



"William Blake Self-Portrait"



Lesson #23

Ceramic Self-Portrait as a Famous Artist

Creating ceramic figurative sculpture using slabs and coils

By Cara Moczygmba

Self-portraiture is prevalent in the Art History tradition as many artists discovered that the one model they could always count on was themselves. Rembrandt and Van Gogh are both well-known self-portrait artists, painting hundreds if not thousands of self-portraits during their careers. Although the subject matter may be the same, the painters themselves are quite different; from posture, palette, and painterly textures, to props and symbolism, every painter brings a new vision to the self-portrait.

In ceramics, there have been several artists who have used the subject of self-portraiture, most notably Robert Arneson. In many of his self-portraits he used the style, colors, textures and forms of specific painters to reinterpret two-dimensional art forms as a three-dimensional sculpture.

Lesson Goals and Objectives:

Construct and sculpt a hollow bust out of clay using self to create naturalistic features.

Translate concepts and styles of 2-D artists onto 3-D forms.

Layer underglazes and glazes to create expressive sculptural surfaces.

Standards/Learning:

Meets National Standards 1, 2 and 4

This project is appropriate for advanced middle school, and 9th to 12th grade students.

Art history awareness and research skill development.

Structural problem-solving, building a hollow ceramic form without collapsing.

Supplies:

Clay with Grog such as AMACO® Sculpture and Raku No. 27-M (45029P) or Terra Cotta No. 77-M (45143N)

AMACO® Velvet Underglazes and assorted glazes

14" Plasti-bat (32333M) or wooden board

Banding wheel (11078J)

Scoring tool (11199R), fork or toothed scraper

Brushes

Joining and texture tools

Spray bottle

Plastic to wrap work in progress

Optional Supplies:

AMACO/Brent Slab Roller: SR-14 (22619Y), SR-36 (22622C), SR-20 (22621B), SRC (22667F), Mini SRC (22683B)

Brent® Clay Extruder (22627H) (for making coils of uniform thickness)

Transparent Matt LM-10 glaze (39232N)

Clear Transparent LG-10 glaze (39143R)

Mirror

Background Preparation and Research:

Allow 3-5 class periods for this project with drying and firing time before the final glazing class.

◆ Assist students in selecting an artist to research. Portrait artists are recommended for first projects but advanced students could be further challenged by applying the ideas of non-figurative artists into creating portraits reflecting their styles.

Suggestions for painters include Picasso, Frida Kahlo, Kandinsky, Dali, Goya, Monet, Francis Bacon, and Rembrandt.

◆ Introduce the project with examples of figurative ceramic artists, including: Adrian Arleo, Robert Arneson, Viola Frey, Arthur Gonzalez, Marylou Higgins, Sergei Isupov, Christy Keeney, Anthony Natsoulas, Richard Shaw, Akio Takamori, Noi Volkov, and Patti Warashina.

◆ Each student should distill their chosen painter's conventions and styles into a few words. For example, the elements of Van Gogh's paintings may be summarized by "Texture, Acidic Colors, and Intense Gaze". De Chirico's may be "Line, Architecture and Representative Forms".

◆ Determine desired scale of assignment, whether life-sized, half, etc. (keep in mind that the larger the bust, the more challenging and time-consuming the project).

◆ Sketches of the general form, texture and color should be done on paper with that scale in mind.

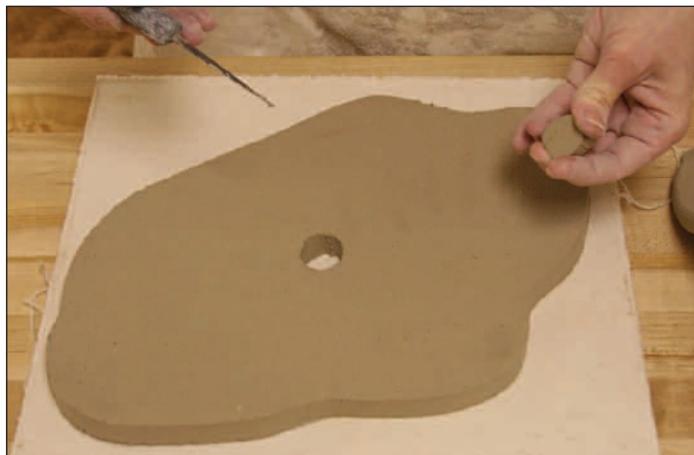
◆ Demonstrate slab and coil-building techniques for building a hollow form with interior supports as necessary.

Instructions:

1. Busts should be constructed with the artists' styles and the preliminary sketches in mind. Each student should use themselves or their classmates as models to insure appropriate form and proportion.

TIP 1: Recommended wall thickness is $\frac{1}{2}$ "- $\frac{3}{4}$ ", depending on the size of the sculpture. (Walls may be slightly thinner when reaching the top of the piece, but extremes of thick and thin should be avoided).

TIP 2: Allow the piece to set up in stages, with the lower areas becoming stiffer while working on the upper layers. Moisten and cover with plastic any areas that are getting too dry (late leatherhard or beginning to lose color). Keep wrapped in plastic between class sessions. To keep top areas of the project moist, wrap the very top portions (or where clay will next be added) with a small strip of soft plastic pressed firmly onto clay to keep air out. Bag the rest as desired.



