and annexation of Egypt, and the suffering of the rural poor in the American South. To the mind then, what could better exemplify oppression and debasement? Purity and corruption, beauty and evil intermingle in a sensuous and conceptual weave around the cotton boll, and even the powers of the artist cannot fully extricate the form and return it to a state of simple neutrality.

For sculptor Lydia Thompson, a professor of ceramics at Virginia Commonwealth University, the paradox of the cotton boll’s attractiveness as a natural form and its repugnance as a symbol of a history of exploitation, specifically of Africans and African-Americans, has proved intriguing enough to support a series of diverse works in various media. Among the earliest of these is a series of sculptures that she began in 2007 while a resident at the International Ceramics Research Center in Skælskør, Denmark, almost 4000 miles from the cotton fields of the American South. Her immediate inspiration was the theme of migration and its connections to her own ancestry. The resulting sculptures represent glazed ceramic cotton bolls—rendered hollow and biomorphic, like ghostly white internal organs—heaped upon trays resting on red-wheeled carts reminiscent of flatbed railway cars. These sculptures in part indicate a shift of focus within a reflection on identity that has characterized Thompson’s activities for a number of years. “The past work that I’ve done has always related to my West African heritage,” she explains. “but I began to feel that I needed to pull away a bit and focus on the roots of where I am now, here in the U.S. I thought about migration, particularly from the South to the North, and the way that the cotton industry prospered because of railroad tracks.”

The anthropomorphic quality of the cotton bolls in Thompson’s cart sculptures—their suggestion of body parts and the potential for synecdoche that this resemblance in-
roduces—has become less pronounced in her more recent works, though the theme of movement of populations remains central. Replacing her emphasis on harvested bolls is a new interest in the cotton field in bloom, an actual example of which Thompson saw for the first time only a few years ago at an agricultural teaching facility in Richmond. Later, working partly from photographs taken during a family reunion in Bennettsville, South Carolina, she attempted to capture the effect of a blooming field in paper sculpture, a medium in which much of her most important work has been rendered over the past decade. Since completing three of the paper sculptures of fields, she has made a point of exhibiting these planar constructions as essential counterparts to her ceramic sculptures and installations. Presented behind Plexiglas in deep shadowbox frames, the paper sculptures are cut from Canson stock paper in a simple palette of brown and white. The delicacy of the two-dimensional forms in these works serves as an important supplement to Thompson’s ceramic renditions of cotton, which capture the shape and volume of the bolls but, naturally, convey little of their lightness.

Regardless of the medium, the majority of Thompson’s recent work is grouped under the compact title Promises, a reference to a Civil War-era military order granting 40-acres of farmland to freed slaves in the coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Later revoked by President Andrew Johnson, the unfulfilled promise of land grants came to represent for African-Americans the failure of Reconstruction policies and the continuation of racial oppression. Thompson’s work is not, however, devoted to commentary on specific political history but rather to a more general reflection on issues of African-American identity, community, the landscape, and ties to place. If the cotton field represents a site of exploitation it is also clearly envisioned as a place of nurture and implicitly a common ground for unification of the exploited. In Thompson’s sculptures, the earthiness of the field, its composition of rich, red soil retaining the heat of the sun and offering the promise of growth, seems a catalyst to resilience and a fertile resource upon which to re-establish a sense of stability. Re-rooting is a prominent metaphor in the cotton field sculptures, particularly those produced as installations of thick ceramic tiles arranged in vertical grids: Promises and Bloodlines. In these works, linear imagery overlies the white surfaces of the abstract cotton bolls as an essential means of linking the formal elements of the compositions to the cultural and historical contexts that inform Thompson’s conception of the work.

