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By Hand- Skill Development And Transformative Discovery Of Clay Sculpture

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By Hand - Skill and Transformative Discovery of Clay Sculpture

by

Meredith MacKeigan

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 9, 2011

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies
Abstract of Project

This project is a documentation of the insights and learning of a new skill and its impact on perceptions of personal creativity. The skill development discovery process is supported through professional mentorship and skill based workshops and independent study. Personal learning and reflection will be informed through personalized narratives and contextualized experience in relation to the environment, selected reading and interactions with other attendees of the workshops. The experiential process of the project will be documented through the production of a personal creative journal with digital assets integrated into a public showing of the creative product and process for final presentation.
Buffalo State College
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Dates of Approval:

Dr. Cyndi Burnett
Assistant Professor

Meredith MacKeigan
Student
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my husband and children for their generosity of time, spirit and encouragement in facilitating my study of creativity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed to the success of this project. I would especially like to thank Ms. Susan Low-Beer for sharing her studio and generous spirit throughout her teaching workshops. Her interest and enthusiasm contributed greatly to the lifecycle of the project, providing ongoing encouragement and curiosity of the media, her insight and student community to a newcomer.

I would also like to mention the ongoing support and guidance by my supervising faculty member, Dr. Cyndi Burnett. She provided encouragement and focus, which were greatly appreciated throughout the duration of this project. A special mention goes to my sounding board partners, Melanie Rothschild and Ainhoa Otaegi for their ongoing feedback and support.
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Section One: Purpose and description of project

This project is designed to focus on the development of introductory skills in clay sculpture and proficiency in working with the materials and understanding the unique qualities of the medium. This will be facilitated through a series of expert guided two-day workshops in the studio of recognized artist and sculptor, Susan Low-Beer. Ms. Low-Beer has a distinguished career as an arts educator and as an international artist exhibiting in several media. Her body of sculptural work ranges from small intimate pieces to large-scale installation work that fully involves and engages the viewer on multiple aesthetic and subject matter levels.

The clay workshops cover basic techniques, processes and tools including: materials, preparation, hand-building techniques and an overview of glazing and kiln firing techniques and studio facility safety requirements. The workshops will include traditional life models for gestural figure work and skill development, as to how human proportions are translated to the clay medium by way of movement and three-dimensional transference. Clay portraiture will be explored with live models to focus attention of the human body to a specific area to explore the complexity of representation in three-dimensional form. Additional workshops including hand-building techniques for independent free form clay work with access to live figure models, will also be included.

Rationale for Selection

E. Paul Torrance’s (1983) twenty-two year longitudinal study on creativity confirmed an insight that many of us sense but rarely follow. To live, create and accomplish a life that employs one’s creativity to the fullest, one needs to do what you
love and follow your passion. This sounds simple, but is most likely one of the hardest gifts we can offer ourselves. Torrance’s research described the impact of loving what one does and having a strong and powerful vision of the future as being more indicative of future success than one might have imagined (pp. 73 - 77). Torrance’s research further indicates that executing on creative passion will be a stronger indicator of success than past experience and activities (p. 73).

The journey to this project stems from a personal desire and creative wish. As a teenager I wanted to be a potter and ceramic artist who used clay as a sculptural medium. As a young woman, I saw the work of Ms. Low-Beer in a magazine that showcased private and public collections of art. I was taken with the sculptural forms of her work and dreamt of creating sculptural works with visual impact, weight and resonance with a viewer. I was deeply interested in how the textural nature of clay and its many forms could take on multiple appearances in weight and style. Ms. Low-Beer’s work specifically had an ability to show complex layers of narrative through the execution of human and abstracted form, subject matter and ceramic glaze execution. Her work has remained within my personal visual library for many years and has helped shape an avid interest in clay as a sculptural medium. The desire to learn and create in this medium has been a constant desire, however I chose to pursue alternative creative education and media, thinking they were more practical and transferable to commercialized opportunities. I have felt in recent years that I had missed my chance; it was too late to introduce a new aesthetic medium with any proficiency into my life. In short, if I was interested, I should have pursued this wish at an earlier age. For E. Paul Torrance’s sake, I needed to change my perspective. Independent of age, skill development of clay sculpture offers a starting point from
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which the reflective process of learning a new skill can connect creative insights into other areas of my personal and professional life.