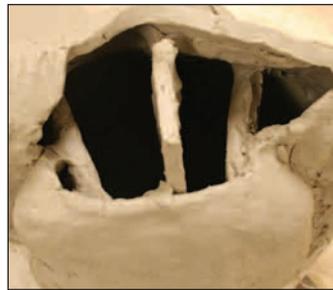
2. Start construction by cutting a flat slab base to the desired contour and size, laying it on a porous board or on a doubled sheet of newspaper. Remind each student to sign their name into the underside of the slab and cut a 1" round hole in its center for air to escape (as it will be difficult to flip the sculpture over after construction begins).



3. After scoring & slipping the edges, place the first strip of clay on top of the base (not around it) for best support. Build the sides of the form up using either slabs or coils, or a combination of both. Slab strips can be cut to the width and shape that is appropriate to the desired form. Always "stitch" or mesh seams together well and put coil along inside of seam for additional strength.



4. Shape the torso by adding slabs or coils and coaxing the walls while supporting with the other hand. "Darts" or cutouts may be created to achieve deeper indentations.



5. To create the shoulders and neck, construct internal structures to help support the weight through construction and firing. Added slab supports should be the same consistency as the rest of the sculpture to avoid stress cracks. Be sure to make holes in any supports which may trap air, or there can be disastrous kiln blow-outs. **Note:** Do not pack the interior with newspaper as this gives very little structural support while building, none while firing, and can shorten the life of electric kiln elements.



6. Build the neck as a tube and attach the chin as a "chevron" tilted up. Let the underside of the chin set up before adding the weight of the head (this would be a good stopping point before the next class).

7. Once the neck has set up enough to support the weight of the head, continue to build up until reaching the hairline. At this point, before enclosing the head, the features should be modeled and sculpted. Begin by sketching the location and shape of the features. To sculpt the eyes, push in at the inner corners using two fingers



while pushing out the bridge of the nose. Push out the eyebrows and nose from the inside. Cut an upside down "T" starting at the top of the nose, and then add a strip of clay to create the desired size and shape. Use modeling tools to finish sculpting the nose, eyes, and mouth adding clay where needed.



8. **Head:** After the features have all been completed, close up the head by building it a little pointier than desired, then seal it up tightly. Gently paddle into shape.

9. Hair is best sculpted as a form, rather than as individual strands (which are likely to break off and look odd). Slab or coil build the shape of the hair, and texture with whichever tools seem appropriate – combs, forks, wood tools, brushes, etc, can all be used to give the hair a naturalistic appearance. Texture the outside of the bust if desired although it is best to texture or add elements while building. If texturing is left until late, the bottom and top will appear different due to the variations in stiffness and consistency of the clay.



10. Velvet Underglazes may be applied to the bust before bisque firing, preferably at the bone dry greenware stage. These can be used as an "under painting" or for final decoration.

11. Allow the completed sculptures to dry slowly and evenly before bisque firing to cone 04. Larger and thicker pieces should be fired more slowly (10-12 hours).

Surface Treatment, Glazing, and Firing

12. After bisque firing, more underglazes and selected glazes can be applied to achieve the desired effect before the final glaze firing. Alternately, the piece could be left with the matt underglaze and clay surface as long as it is not going to be displayed outdoors. Various artists finish their surfaces by applying glazes and color in different thicknesses and techniques so the style of the chosen artist should be kept in mind. To achieve the surfaces shown in this lesson plan, glaze the bisqued pieces as follows:

a) The first step in glazing is to wipe off dust and debris using a clean damp sponge to help prevent glaze crawling. Sponge off all surfaces and do not saturate the piece or rinse it under running water, as it would absorb so much water it would cause the glaze not to stick well.



b) Brush on a thin coating of a dark colored underglaze on the bisqueware and then sponge it off. Sponging leaves some underglaze in the crevices and textural interstices, giving the piece more visual depth and accentuating the texture. For detailing and design work, more underglazes are painted on after this step (as done with the flames, to make a greater contrast).



c) Apply 1-2 coats of a gloss or matt clear glaze and fire to Cone 06-05. (LM-10, AMACO Liquid Matt is recommended as it enhances the underglazes without a shine detracting from their colors).

GLAZING TIP: Colored glaze can be used over some (or all) areas of the piece, as done with the white glaze on the clouds. Keep in mind that wherever one glaze is applied over another, the end result may be unpredictable, and may not look like either of the original glazes.

If the two glazes react badly, they may also run, so any layering for glazes should be nearer the top than the bottom. Also, when layering glazes, the glazes will run together, so this technique is not suitable for areas of color requiring crisp lines.



Variations:

1. If students are particularly drawn to artists who do not paint the figure or portraits, but are perhaps abstract painters — for example, Kandinsky, Pollock, or Monet — encourage them to use the artist, but perhaps incorporate the patterns and paint quality in a sculptural form. If they were to make the painting into a sculpture, how would that be accomplished? Robert Arneson was famous for assigning his students to make a sculptural form from a painting, using all angles and all of the painting.

2. These building and decorating techniques can be used for a wide variety of sculptural forms, and can be used also for creating large-scale vessels.

This lesson plan was written by Cara Moczygemba. Cara Moczygemba graduated with a BA from San Francisco State University, and a MFA in ceramics from California State University Long Beach. She has lived and taught in New Orleans, San Diego, and Indianapolis. Currently she is a ceramics instructor at the Indianapolis Art Center.

This is one lesson in a series of art plans for elementary and secondary programs using American Art Clay Co., Inc. products. Successful lessons will be considered for future publication. Send your ideas and slides or digital photos to Jeff Sandoe, Director of Education Training, American Art Clay Co., Inc., 6060 Guion Road, Indianapolis, IN 46254.

