

# Matt Moyer

## Teaching Philosophy

I have had the good fortune of learning from some topnotch teachers. They come from varied backgrounds and the work they produce is diverse and individual, but what the best of them have in common is a passion for engaging students and challenging them to venture beyond their boundaries.

Though there are various ways to engage students, I believe that teaching them *well* is not just about imparting knowledge. Every bit as important is creating an environment conducive to inquiry, one that instills in the student the desire to ask questions--of others, of their materials and of themselves. This provides the most fertile conditions for learning. Using ceramic metaphor, as a teacher my goal is to provide students with "bricks". I show bricks created by other artists, discussing how each brick is unique and what sets it apart. From that starting position I begin the process of guiding students through the making of their own bricks, culminating in their journey of learning to *build* with their bricks. An integral part of my undergraduate education was the opportunity to exhibit my ongoing inquiries in galleries and showcases within the ceramics studio. During graduate school, I continued this idea by organizing student exhibitions that involved not only my own classes, but students in 3-D fundamentals and ceramics. For almost every student, this was their first opportunity to exhibit in a gallery setting. The gallery experience served as a springboard, elevating their confidence in their future explorations.

I design courses that encourage experimentation, imagination, and inquisition. I believe that all great artists remain students, continually seeking new information and exploring the world and its materials. I include activities revolving around a concept known as the "Clay Olympics" wherein students are encouraged to push their skills, materials, and their notion of the time required to complete a project. The result of these "Clay Olympics" is a newfound realization of their capabilities acquired through an entertaining and interactive series of events. A side benefit of this exercise is that it serves to bond the class for the remainder of their semester and often beyond. As a teacher who is also learning, I listen to a student's questions and then provide the tools, knowledge, skills, space and confidence necessary for that student to discover his own solutions. It is my goal that on the path to those solutions the student will discover questions he did not know existed and thus find solutions that encourage further inquisition.

Because a teacher sees an ever-changing cycle of students at various levels of learning, interest and ability, the structure of my curriculum remains flexible so that I may offer opportunities that bring all the students together as a collective group. As I see it, the most valuable experience a teacher can offer is to create a class and studio environment that fosters commitment as well as a state of curiosity, camaraderie, community and collaboration, and within that structure encourage students to interact and learn from their peers through tactile and cerebral activities. My Beginning Ceramics courses included "community" exercises that task small groups of students to collaborate and work on objects together, bringing to light the uniformity of all students' touch while showing how the object still embraces each student's own markings. This exercise, as well as assignments that present groups of students with a particular problem that must be solved

cooperatively and concluded through group presentation of their thought processes, technical discoveries, and conclusions, affords them the opportunity to learn from one another. Assignments such as the table collaboration or mini-assignments to groups of students in the form of solving a particular technical problem enables them the opportunity to learn from each other by presenting their thought process, technical discoveries and conclusions in the form of group presentations.

Specific to the success of a Ceramics studio is the strong need for the entire group of students to share the common goal of maintaining a *clean, functioning* and *safe* studio. In addition to all of the technical exercises, cerebral activities and peer interactions, each semester I establish a strong obligation to studio improvement. That commitment can come in the form of cleaning; building shelving, making bats and ware boards, building kilns, and a myriad of other projects that improve the ceramics studio. I offer the same challenge to the students that I espouse in my own life: “leave it better than you found it”. Through this idea of betterment, I instill within the students a sense of pride and respect for their work, the work of their peers and the space they all share.

**-Matt Moyer**