My project will test my assumptions, challenge my intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1989) and allow me to explore an area of interest or ‘love’ and experience the diversity of creative identity (Amabile, 1989). I will approach the process with the understanding that I will need to acknowledge, and actively engage in the experience in order to profit from the gift of change and channel the learning from the experience to open new pathways between the head and heart of creativity (Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2007).
Section Two: Literature and resources

Introduction
To compliment the skill development experience, I read a series of books and scholarly articles that explored motivation, process and experience of beginning creative projects. Some of the articles investigated the experiences and methods used by other artists to begin creative engagements and describe the challenges associated with sustaining intention and commitment throughout a project. Others looked at the courage and intrinsic motivation required to grow, explore and creatively evolve your creative process, content and self. I was particularly interested in how the concept of play might be woven into the process of learning a new skill while adhering to a predetermined process for guidance and support. I viewed the literature resource writings as references points within a larger creative process of skill development that supported and acted as stimulus to challenge perspectives throughout the experience. The literature assisted in grounding personal reflections of the experience in new ways. I wanted to review some of the theorists and published works around creative courage, motivation, play and process. I selected several authors and theorists but a few stand out and are worth noting in this phase of development.

Courage
Rollo May’s (1975), The Courage to Create, presents a historical and theoretical overview of creative barriers and psychological impediments to creativity. May (1975) probed and identified the process of creative acts and unearthed key attributes of creative courage required for creativity. Through historic creative accounts and psychological research, he contextualized the challenges and fears individuals and groups face when approaching creative acts. May probes deeply into our psyches and extracts the salient and thoughtful insights from our culture and the
individual’s perceptions of creativity. The description of the creative encounter (p.44), what May defines as the second element in the creative act, speaks to the absorption one feels when one has connected in a meaningful way or wholly involved in the act of creativity. He aligns it to the experience children feel at play when fully engaged and describes it as an intense powerful heightened state of consciousness:

But what the artist or creative scientist feels is not anxiety or fear; it is joy. I use the word in contrast to happiness or pleasure. The artist, at the moment of creating, does not experience gratification or satisfaction (though this may be the case later, after he or she has highball or pipe in the evening. Rather, it is joy, joy defined as the emotion that goes with heightened consciousness, the mood that accompanies the experience of actualizing one’s own potentialities. (p. 45)

May describes this state of consciousness as a catalyst to impact and actualize our own potential (p. 45). The theme of encounter is continued and further explored by way of intensity and passion and it informs purpose (p.46) and the many forms of creativity (p. 87). The limitations of creativity are explored in our terms of personal and cultural subjective and objective perceptions and how they are woven into our pre-conceived ideas of creativity, form and impact imagination (p.p. 117 - 123).

Play

I reviewed the transcripts and video of two prominent speakers engaged in professional dialogue around the topic of play. Tim Brown, a principle within the design company Ideo, and Dr. Stuart Brown, well known researcher on play from the National Institute of Play in California spoke at the TED conferences in 2008 and 2009 respectively

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I have read previous books by the authors. Tim Brown on design thinking (2009) and Stuart Brown (1998) on the impact of play and lack of play within our adult culture. Both speakers explore the idea of play and its relationship to creativity in their talks and identify how play can be interwoven into our corporate cultures for increased creativity. Stuart Brown specifically looks at how enterprise might actively develop a ‘state of play’ in their organizations to be a transformative force and provide a window to innovation (Brown, 2009). Tim Brown makes his topic personal by having audience members perform divergent activities and experience their own pre-conceptions of play. He discusses how play, when used within a safe environment, provides freedom from the judgment of peers. If we can translate the essence of play into our work environments as adults, we could extend ourselves the security to take risks, which assist us in pursuing creative risk (Brown, 2008). Similar to the ground rules of Creative Problem Solving (CPS) (Parnes, 1991), play needs a trusted environment to support risk taking and benefits from divergent activity to try new possibilities and solutions within the problem opportunity. Both authors refer to the need to encourage play within our lives as adults. Brown (2009) describes adults as having lost our sense and priority to play. Stuart Brown also views play as a practical skill, which allows for curiosity and exploration. Learning the cognitive benefits of play helps position and builds authority for its prevalence in our everyday lives. I especially appreciated the ideas of creating symbols of play for ourselves and our organizations and how these symbols could assist us in leveraging and positively impacting skill development and professional development and personal lives (Brown, 2008).
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**Process**