Thompson produced the immediate precursor to the wall-mounted ceramic installations (a pair of earthenware tiles decorated with abstract representations of foliage and combined with white reliefs of cotton bolls) at Skælskør. “I was only going to be in Denmark for four weeks,” she recalls, “and realized that I couldn’t do a large body of work in that time. I made some of the cart sculptures there, but after a while I asked myself why I was doing something that I’d already done back home. I decided to push myself to come up with something new, and I focused on tiles.” The prototypes made in Denmark established the basic elements that Thompson has incorporated into two subsequent installations, though the decorative flourishes have diminished in favor of a simpler rendition of earth and plant. The linear imagery, in the form of black ceramic decals, continues to articulate the glossy white surfaces of the abstract cotton bolls as an essential means of linking the formal elements of the compositions to the cultural and historical contexts that inform Thompson’s conception of the work.

In the 2008 wall installation Promises—which consists of 20 thick, press-molded, Virginia red clay tiles that are inset with slip-cast and white-glazed earthenware cotton bolls—the only decoration of the tile surfaces consists of patterns of shallow parallel grooves alluding to furrows in a field ready for planting. The edges of the tiles are relatively rough, exhib-
iting evidence of the compression of the clay that brings to mind geological fold trains in the strata of the earth. The cotton bolls are set into shallow depressions carefully prepared in advance, but the effect for the viewer is of their having been pressed into the tiles while the medium was still in a plastic state. These features effectively convey the appealing qualities of raw clay and rich, moist soil and affirm the positive symbolism that the earth possesses in Thompson's works. “Slaves were close to the ground,” she observes. “They were part of the process of nurturing and harvesting the cotton plant. When they were brought from Africa, these people were from different ethnic groups and they spoke different languages, but the earth was something that they had in common, something that physically united them.”

In order to reflect upon the diversity of displaced African cultures and the mingling of differences through the shared experience of cultivating the land, Thompson incorporated linear renditions of ritualistic masks into her wall installations. Representing various West African carving styles (and some inventions on Thompson’s part), the masks symbolize ethnic identities and refer to the distinctive rituals through which those identities were formed and perpetuated. In Promises, the drawings of masks were transferred to the surfaces of the abstract cotton bolls as ceramic decals, but in the subsequent 2009 wall installation Bloodlines Thompson found it more appropriate to inscribe these images on the surfaces of the earth-like tiles and emphasize the lines through application of iron oxide. Like petroglyphs, or more ephemeral images scratched into compacted soil, these drawings represent the imprint of identity on a common ground: the “movement of ethnically diverse populations through slavery to the American South and the blending of their traditions through shared labor.” Completing the imagery are black-line decals of floral patterns applied to the cotton bolls to suggest the products of European textile mills to which the raw American cotton was shipped in the 18th century. This expansion of focus to include the broader economic context of cotton is a likely indication of where Thompson’s work will head in the future. “At the moment it’s still closely connected to reflections on my culture,” she observes, “but I think that this body of work will continue to lead me into even more universal terms.”

The author A frequent contributor to CM, Glen R. Brown is a professor of art history at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.
Magda Gluszek’s animated figures tell open ended stories through pose, expression, and brightly colored confectionary surfaces.

My clay sculptures investigate ideas about consumption, self-presentation, and societal behaviors versus animalistic impulses. Using the building solid and hollowing out technique allows flexibility in planning dramatic, performative poses while a combination of ceramic and mixed media surfaces give me a variety of options for referencing confectionary textures and colors. I’m constantly absorbing information about multimedia processes from hardware stores, craft books, and other artists that add depth and variety to my figures.

From Maquette...
Building solid forms in clay is a technique often looked at as a means to an end and not an end in and of itself. It’s traditionally used by artists who take a mold from their sculptures and cast them in another material such as bronze or iron. I strive for a gestural style in my sculptures, leaving my tool marks as evidence of how I work, a style influenced by artists such as Auguste Rodin as well as my studies of terra-cotta maquettes from the 1700s and 1800s for larger works in clay, marble or bronze.

