Clay and Basket Fusion

Combine a fired clay pot with reeds to create a sculptural vessel that fuses two ancient techniques!

(art + history)

Fired clay is one of the few materials on earth that does not change with time, and clay has always been an abundant resource. The earliest function of clay was to line baskets as a way to waterproof them. Baskets were often used to carry water to crops, and the clay lining prevented leakage. It is thought that once these clay-lined baskets were used for their intended purpose, they were set aside and eventually dried out. The loss of moisture caused the shape to shrink and separate from the sides of the basket. When the clay, now shaped like a pot, was removed, it retained the basket pattern and, eventually, early men and women discovered that they could harden the molded pottery in hot ashes and make sturdy containers. These pots were undecorated and expendable — they were created simply as a means to transport liquids, and sometimes were used only once.

Heating of the clay pieces, and thus, the creation of a piece of fired pottery, may have been discovered when heating a clay-lined basket of food. Another theory is that a clay-lined basket may have accidentally fallen into the fire. However it occurred, the discovery that fire could make clay objects more permanent was the birth of the art of ceramics.

What if we combine fired clay and basket-making to make a modern vessel form? The base for the vessel will be made to accommodate the addition of reeds, and a fusion of pot and basket is possible! Start with a base that is handbuilt or thrown, and punch a few holes. Once fired, reeds are attached and a basket is woven onto the top.

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View examples of ancient clay-lined baskets.
2. Provide each student with 2 lbs of clay for handbuilding or throwing on the wheel.

Materials (required)

Blick Stoneware Clay, 50 lb (30517-1050); share two across class

Kemper Hole Cutter, 1/2" (30369-4012); share five across class

Natural Reed for Basketmaking, Round Reed, #4, 1/8", 511 ft (60961-1316); share one coil across class

Waxed Thread (63012-); share one spool across class

Tonic Studios Arts & Crafts Plus Scissors, (57079-1005); share five across class

Optional Materials

Trait-Tex Budget Yarn Pack (65237-1001)

Darice Hemp Twine (62985-)

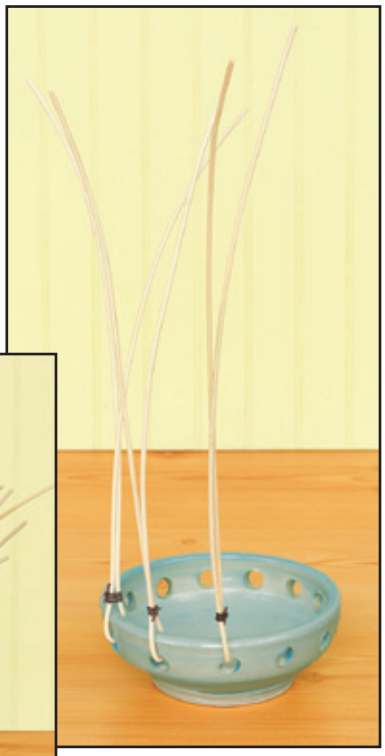
Rexlace Britelace (61533-)

Natural Reed for Basketmaking, Flat Reed (60961-)

Coiling Core, 1/4" (60962-1325)

Step 1: *Make a handbuilt or thrown base with holes punched at the rim. Fire.*

Step 2: *Add reed by threading it through the holes. Secure by tying with linen thread.*



Step 3: *Weave the sides of the basket using yarn, hemp, wire, or other materials.*

Process

1. Make the clay base for the vessel. Using clay, either throw or handbuild a base about 6–7" in diameter. Make a bowl or cylinder form. Handbuilding methods could include coil building, pinching, slab building, or slump molding.
2. At the rim of the base, use a Kemper 1/2" hole punching tool to punch holes all the way around the form. The holes should be at least 1/2" from the top of the rim, spaced approximately an inch apart. An odd number of holes in needed for the weaving process.
3. Bisque and glaze fire the base. The base can be glazed, stained, or painted after the bisque firing. Since this vessel will not be holding food, any surface treatment can be used in the final step.
4. Cut enough pieces of reed for one to go through each hole in the base. Cut reed twice the length of the desired height of the finished vessel. If the reed element of the vessel should be 10" tall, cut the reed into 20" pieces. Soak the reed for at least 30 minutes, or overnight.
5. Begin adding reed to the fired base. Insert a piece of reed through a hole in the base. Bend the reed when it's half-way through so that both ends point up. Using a piece of waxed linen thread, tie the two sides of the reed together just above the rim of the base. Wrap the linen thread around the reed a few times, and tie. Repeat for all the pieces of reed.
6. Now, begin weaving the basket! Use yarn, lanyard material, hemp, or even soft wire to weave the side of the basket form. Leave the reeds untrimmed at the top, or cut them into a uniform height. This vessel is a sculptural celebration of two ancient crafts "woven" into one!

National Core Arts Standards Visual Arts

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relates artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.