Twyla Tharp’s (2003), *The Creative Habit* is a book that helps demystify the creative process. Her dedication to her craft and commitment to creativity are described to help connect the reader to the process and habitual activities and routines required to enable creativity. I appreciated the descriptions that provided insight into her personal process but captured the ambitious nature of any individual determined to continuing their path towards creative exploration. She writes about the fear of beginning a project and provides practical tips on how to break down personal barriers and fear of judgment. She provides guidance through a steady habit of practice exercises where one works toward breaking down self imposed barriers. I appreciated her description of looking for inspiration and subject matter in many places. *Scratching* (p. 98) is her term for this process. Scratching is the process that supports a heightened awareness and perspectives that provide new vantage points into one’s environment and everyday experiences. Her practical advice and exercises for idea incubation speak to finding inspiration in new ways and thinking about one’s surroundings as untapped opportunity for inspiration. Tharp’s routine to building creative habits supports a disciplined approach in leveraging our skills and interest into personal creative power (Osborn, 1948). By opening ourselves up to seeing things in new ways and being dedicated to the craft, we allow ourselves to hone in on opportunity when it enters our peripheral view, by making it a habit. “When it all comes together, a creative life has the nourishing power we normally associate with food, love, and faith” (Tharp, 2003, p. 243).

**Motivation**

Trying to understand my own motivation for skill development in clay sculpture made me revisit the theories of Teresa Amabile. Specifically, I wanted to
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look at intrinsic motivation and its role within creativity in *Growing up Creative* (Amabile, 2007). *Growing up Creative* provides an overview of Amabile’s theory of ‘the creativity intersection’ (p. 63) and the role intrinsic motivation plays as a principle of creativity (p. 54). I felt it would be important to reflect on creative motivation and its relationship to skill development and the role of self-determination (p. 46) when creating new domain expertise. Amabile’s ingredients of creativity (2007) include: skill in the domain, creative working and thinking skills, and intrinsic motivation for creativity can be applied to any creative endeavor. The rewards of finding this personal intersection can be creatively rich. The book provides actual scripts and exercises to try with your children and tools to rethink your perspective on inspiration for your personal approach to creativity at any age.
Section Three: Process plan

Attached is the timeline used to support my efforts and provide guideposts during my learning process. I used these guideposts throughout my process and in some cases spent more than the originally allocated time to accomplish the identified tasks. I referenced and referred back to these for time management purposes and identification of cross-pollination activities for efficiencies until the completion of the project.

**Project Timeline:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 5 - 15</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research of skill development opportunity and instruction. Identification of classes and instructors / solicitation and communication requests / registration /</td>
<td>7 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 24 - 31</td>
<td>Concept Paper Draft / Final</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research literature / Ideation and CPS / Written draft development</td>
<td>15 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan, February, March, April, May</td>
<td>Sounding Board Partners - Key Connections / Feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly sessions - combination email &amp; skype - duration of project ( 3 - 4 hours / month ) Provide feedback / reviews</td>
<td>9 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 5 - March 6</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>30 hrs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Skill Development Workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan - April</td>
<td>Clay Sculpture Workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Figure Model 10 hrs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>January 8 &amp; 9</td>
<td>The Figure 10 hrs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>Portrait 10 hrs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 12 &amp; 13</td>
<td>Free Form / Handbuilding 10 hrs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Model / Free Form 10 hrs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>20 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 12 - April 2</td>
<td>Development of hand building techniques described by instructor with support from published texts</td>
<td>9 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work will be brought to free form class for</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre &amp; Post Workshop Documentation</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td><strong>February 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Jan 7 &amp; 10</strong></td>
<td>Capture technical notes and reflections</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 hr</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>February 4 &amp; 7</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 hr</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>March 11 &amp; 14</strong></td>
<td>Capture technical notes and reflections</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>April 1 &amp; 4</strong></td>
<td>Capture technical notes and reflections</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Identification of Public Space for Display &amp; Booking arrangements</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordination of location / logistic of display set up and presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 - 2 hrs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of short survey to attendees for distribution and collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.5 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation preparation and delivery - Presentation might include PowerPoint and physical diary / digital diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 hrs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 2</strong></td>
<td>Angel upload of digital documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.25</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>May 3 - 9th</strong></td>
<td>Final edits and preparation for electronic submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 hrs</td>
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| total                    | 187.25                                                      |
Section Four: Product and outcomes

Workshop Overview

My entry into developing a new skill in clay sculpture was through a series of weekend workshops. The sessions were a wonderful way to be introduced to clay and its sculptural application.