I begin by sketching and then building a small maquette to work out the positioning of a figure and details of the pose. The small models have a life to them that’s very different from the polished quality of the finished works. It’s important to capture that fresh feeling and liveliness in my figures. Translating the sketches to a three-dimensional model is essential to the building process because it helps me to adjust the pose and proportions of the figure as well as plan the final scale of the piece. Measuring the maquette and marking out the workspace gives me an idea of the sculpture’s final dimensions, in this case four times greater than the maquette (figure 1). This also allows me to check myself throughout the building process by measuring various parts of the body and comparing them to the model.
Measure the maquette and mark a scaled-up outline on the work surface.

Press wooden dowels into the solid clay wherever support is needed.

Use a plastic, putty knife to create gestural marks and imply an underlying structure.

Remove the head and model it separately to ensure refined details and facial expression.

...to Form

The mass of the sculpture is built up with solid clay. Wooden dowels are added wherever support is needed and clay is squeezed around them to hold them in place and extend the form (figure 2). These linear extensions are also planted to determine the direction and angle of limbs. The maquette is referenced constantly throughout this process. Wherever possible, dowels protrude beyond the form for easy removal. As limbs begin to extend further from the figure, external dowels are added for extra support. Because the clay dries and shrinks around the internal supports, the strength of each limb is constantly monitored and I remove the dowels as soon as the limb can support itself or be supported externally.

Initially, clay is added and manipulated by hand, but as the form progresses I use a plastic putty knife to direct the material, imply the underlying bone and muscular structure and create gestural marks. Building solid allows me to work the form as a whole and gives me the flexibility to fluidly correct proportions and change direction of limbs (figure 3).

Details

Detailing the sculpture begins once the whole body is roughed out. As the form gains definition, I switch to smaller wooden and plastic knives to make more specific markings and delineate skin folds. Detailed areas of the figure, such as the head and hands, are removed from the body and modeled separately (figures 4 and 5). When completed, they are reattached to the form. Thin and exposed limbs are covered to prevent them from drying too quickly.

A commercial sprig mold and home-made stamps add decorative elements which have an aesthetic quality contrasting my gestural hand and tool markings. I make stamps by attaching decorative mirror findings and upholstery tacks to thick wooden dowels (figure 6).

Cornstarch is used as a release agent in the mold and dusted on the figure, preventing the plastic stamps from sticking and allowing them to make clear impressions. The cornstarch leaves no trace when fired.

Hollowing

After the figure is completely modeled, I allow it to dry to a stage that is slightly soft-leather hard. Extending limbs are wrapped loosely with plastic because they dry quickly. When these appendages reach the right stage, I assess where to make the first cut to begin hollowing, usually starting with a hand or a foot, providing it does not compromise the balance of the figure. I cut with a wire tool, aiming for a spot with minimal detail to repair upon reattachment. Notches are made around the cut so that the pieces can later be matched up to their exact position (figure 7). Various sizes of loop tools are used to dig out...
The details of the fingers and hand are also modelled separately, before being reattached.

Stamp patterns into the surface using upholstery tacks glued to wooden dowels. Use cornstarch as a release.

Cut the appendages with a wire tool when pre-leather hard. Make registration marks on each half.

Hollow out the limbs using trimming tools so the wall is an even thickness, then score the edges and reattach.

After the head is hollowed, cut an access opening in the back for inserting the eyes.

After removing and hollowing the limbs, the torso is ready to be hollowed out.
Cut sections from the torso, hollow out, then reassemble using the registration marks as guides.

Attach the hollowed out limbs, using supports as necessary until the piece firms up.

Add appendages that need to be positioned specifically after all other parts have been joined.

the interior clay until the walls reach a consistent thickness of about ¼ inch. A wooden knife is used to compress the inside walls for added strength.

Each time a section is hollowed, it is wrapped in plastic and placed on a piece of foam to prevent distortion. When two sections are hollowed I score the edges with a homemade tool composed of several sewing needles epoxied to the end of a wooden dowel (figure 8). Slip is applied and the forms are rejoined. Fresh clay is worked into both interior and exterior seams. I try to recreate the markings of the initial building process while disguising the connection.

