

Notes / Ceramic Studio

IDC, IIT Bombay

Currently

A few students started taking an interest in learning pottery. Ujjwal became an addict of sorts. Shilpa has worked with Angad in Auroville and Sakshi did her internship with Sheetal Vora's aunt - small world! Nirmala Patwardhan was here for a raku workshop. Sandeep Manchekar has been a big help - fabricating a wheel and a gas-kiln for the studio. Bhimji Chauhan has been visiting occasionally. Hanif and Abbas, two young potters from Kumbharwada come for introducing students to table-ware products. Hope to have a gathering of potters from all over, soon! Some of us visited Kavita Gupta's studio at Thane to see how she manages to work from home - she has a loft that houses the wheel and the kiln and clay was stored under the chairs in the living room. Visited the ceramic section in one of the malls and saw rows of very neatly glazed cups. What interests me is not this industrialised efficiencies- though there is a thing or two to learn from that - what interests me is that which is hand crafted. The pottery activity here symbolises that which is very personal.

Brief History

The last of the four studios on the ground floor, the ceramic studio at IDC has had a chequered history. Lined in neat shelves are a set of glazed pots, made during a workshop during the time when Mr Gafoor used to be at IDC. The fact that these pieces are seldom touched but have been on display for years suggests a strange mixture of the reverence accorded to 'art objects' and an indifference to a traditional artistry involved in pot-making. The studio has witnessed greater activity during the times when Mr Gafoor, Mr Bhimji Chauhan, and Ms Vanmala Jain were associated with it. In their absence, pottery has been a fringe activity and the ceramic studio has been used largely for plaster-moulds. Occasionally, there are some exercises in clay as a part of basic design / form courses and for claymation exercises. Pottery workshops have been held at times - years? The campus community has at times used the workshop with clay from the Powai lake for making Ganpati during the Ganpati festival in the autumn semester.

(Few examples of work done from Prof. Rao / any other examples of work done with clay).

Notes on exercises

Exercises in clay lend themselves to the development of imaginative abilities. The ease with which the material lends itself to being shaped and moulded suggests a tremendous potential in its use for developing a feel for three dimensional forms. Working with clay also leads to a quietening of mental processes and as the mind becomes quieter in the process of working the perception of forms gets to be sharper. It is important that after having set some directions for an exercise the instructor brings about a meditative space. Preliminary exercises should allow for getting a familiarity with the material and should be open-ended. Later there can be some goal oriented exercises, though eventually the studio should have an atmosphere that invites personal approaches to working with clay.

Equipment

For pottery, The studio is equipped with two motorized wheels, an electric kiln, a gas kiln, a ball mill, a glaze-mixer. Earthenware are from Kumbharwada. Sandeep Manchekar has been supplying the glazes and stoneware clay.

Recommendations

1. More shelf-space. Reordering the studio.
2. Separate out areas for plaster and clay.
3. Develop 'Post Experience Programs in Ceramics' for graduates.
4. Working towards an understanding of glazes.
5. Initiating sculptural ceramics / murals.
6. Visits to local potters.

Notes

There is something about pots and pottery that is difficult to pin down. To understand this you need to look at the afternoon light falling on freshly baked pots, fresh out of the oven. You might think that it is in those numerous shades of browns but it is not just that. You might say that perhaps the magic is in the nuances of forms and contours of the pots, but it is not just that. There is something in the manner in which clay speaks with your fingers and when your fingers learn the tongues in which clay can speak, you have understood a little of that magic.

The Japanese are full of wisdoms regarding pots and pot-making. The ritual of the tea ceremony and the notions of perfection in imperfection is tinged with the eloquence of shunyata. In India, traditional potter communities still survive; though the skills of the village potter are seldom required. Vessels made of metal and plastic are durable and for those who are impoverished - either materially or spiritually, prefer these. To clean a steel plate is easier than cleaning a ceramic plate or an earthenware pot. Manual skills are associated with lower castes. These are some of the reasons why in many places this traditional ability is not sought after by the youth.

Those who realize the primordial nature of shaping a pot, are willing to undertake the adventure of pottery. For a painter, the understanding of glazes, is a fascinating journey. The metaphors of clay and kiln, fire and earth, become intimate metaphors that bind us to the universe. Kabir, Shoji Hamada, Bernard Leach, Ray Finch, Gurcharan Singh, Nirmala Patwardhan, are known to potters. Not known to potters is the solitary village potter whose head bobs up and down as he rhythmically beats the pot.

In Morbi, in Gujarat, there are automated tile-making machinery that are marvels of the how the human mind can think. Raw clay bodies are washed, filtered and as the water evaporates it leaves behind clay dust. Neat rows of tiles are compressed by hydraulic presses. These are coated with glazes. Patterns are screen-printed mechanically and as the coated tiles move down the conveyer belt, their edges are wiped clean. Using a deceptively simple idea, the tile moving down the belt is rotated through ninety degrees, so that the two other edges can be cleaned as well. These are now ready to go into the kiln. The temperature goes up in stages, as the (text missing).