The format of the two day workshops was one of the full day sessions, allowing each student to be immersed in identifying and understanding the principles and properties of clay for sculptural development. The sessions provided focused attention on the experience of working with the clay as a medium and experience its changing physical properties over the course of a day. Students were able to identify and learn when and how differing techniques might be applied to the work to best suit the changing properties of the clay in time such as; carving, drawing, stamping, adding to the sculpture volume, reworking areas or affixing pieces. The very nature of this hands-on medium forced the students to learn by doing and experimenting.

This was an interesting aspect of the physicality of this learning. Each person grew with expertise as they responded to the development of their ideas as they worked with the clay throughout the day.

The workshop sessions were designed to support experiential learning by the students through direct material demonstrations and independent projects. Students learned at their own pace and were supported by instructional segments and individual one on one coaching. Group discussion and demonstrations were offered at key learning points throughout the day to help with overall methodology or approaches of workshop themes. Each student’s individual work and progress was discussed directly with the instructor to identify new techniques with suggestions on how to improve the
form. Students had access to a range of sculpture supplies and tools with group and individual demonstrations on implementation and technique.

**Workshop 1: Figure model**

**Orientation**

Coming to my first workshop, I didn’t know what to expect. The studio and class format accommodated twelve to fourteen students. Many of the attendees had been longstanding members of the workshops and were familiar with the format for the weekend sessions. The environment was casual yet focused. Each student was there to pursue his or her work and there was vibrant and wonderful energy that filled the studio. The environment itself was inspirational as many of the walls showcased the work of our instructor. The studio surroundings helped demystify the sculpture and firing processes by seeing pieces at differing stages in their development to final product.

**Process and Challenges: Gestural exercises and sculpture activity**

The day started with some relaxation breathing techniques to help bring focus to the day’s activity and set the tone of the work environment. An overview was provided for those new to the figure model workshop with a quick lesson on the gestural exercise. Objectives were outlined for working with the figure explaining what to look, and look out-for, in beginning our sculptures. This gesture sculpture started out using a smaller and more manageable amount of clay. Although some students worked in abstract modes, most students were there to learn and improve skills of representation and enhance their capability in seeing the form in new ways.

I was still surprised how my ‘view’ and perspective in rendering the form changed when working in clay compared to my painting and drawing experience. The
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medium forced me to rethink my understanding of creating a scene’s perspective in 2D, and its creation in the 3D space required you to experience the view from different vantage points. Moving around and seeing the subject from different angles helped me you understand the nuances of the form and volume in new ways. This process was very different from traditional two-dimensional artwork as one typically deconstructs the volume into forms and shapes from a single view or perspective. Just when I thought I had captured the moment and perspective in clay, the model needed to be rotated and the sculpture no longer represented the scene in the new view. I realized I missed important information in this rotation or not seen the subject fully until turned and a new perspective was revealed. I enhanced my ability to look for information and tried to anticipate the change in perspective so I would be ready to make the necessary corrections to the work effort when the model turned.

There was a heightened immediacy with the medium’s response and this was one of the major differences from other artistic methods such as drawing and painting. I would almost say that clay has a natural instinctive forgiveness in its properties with the fluidity and responsiveness in the creator’s hand to change form and weight quickly. My experience with other media such as painting and drawing is that one has to bring that sense of forgiveness independent of the media and instill it in one’s own process with the media. With clay, it felt more innate to the medium and creative process. I also felt the speed at which the clay could be altered or modified helped reduce internal self-imposed barriers such as self-criticism that can inhibit creativity. There wasn’t enough time to worry whether I was doing it correctly. It is necessary to work quickly to support the subtleness of the soft clay phase and work quickly to move and alter the clay to catch up with the visual information and interpret what is being seen and sensed through touch. There was also a sense of prolonged freedom
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and playfulness in making the alterations quickly and in many cases effortlessly. The challenges with the medium became more evident as you worked towards finer detail or deliberate efforts of representational executions. The gestural exercises were an excellent way to warm up to get into this mindset of open possibilities clay carries inside it.