The arms, legs, and head are removed and re-built piece by piece in this manner. They are then wrapped and laid aside on foam. When hollowing the head, I remove the eyeballs, leaving empty sockets. A section is cut away from the back of the head (figure 9), allowing access to install porcelain eyeballs, post-firing.

Next, hollow out the solid torso (figure 10) and reassemble it in the same manner as the head, hands, and legs (figure 11). Begin by attaching the limbs first (figure 12). Appendages that require specific positioning, like the hands, are added last (figure 13). The attachments are often fragile and limbs are propped with various supports and clay. Cover the entire piece with plastic for several days, unwrapping it a little each day and allowing it to dry evenly.

Next, hollow out the solid torso (figure 10) and reassemble it in the same manner as the head, hands, and legs (figure 11). Begin by attaching the limbs first (figure 12). Appendages that require specific positioning, like the hands, are added last (figure 13). The attachments are often fragile and limbs are propped with various supports and clay. Cover the entire piece with plastic for several days, unwrapping it a little each day and allowing it to dry evenly.
Surface Decoration
My work takes advantage of both ceramic materials and mixed media when creating the confection-referencing surfaces. Along with traditional surface treatments like terra sigillata, glaze, and colored stains, I use paste and resin epoxies, oil paint, acrylic paint, chalk pastels, microfilament, candy sprinkles, paste wax, and other materials as they relate to my concepts.

Fired Finishes
When the figure is nearly bone dry, I apply a coating of white terra sigillata to the legs and terra sigillata colored with pink Mason stain to the upper body (figure 14). The sculpture is bisque fired to cone 06.

After the bisque firing, I prepare several commercial stains with Gerstley borate and paint them in concentrated areas to accentuate the sprigging and stamps (figure 15). Excess stain is removed with a damp sponge. Three brush coats of red glaze are applied to the hair and the piece is fired to cone 03.

For the final firing, a satin matte glaze is mixed with several color variations and sieved through a 100 mesh screen. A few drops of sodium silicate defloculate it and lessen the amount of water necessary to make it flow. This causes the glaze to retain a raised quality when trailed over the form using an ear syringe fitted with an inflating needle (figure 16). Underfiring the glaze to cone 08 allows it to retain a raised, semi-matte quality, similar to icing.

Post-firing Finishes
When the glaze firing is done, I fit the figure with eyeballs. I prefabricate several porcelain eye shapes using Helios Porcelain from Highwater Clays, Inc., fire them separately to cone 7, and attach them postfiring. The contrasting clay bodies and separation of the eyes from the form creates a dramatic and realistic expression. I paint the eyes with oil paints, thinned with linseed oil. The iris color is chosen to match the figure’s red hair, then other highlight colors are added. A needle tool is used to detail the iris by dragging through lighter values of paint and creating highlights.

While the paint is drying, I add resin to selected parts of the figure, coloring it to resemble sugary syrup. Wearing gloves and a respirator that protects against volatile organic fumes, I mix equal parts of resin and hardener, and stir vigorously. A coating is painted over the eyes to protect the oil paint and add luminosity. Fine shavings of chalk pastels can be added to tint the resin a variety of colors. I pour it into the figure’s mouth as well as various indentations formed by the stamps (figure 17). Confectionary sprinkles are embedded into the resin for further decoration (fig-
Trail a satin-matte glaze that’s mixed with a deflocculant to create raised, icing-like line patterns.

Mix epoxy resin with crushed chalk pastels to create the illusion of a sugary syrup.

Add confectionary sprinkles to the resin in the indented stamped area.

Apply epoxy putty around the eyeballs. This will secure them to the eye sockets.

Insert the eyes through the opening in the back of the head and position them appropriately.

Epoxy the access point at the back of the head using epoxy putty.
Magda’s surface detail shows her seamless integration of traditional and multimedia decoration techniques. Disguise the repair using acrylic paint that’s mixed to match the red glaze.

