



## **ART 260: Ceramics Traditions in Umbria and Central Italy**

### **Course Syllabus**

**Instructor:** Philippa Stannard, MFA

**Credits:** 3

**Contact Hours:** 45

**Prerequisites:** None

**Class Hours:** TBA

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Course Type:** Standard Course

**Lab Fee:** 100 €

### **Course Description**

This is a beginning-level ceramics course that will introduce you to the technical and conceptual sensibilities inherent in clay. You will learn about the ceramic traditions in Italy and Umbria as a springboard for learning various hand-building techniques including coil, slab, and pinch methods, as well as the glazing and firing processes. These include learning about prehistoric pottery in central Italy, Etruscan figurative work, and the Maiolica Method from Deruta, as well as the classic terra cotta and black slip glazed urns that are so popular and are often associated with the Mediterranean. We will explore the ceramics of the region of Umbria first hand, taking trips to archeological museums, visiting local ceramics studios, and viewing work made by local ceramicists using the Maiolica method.

### **Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures**

By the end of the course, students will have:

<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Assessment Measures</b>
learn about the history and traditions of ceramics in Italy and Umbria	Course requirements that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome Quiz, Assignments, Written work
basic understanding of the properties inherent in clay, firing, and glazing	Quiz, Assignments, Critiques
Increase proficiency in different hand-building techniques such as pinch, slab, and coil;	Class participation, Assignments, Critiques

gained an appreciation and greater understanding of a ceramic form and the aesthetics of three-dimensional objects.	Quiz, Written work
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### Course Materials

#### Readings

Course reader available at local copy shop. See “Umbra Institute Course Materials - Textbooks and Readers” handout provided in the orientation folder for more information.

#### Supplies

All clay, glazes and firing costs and museum visits are included in your lab fee.

### Assessment

Ceramic assignments (4)	90%
Quizzes, written work and class participation	10%

### Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	

D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

### Course Requirements

Grades are based on class attendance, class participation, quizzes, the quality and punctuality of turning in written and ceramic assignments, and overall improvement. Assignments are due on the assigned date. For every class that your assignment is late, your grade on the assignment will drop by one letter grade, unless you have a written note from a doctor.

#### *Ceramic assignments (4) (90%)*

Students are requested to finish all assignments given in the assigned time. We will regularly make work that requires drying time between various stages (such as waiting for a pot to be “leather-hard” before applying a handle). This means coming into the studio outside of class to cover or uncover work to control drying and finish work begun earlier. You might even want to consider taking your work home if you will not be coming to the studio for a few days. Your success in developing skills will be directly proportional to the time spent on your work outside of scheduled class times.

You will have three ceramic assignments due during the semester. Each assignment will be graded three times.

1<sup>st</sup> Grading – LEATHER-HARD/CONSTRUCTION – 50% - 70% of each assignment, depending on the assignment. The date your assignment is due, you will be graded based on the quality, time spent, level of challenge, concept/aesthetics, and craftsmanship of your work. You should be at the proper drying stage: LEATHER-HARD. This way, changes can be made if needed without starting your work again from scratch. Once your work is at the bone-dry stage, additions and corrections are almost impossible to do well.

2<sup>nd</sup> Grading – BISQUE – 10% - 15% of each assignment, depending on the assignment.

Your pieces will be graded again based on how well they fired. Did they dry properly (slowly and evenly, otherwise cracks may appear...)? Did they crack during firing? How sound was your construction?

3<sup>rd</sup> Grading – GLAZED/FINAL PRODUCT – 15% - 40% of each assignment, depending on the assignment

You will glaze or decorate your work using different techniques such as slip painting, Maiolica painting, waxing, etc. You will be graded on your piece as a finished product. Did you apply the glaze evenly? How much time and effort did you put into painting and/or finishing your work?

Work will be evaluated in individual and group critiques throughout the semester. Grading will be based on the *quality* of your work, achieved through your productivity, specifically:

- *Level of Challenge:* How far did you go beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment to produce more numerous and challenging pieces? How thoroughly did you explore the required techniques?  
Note: Quantity alone will not raise your grade unless you use the pieces to arrive at a higher quality, such as to work through ideas or improve handling of materials.
- *Concept/Aesthetics:* How original and personal is your solution? How effectively did you use principles of design to communicate your concept? How far did you reach beyond the obvious?

- *Craftsmanship:* Is your construction sound? Did you take time to finish and resolve surfaces, joints, edges, and other details in an appropriate manner for your design?