Product

I was pleased with my final output of the figurative workshop. I produced two gesture sculptures and one final product. The clay shrinks 15% post firing and this change in size was dramatic and a surprise the first time. Overall, I was pleased and I look at the final product as an expression of the phases of development and process of making the piece. I spoke with the model during the session and although I know it is not a true representation, there is a connection to the spirit and mood of the pose from the day and that day’s story. It represents my own learning story and lessons that reached beyond the physical object.

Figure 1 - Workshop 1 non-fired figure sculpture
Workshop 2: Portraiture

The portraiture workshop had a similar format and approach to the figure workshop. We started the day with warm up exercises and gesture activities. The difference in working on a specific area of the body was challenging. We worked from a similar approach as the figurative workshop, general to specific. It was difficult to avoid creating an idealized image of the head because we all possess a familiarity and preconceived idea of placement of facial features. I found the instruction and physical description of the visual proportions and weighting of this workshop immensely helpful. Our teacher provided physical descriptions of the proportions through easy to remember placement and cupping of hands to help reinforce dimensions of the human head. I was immensely challenged as this creation of a likeness was the intention and drove the sense of success. I found it particularly interesting observing the work of the other students as we progressed through the day and seeing how they all captured element of the model’s likeness, but in differing ways.

The portraiture workshops provided an authentic experience of feeling and sensing the shape of the form. I think our personal knowledge of the size and proportions of our facial features and skull allows us to intimately feel and evaluate the experience in a different way from the full figure exercise. This familiarity of the form provided a sense of comfort, however at the same time came with pre-conceived ideas of shape and form to that of the model in front of us. This relationship between shape and volume of what I thought it should look like and what it wound up looking like were not necessarily the same. The exercise was however incredibly rewarding because it helped reinforce the idea of new perspectives and approaching problems from new perspectives.
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Figure 2 - Workshop 2 non-fired portraiture sculpture

Workshop 3: Free form

Warm Up Exercise: Five balls

This was an interesting workshop as there was no model to work with or reference from during the two-day session. We could work in any direction and were provided a launch pad to inspiration and sourcing a theme through a warm up exercise. Each student created five small balls of clay. We were to choose an object from a box of found items in nature (shells, leaves, twigs, rocks etc.). From that one object, we each had to choose an aspect of that item that could help inform our piece. It could be the size, shape, pattern, or link to other ideas. It was an exercise of forced connections that allowed students to quietly shape thoughts through a divergent exercise. As we progressed, each ball was informed from the previous ball and the concept explored more fully. At the completion of the fifth ball and work, each student looked back on their work and assessed if there was anything they wanted to
explore deeper. I liked this exercise and was comfortable in its proximity to other creative problem solving (Osborn, Parnes, 1991) divergent activities. My extended piece for this workshop was informed from the exercise and captured the themes of shelter and belonging.

![Figure 3 - Workshop 3 non-fired free form sculpture](image)

**Workshop 4: Model and free form**

This was an interesting mix. We had access to a model for the first day and worked free form for the second day. Due to an extenuating circumstance I missed the first two hours of class and therefore worked quickly to catch up. I was much more comfortable heading into the model’s pose, but at the same time it was challenging due to the angles. As we only had the model for one-day, I tried to capture the essence of the pose and see where it might help lead me on day two. Day two leveraged the five ball forced connections exercise, however this time it was informed with directed and self-directed connections. At the end of the series I chose to rework the figurative piece from the previous day and create a more abstract sculptural piece.

The workshops and independent work at home have produced not necessarily a large volume of work, but the work has been incredibly informative of the process
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and descriptive of the skill development. Each piece is a reminder of the excitement and challenges of the day and how I looked to and saw with my hands in a new way.