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### Recipes

#### RED EARTHENWARE

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<td>Goldart</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redart</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100%

**PETE PINNELL NO BALL MILL**

**TERRA SIGILLATA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>3 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Ball Clay (OM4)</td>
<td>400 g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mix ingredients in a blender. Add sodium silicate drop by drop until the mix thins. Let sit for 48 hrs. Keep the top 1/3 and discard remaining material.

Pink Sigillata

- 1 cup sigillata
- 3 tsp. Mason Stain (MS) 6020 Pink

---

#### RED ICING GLAZE

**Cone 03**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferro Frit 3124</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kona F-4 Feldspar</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Add:**

- Mason Stain 6026 Lobster 25%

---

#### COLORED STAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stain Type</th>
<th>Mason Stain (MS)</th>
<th>Gerstley Borate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>1 part</td>
<td>10 part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>3 parts</td>
<td>10 part</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Green:**

- MS 6242 Bermuda
- MS 6364 Turquoise Blue
- MS 6026 Lobster
- MS 6020 Pink

---

#### VAL CUSHING TRANSPARENT SATIN GLAZE

**Cone 03 (fired to Cone 06):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferro Frit 3124</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kona F-4 Feldspar</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPK Kaolin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100%

**Add:**

- Green: MS 6242 Bermuda 5%
- Blue: MS 6364 Turquoise Blue 5%
- Yellow: MS 6404 Vanadium 15%

---

After the resin cures overnight, I mix a small amount of two-part East Valley Epoxy putty which can easily be modeled to mimic clay and apply it to the eyes (figure 19). They are carefully inserted into the sockets and positioned appropriately (figure 20). The figure is turned face-down while the epoxy cures, preventing the eyeballs from shifting. This allows me to attach the fired clay cover over the access point at the back of the head with more East Valley Epoxy putty and disguise the repair with acrylic paint (figures 21 and 22).

To complete the sculpture, a coating of paste wax is brushed on to the figure’s flesh. When dry, it can be lightly buffed with a cloth to give the skin a soft sheen.
Touchstone Center for Crafts is Pennsylvania’s only residential art school and is devoted to the art of craft.

**2011 Ceramics Courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Instructor(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 11–15</td>
<td><em>Vessels That Pour</em> with Susan Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 18–22</td>
<td><em>It’s All in the Details: Focusing on Embellishment &amp; Low-Fire Decoration</em> with Christy Culp</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 25–29</td>
<td><em>Structural Ceramic Designs</em> with Brian Kakas</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1–4</td>
<td><em>From My Table to Yours</em> with Yoko Sekino-Bové</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 6–12</td>
<td><em>Wheel-Thrown Pottery</em> with Valda Cox</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 15–21</td>
<td><em>Tile and Mosaics</em> with Karen Howell</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 22–26</td>
<td><em>Naborigama Wood-Firing</em> with Dan Kuhn</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 9–11</td>
<td><em>Finding Finish in your Pottery</em> with Jerry Wagner</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 16–18</td>
<td><em>Primal Pottery in a Contemporary World</em> with Becky Keck</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 23–25</td>
<td><em>Exploring Raku</em> with Joe Sendek</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Touchstone’s ceramics studio boasts gas, electric, naborigama wood, and raku kilns along with “pit-firing” techniques, providing for a variety of clay finishing options. The ceramics studio is situated along a creek and its natural, open-air setting provides students with a distraction-free, inspiring environment.

Nestled in the beautiful Laurel Highlands of Western Pennsylvania, Touchstone hosts hundreds of students every year for weeklong and weekend classes in painting, blacksmithing, metalsmithing, ceramics, glass, sculpture, photography, fiber, mixed media and more.

Visit us on the web at [www.touchstonecrafts.org](http://www.touchstonecrafts.org), find us on Facebook, or call us at 724-329-1370.