*Assignment 1: Pinch Technique – Prehistoric Ceramics in Central Italy*

- *Two pots: one beaker, the other an urn (made by attaching two beakers) pinch technique. Pinch, squeeze, turn. Pinch, squeeze, turn...*
- *Dry the pots enough to hold their shape, scrape, and smooth surface with wooden ribs to even out any bumps. Smooth surface with hands, burnish, and finally, rub very fine slip lightly onto the pots to create as smooth as possible of a surface.*
- *When the slip is no longer shiny or tacky to the touch, you may begin to decorate the surface of your pots with our 'prehistoric' tools... shells, bones, combs, string bow stones, etc.*

The earliest Neolithic remains found in Umbria near Lake Trasimeno and date back to 6000 B.C. Pottery production came into being as these primitive people settled and started growing their own food and building structures to live in. The pots with rounded bottoms are generally the earliest forms of prehistoric pottery, as the round bottom could stand up easily on most uneven ground or stones. Flat bottomed pottery is usually an indication of later, more evolved living conditions where they would have had flat surfaces on which to place pots. These pots had functional purposes, mainly for food and drink, and holding the remains of cremations. They were decorated using instruments at hand: bits of flint (triangular indents), combs (dotted lines), bones, shells and stones.

We will visit the Archaeological Museum in Corso Cavour to see some excellent examples of these pots, found near Lake Trasimeno and other nearby parts of Umbria.



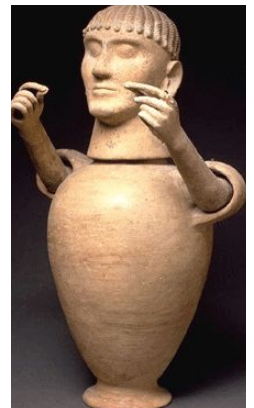
*Assignment 2: Sculptural Coil Technique – Black Figure Vase*

- *One vase made using the coil technique. This could include sculptural elements if desired.*
- *Burnish vase when leather-hard.*
- *Design your motif and decoration, paint with colored slips while leather hard (not bone dry).*

Etruscan vase painting was produced from the 7<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. It was strongly influenced by Greek vase painting.

Make the base of your vase by making a spiral from one coil, pressing the sides of the coils closely together and smoothing inside and out to make a smooth base of uniform thickness. Begin

building up the vertical walls of the pot by adding one coil at a time, carefully joining each coil to the one below it by smoothing with your thumb. Coils should become invisible as you build a smooth and uniform sides. If you do not join your coils carefully, the coils will separate as the clay dries and your pot will fall into a series of clay circles. Forms will be burnished when leather hard, then painted using slip glazes to create color contrast between the terracotta and the different slips that are applied to the surface of the piece. The vases may be waxed after the bisque firing, or glazed with a thin layer of transparent glaze and fired a second time.



*Assignment 3: Slab and Maiolica Technique – Inspired by Deruta*

- *Two forms made using the slab technique.*
- *We will glaze these works using Maiolica method.*



The slab technique is another clay construction method, and has been used for millennia as a method of producing pottery and ceramic objects. We will use this

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method to create two pieces (plate, bowl, etc.). We will then decorate them using traditional methods used in Deruta.

Deruta began producing ceramics around 1300, and is located about 9 miles south of Perugia. Deruta continues to be world famous for their production of ceramics, in particular, using the Maiolica technique.

Maiolica is a type of ceramic decoration that is painted or applied to the piece. Pouncing is often used. Pouncing is a traditional way to transfer patterns onto the unfired white glaze. Charcoal or graphite is rubbed through a series of small holes punched in a paper pattern to transfer the design to an item to be decorated.

Create two forms using the slab method. Dry your work *slowly* to the bone-dry stage and bisque fire. Apply a base white glaze to the bisque piece. You will find or draw a pattern, sized to fit your pieces. Once you have your pattern, place a piece of tracing paper on top of your design, and poke many, many holes through the tracing paper. Place the perforated tracing paper on your glazed piece and gently rub charcoal through the holes to transfer the design. Now you can begin to paint your work, using the charcoal lines as your guide.

*Assignment 4: OPEN. Use a technique of your choice to make something creative. Research different ceramics artists, time periods, or techniques for inspiration. It could be functional, sculptural or a mixture of both! Write a short paper detailing your creative process, inspirations, and techniques used. Project and ideas will be shared with the class.*

#### *Quizzes, written work and class participation (10%)*

You will be given quizzes on your readings and on what we have learned in class. You will also write a short paper on your last assignment. Class participation refers to active participation during class time. This includes studio time, critiques, discussion of readings, keeping the studio clean, clay recycle, help during firing and any other activity during class time.

#### Additional Course Information

##### *Clean up*

You are **REQUIRED** to clean and pick up after yourself. This includes cleaning up your work space, tools, etc. Any clay on the floor should be wiped or swept up. Spilled glazes need to be wiped up, and the lids should be put back on the containers. Store all artwork in designated areas. Leave it cleaner than you found it!