Figure 4 - Workshop 4 non-fired forced connections sample exercise pieces and figure in progress.
Section Five: Key learnings

There was a moment in my first weekend workshop on day two, where I had what E. Paul Torrance (1983) discussed in his article “the importance of falling in love with something” with a strong image of the future. I was moving clay around, focused on capturing the likeness of the model when I paused and said to myself “I love this”. In that moment of developing a new skill, I experienced an immediate connection to the medium and the pure pleasure and intellectual challenge of working with the clay. I was deep in concentration and unaware of time. I was suspended in delight; I was in Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). That was the experience I set out looking for when I started my journey with learning how to work in clay sculpture.

Process: The power of experiential learning

The workshop experiences delivered on one of the core learning objectives I had set out in my preliminary planning of the Master’s project. I was looking to gain an introduction and understanding of the clay medium, its techniques and tools. Through this experience, I not only gained an awareness of the medium’s properties, but I was transformed by the medium itself. I have experienced an intensity and connection to the media and have experienced first hand the power of intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1989) in deepening one’s area of acquired skill. Those moments of suspended time and enjoyment reinforce the idea when you find something that captures your attention and interest, learning can easily be transformed into focused play. The clay’s malleable properties removed many creative barriers and allowed me to reconnect to the spirit of play. Stuart Brown, psychiatrist and play researcher speaks about the importance of object play in his 2008 Ted Talk,
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http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_its_vital.html. From Brown’s (Brown, S. 2008) transcript, he describes object play as a “fundamental part of being playful…the manipulation of objects, is the hand in search of a brain. The brain is in search of a hand and play is the medium in which those two are linked in the best way.” My experience with clay resembles this with the connection between the hand and creative heart.

**Content: An open and readiness to change**

One of the many rewards in working with clay was its ability to shape and form your own ideas in multiple directions. From flat stamped tiles to full figure sculpture, the product is informed by our extended senses of touch, sight and imagination. When you squish it up it doesn’t mock you, it becomes comfortable again in the warmth of your hands and accepts our frustration with a playful readiness to try again. There is a level of comfort to restart without the baggage of failure.

I engaged in a wonderful conversation with one of the other students in the workshop to discuss and share my ideas and thoughts around the natural forgiveness of the medium and how clay has an ability to help ready an individual for change with its inherent characteristics. We discussed the idea of the clay’s natural fluidity and how working with it can help prepare you for the fluidity found in life. It can help you gain strength and appreciation at how quickly challenges present themselves. But with a deep understanding of the mediums ability to change and evolve, these characteristics feel supportive and non-threatening. This experience with clay can assist in developing a mindset of welcoming change and its ability to find new forms with guidance.
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Gaining domain knowledge and confidence

As I returned to each new workshop, I was surprised at how my anticipation of the event changed from curiosity about the environment and the how of the day’s technique to a focus on the what or content of the experience. Sounds simple or expected, but in the mind frame of developing a new skill, it was important to be aware of this shift in focus. With an increasing comfort with the media, I was able to move outside of the basic skill development and procedural focus to explore more imaginative opportunities with the clay. Medium proficiency is in the future but the experience was a great instructor in the stages of learning and the benefits of creating a welcoming environment for the student to define their own pace. By being aware of one’s experience in developing a new skill, one gains a renewed appreciation of the student’s journey. It has heightened my awareness of the role of orientation within the learning environment and how the learning process must be accompanied with patience and wonder from both the student and the teacher.

Experience: The power of community

One of the unknown benefits of the workshops was the camaraderie and inspiration from the larger community of students. The dialogue support and excitement about the transformative qualities of working with clay. I was inspired by the other students varied experiences and their work.
Section Six: Conclusion

I found my creative intersection (Amabile, 2007), that space between intrinsic motivation, skill and domain. I was focused on the task and ready to take it all in from technique to results, I was alive in the moment and the process. Developing a new skill has been rewarding and has taught me to be more mindful of the power of intrinsic motivation and identifying where and when this can be applied to help inform innovation and creativity.

Torrance (1983) wrote about the importance of finding identity in the search for what you love to enable creativity to the fullest. This search can take many forms. The narravitist construction of identity can be expressed as the ability “to shape an identity for ourselves by taking over the social interpretation in our active lives and knitting them together in a unique life story” (Guignon, 2004, pp. 127). As I reflect on the community, and shared stories, this is a new chapter in my personal narrative. The retelling of this chapter of creative expression will shape and guide my attitude towards creativity in the future.

The experience was meaningful and one that will continue to unfold. I see myself continuing to develop skills working with clay and developing a fuller understanding and appreciation for the medium. Its core is one of possibility and opportunity. This inspires me to achieve a heightened level of fluidness and malleability as I continue to challenge my creative-self.
References


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OF CLAY SCULPTURE

_Innovation Processes_. Buffalo, New York: Creative Education Foundation Press,
133-154.


Simon & Schuster.

Torrance, P. E. (1983). The importance of falling in love with 'something'. _The
creative child and adult quarterly, 8_(2), 72-78._
Appendices

Appendix A - Workshop 1 - The Figure Model
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE

Workshop 1: Figure Model Extended Pose

Workshop 1 - Figure Model Fired Sculpture
Appendix B - Workshop 2 - Portraiture
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE

Appendix C - Workshop 3 - Free Form

Workshop 3 - Free Form

Workshop 3 - Free Form
Five ball divergent exercise
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE
Appendix D - Workshop 4 - Model an Free Form
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE

Workshop 4 - Model and Free Form
Five Balls Forced Connections Exercise

Workshop 4 - Model and Free Form
BY HAND - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOVERY OF CLAY SCULPTURE

Workshop 4 - Free Form Work in Progress
Appendix E- Concept Paper

By hand - the development and discovery of a new skill in clay sculpture reflecting the head and heart of creativity

Section One: Purpose and description of project- clay sculpture
I will be focusing on learning and developing introductory proficiency in the area of clay sculpture. This will be facilitated through a series of expert guided two-day workshops in the studio of recognized artist and sculptor, Susan Low-Beer. Ms. Low-Beer has a distinguished career as an arts educator and as an international artist exhibiting in several mediums. Her body of sculptural work includes small intimate pieces to large-scale installation work that fully involve and engage the viewer on multiple aesthetic and subject matter levels.

The clay workshops cover basic techniques, processes and tools including: materials, preparation, studio facility safety requirements, hand-building techniques and an overview of glazing and kiln firing techniques. The workshops will include working with a traditional life models for gesture and figure proportions and portrait models for the workshop on portraiture. Additional workshops will include hand-building techniques for independent free form clay sculpture and access to live models.

Rationale for Selection
E. Paul Torrance’s (1983) twenty-two year longitudinal study on creativity confirmed an insight that many of us sense but rarely follow. To live, create and accomplish a life that employs one’s creativity to the fullest, one needs to do what you love and follow your passion. Sounds simple, but is most likely one of the hardest gifts we can offer ourselves. Torrance’s (pp. 73 - 77) research describes the impact of
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loving what you do and having a strong and powerful vision of the future as being more indicative of future success than you might have imagined. Torrance’s (p. 73) research indicates that it is a stronger indicator of success than past experience and activities. As a teenager I wanted to be a potter and ceramic artist that used clay as a sculptural medium. I saw the work of Ms. Low-Beer’s as a young woman and dreamt of creating these types of sculptural works. Her work has stayed with me throughout my years and interest in clay. The desire to learn and create in this medium has been a constant but I have felt that perhaps it was too late in life to start. For E. Paul Torrance’s sake, I need to change my perspective. This can be the starting point from which the reflective process of learning a new skill can connect insights into other areas of my personal and professional life. My project will test my assumptions, challenge my intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1989) and allow me to explore an area of interest or ‘love’ and experience the diversity of creative identity (Amabile, 1989). I will approach the process with the understanding that I will need to acknowledge, and actively engage in the experience in order to profit from the gift of change and channel the learning from the experience to open new pathways between the head and heart of creativity (Puccio, Murdock and Mance, 2007).
Section Two: Literature and resources

To compliment the skill development experience, I will be reading a series of books and scholarly articles that explore motivation, process and experience of beginning creative projects. Some of the articles will investigate the experiences and methods used by other artists to begin creative engagements and describe the challenges associated with sustaining intention and commitment. Others will investigate the courage and intrinsic motivation required to grow and creatively evolve. Of particular interest is how the concept of play might be woven into the process of learning a new skill while adhering to a predetermined process for guidance and support. I view these writings as references that can support and act as stimulus to challenge myself during the process and think about the experience in new ways.
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Bibliography


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Section Three: Goals and outcomes
I have prepared a draft timeline to support my efforts and provide guideposts during my learning process. I will be referencing and referring back to these for time management purposes and identification of cross pollination activities for leveraged efficiencies.

Project Timeline:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>Preparation</td>
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<td>Research of skill development opportunity and instruction. Identification of classes and instructors / solicitation and communication requests / registration /</td>
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<td>January 24 - 31</td>
<td>Concept Paper Draft / Final</td>
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<td>Research literature / Ideation and CPS / Written draft development</td>
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<td>Jan, February, March, April, May</td>
<td>Sounding Board Partners - Key Connections / Feedback</td>
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<td>Weekly sessions - combination email &amp; skype - duration of project (3 - 4 hours / month) Provide feedback / reviews</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Literature Review - min 5</td>
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<td>February 5 &amp; 6</td>
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<td>March 12 &amp; 13</td>
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<td>April 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Model / Free Form</td>
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**Process Journal / Documentation**

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**April 23- 28th**

**Evaluation / Public Display**

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| **May 2**            | Angel upload of digital documentation                                                             |
|                      | .25                                                                                               |

| **May 3 - 9th**      | Final bound version and CD                                                                       |
|                      | 1 hr                                                                                              |
**Section Four: Product and outcomes**

I will be developing and documenting the experience of the creative process in context to skill development through a variety of activities and artifacts. During the development of the project, I will be investigating the creative process of learning a new medium with fellow workshop attendees and will conduct three to five interviews to capture experiences and creative input into their continued pursuit of a new medium and form of creative expression. Interviews will explore the challenges of developing a new skill later in life, the personal barriers if any that are created during a new artistic pursuit and reflection on the experience and what it has offered to other parts of their lives and creative identity. In addition to the qualitative experiences of others and the core skill development, I will be creating reflections on the creative process of learning a new skill and the contributions to this experience from working with the medium itself.

I will be documenting these experiences in a variety of forms, which will include a Journal of reflections and key leanings from each workshop. It will include photographic artifacts to help identify and describe insights from the learning process and technical teachings. To compliment the journal notations I will create a memory board of inspiration pre and post workshop. The final project will include partial transcripts of interviews with workshop attendees for key learning insights with full transcripts provided if permission and rights for publication are granted.

My creative product will be displayed for public feedback among a selected audience of peers within the arts, communication and community programming community to provide feedback and capture ideas for future seminar. A final product will be chosen from the work to be displayed in a physical public venue.
Section Five
The exploration and investigation of developing skill and capability in clay sculpture provides opportunity and discovery for personal learning. I have several personal goals to assist in the development of this skill. From tactical skill and knowledge transfer in the preparation and management of the medium to the post activity analysis of key learning and reflection on the qualitative benefits of working in a new medium for personal creative growth. The following are my personal learning goals for the project:

Personal Learning Goals
1. Gain knowledge of clay as a sculpture medium, gain exposure to differing technique and methods for working with the medium including:
   a. Understanding the types of clay and their unique properties
   b. Tactical knowledge of the medium when looking at size and weight of objects and understanding how to prepare and care for the objects during development and firing preparation.
   c. Methodologies’ for building larger scale objects and kiln preparation,
   d. Kiln and glaze basics,
   e. Studio set up and basic safety with materials.
2. Explore and mine insight from the creative process of learning a new skill for continued creativity learning and leadership development
3. Identify new networks for creative support, encouragement and development
4. Identification of change elements within the process of learning a new skill and medium and its association and impact for other areas of life
5. Challenge pre-conceived fears of public presentation and
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6. Gather momentum from personal experience to capture and share experience with others for future development of a public lecture or seminar.

Evaluation

Development of a tangible sculptural product and overall process engagement

Personal evaluation of success for this project will include the development of a sculptural product. Although I will not be able to control the final product as the firing process can alter or destroy the work product, I view the activity of moving towards this goal as an objective of self, product and process evaluation.

Expert and peer feedback

I will be soliciting feedback from my mentor / instructor throughout the workshops and will be looking for feedback among other attendees during the sessions.

Development of a journal resource for future learning and reflection

At the end of the process I will have developed a process journal and notations that will be artifacts of the experience. Notations will support the larger post workshop journal entries and assist in personal evaluation of the experience and reflection on the product and creative experience.
References