##### *Process*

It is *imperative* that you work on your projects in a timely manner outside of class. Time spent on work outside of class is directly correlated to the quality of your work. Due to the nature of the medium, clay must have time to harden before passing to the next step. Therefore work can not be rushed. Do not expect the first piece you make to be “the one”. Ceramics is very process oriented. Working outside of class time gives you knowledge of the process, even if your work is thrown back into the clay recycle. You should expect to spend at least one hour outside of class for every hour spent in class.

##### *Stages of wet clay*

Greenware – wet, leather hard, and bone dry

Bisque – fired in the kiln for the first time

Glaze – fired for the second time with a glaze or glass like coating on the surface

#### Attendance Policy

Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are allowed two “free” absences, which do not need to be justified.

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Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the students' grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B). If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. It is also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class. Furthermore, times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students' final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

### Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

### Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

## Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

### WEEK 1

*Clay: Origins, Stages, Processes*

Give everyone a piece of clay

Introduction in pairs

Create a likeness of your partner in clay

Introduce partner (along with your figurine of them)

Throwing name game

Go over syllabus

Definition of ceramics: a brief introduction

General information on materials being used in the studio, the kiln, studio rules, common terminology, safety issues, etc.

Examples of different stages of clay: wet, leather-hard, bone-dry

Work ethic in this class

### Readings

*Reading on Cardium pottery/ impressed ware.*

*Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots Field trip: Archeological Museum*

- Name game
- Quiz on reading
- Introduction to prehistoric pottery
- Prehistoric pottery: before the wheel. Analyze function and construction of pieces
- Discussion

To do before next class:

- Visit the Archeological Museum on Corso Cavour to see prehistoric tools and pottery from the surrounding area. Take pictures of pots you are interested in.
- Bring drawings of the shape/form/decoration for your pinch pot..

### WEEK 2

*Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots: Construction*

- Name game
- Assign tools and shelf space
- Correct studio use
- Demonstration: Preparing clay for work: wedging and kneading
- How much water do you need when working with clay?
- Demo: Construction of pinch pots
- Covering work properly
- Make 10, keep 1 or 2
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Pinch pot (beaker). Wrap work appropriately; make sure it does not dry out too much!

*Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots: Refining shape and surface*

- Discussion of work created
- Problem solving
- Demo: Beaker pot form
- Demo: Smoothing the surface with wooden rib and fingers
- Working on Assignment 1
- Covering work appropriately
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Beaker and an urn: surface smoothed with wooden rib and fingers. Should be leather-hard by next class. Cover work appropriately. Your work should be at the leather-hard state for next class.

**WEEK 3**

*Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots: Decorative techniques*

- Introduction to prehistoric tools used to decorate pottery
- Demo: Impressing your pots
- Terra Decantata – Why cover pots with slip? What function does it have? When is it appropriate?
- Demo: Terra Decantata
- Problem solving, smoothing, decorating, and applying terra decantata to our work
- Covering work appropriately
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- ASSIGNMENT 1: Prehistoric inspired pinch pots (2) - one beaker pot, one urn. They should be between leather-hard and bone dry, painted with terra decantata, and decorated using the “prehistoric tools”.

*Prehistoric Pottery and Pinch Pots: Assignment 1 Due*

- Demo: Burnishing and Shining the surface with a soft cloth
- Critique
- Grading
- Covering (or not covering) work appropriately
- Place finished work on the shelf to be fired
- Introduction to Maiolica Technique and ceramic traditions of Italy and Deruta.

Readings:

Etruscan Vase, shape, form, painting, use



#### WEEK 4

##### *The Etruscan Vase: History, Function, Meaning*

- Quiz on reading
- Discussion of form and use
- Discussion of motif function and meaning
- Class discussion
- Introduction to the coil technique

##### To do before next class:

- Visit Archeological Museum on Corso Cavour and take photos of your favorite Etruscan vases, use these for inspiration in your sketches for your vase
- Sketch/draw vase shape form and desired decorative motif.
- Be prepared to discuss the choice and function of your vase shape and the accompanying decorative motif and its meaning.

##### *The Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Creating*

- Viewing photos and sketches of vase shapes and forms
- Demo: creating a vase shape guide
- Demo: making coils, not too long, not too short. 1/4 inch thick, do you need water?
- Demo: Creating the bottom part of your vase
- Working on vases
- Covering (or uncovering) work as needed
- Clean up

##### To do before next class:

- Vase shape should be half completed by next class and covered tightly to prevent drying out.

#### WEEK 5

##### *The Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Building height, increasing and decreasing circumference*

- Demo: paddling and smoothing
- Demo: increasing and decreasing circumference
- Working on vases
- Covering work adequately
- Clean up

##### To do before next class:

- Your vase shape should be completed in height before next class, cover tightly to ensure it doesn't dry out.

*The Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Adding desired decorative and sculptural elements*

- Evaluate vase
- Demo: smoothing and paddling
- Demo: handles and other decorative elements
- Discussion: strength of different clay states; wet, semi-leather hard, leather-hard, semi-bone dry, bone dry and how they can help us (or make it very difficult/impossible) when making and attaching feet and handles

To do before next class:

- Vase shape should be completed, paddled and smoothed, with decorative and sculptural elements by next class and covered appropriately.
- Draw/print out pattern/design to be painted on your vase. It should be the right size to fit on your vase appropriately.

**WEEK 6**

*The Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Evaluating design, transferring it to your vase*

- Demo: Evaluating design in relation to vase form
- Slips – what are they? How are they used? When should they be applied to our work?
- Demo: When and how to transfer design to vase
- Demo: painting with colored slips
- Working on vases

To do before next class:

- Transfer design to vase, start painting design on your vase with colored slips

*The Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Slip painting*

- Evaluate work on vases.
- Discussion of challenges and how you can learn from them
- Working on vases
- Cover work as needed
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Make sure that your vase is drying out slowly and appropriately, continue painting with slips

## WEEK 7

### *The Etruscan Vase and Coil Method: Finishing up*

- Discussion of work, challenges, and solutions.
- Painting vases
- Covering (or uncovering) as needed
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Finish Etruscan vase.

### *Etruscan Vase Due*

- Critique, discussion of work
- Grading Etruscan vase
- Introduction to Maiolica Technique

To do before next class:

- Ensure that vase is drying appropriately while on break.
- Reading on Maiolica Technique
- Visit different Maiolica Ceramic Artists studios:  
*La Bottega del Vasaio*, Via Baglioni 32 Perugia  
*Materia Ceramica*, Via dei Priori 70 Perugia
- Take photos of work that you like, we will discuss them next class

## SEMESTER BREAK

## WEEK 8

### *Maiolica Method and Slab Technique: Construction*

- View photos, discussion of ideas and forms
- Demo: Slab Technique, plates, platters, and bowls
- Orto Sole work
- Demo: Make and attach different kinds of feet to your work
- FYI: Do not burnish these works
- Covering work appropriately
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- Work on slab forms; bowls, plates, and platters.
- I suggest making several slab works for next class (more than required). Slab works are more prone to cracking as they dry, so treat with care!

*Maiolica Method and Slab Technique: Refining construction and adding functional and decorative elements*

- Discussion of work created: problem solving, Q&A
- Demo: Slab Technique variations
- Demo: Making and attaching handles
- Working on Assignment 2
- Orto Sole
- Covering work appropriately
- Clean up

To do before next class:

- I suggest making several slab works for next class (more than required). Slab works are more prone to cracking as they dry, so treat with care!
- Start thinking about your last assignment

**WEEK 9**

Maiolica and Slab Technique

- Working on slab pieces
- problem solving
- Orto Sole
- Covering (or uncovering) work appropriately
- Last assignment ideas?

To do before next class:

- We'll start working on your last assignment next class, have ideas ready! Your piece should be small and be able to dry quickly.
- Assignment 2 due.

Maiolica and Slab Technique: Assignment 2 due

- Critique
- Grading
- Covering (or uncovering) work appropriately
- Placing finished work on the shelf for firing
- Discussion of ideas for last assignment
- Start the construction of your last assignment

To do before next class:

- Working on last assignment, research ideas and inspiration

## WEEK 10

### *Working on Last assignment*

- Working on last assignment
- Discussion of ideas and inspiration
- Discussion and problem solving
- Clean up

### To do before next class:

- Keep in mind that last week for wet clay is next week
- Working on last assignment

### *Working on Last assignment*

- Working on last assignment
- Discussion of ideas and inspiration
- Discussion and problem solving
- Clean up

### To do before next class:

- Keep in mind that last week for wet clay is next week
- Working on last assignment

## WEEK 11

### *Last Assignment due . - NO MORE WET CLAY*

- Critique
- Creating a pattern for your maiolica work with design, pins or needle tools and cardboard

### To do before next class:

- Design should be ready to be pounced on work next class
- Working on last assignment

### *Glazing, Pouncing, and Painting Maiolica work*

- Glazing
- Pouncing
- Painting

## WEEK 12

### *LAST DAY TO WORK. LOADING LAST KILN*

**WEEK 13**

*Final Critiques and Grading*

*Studio Clean up*

**WEEK OF FINAL EXAMS AND SPECIAL ACADEMIC EVENTS**

The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester.