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Archetypes in Clay

By

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Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Abstract

The artist discusses the background, ideas, and work entitled *Archetypes in Clay*, for the completion of her Bachelor of Arts Degree and undergraduate research for the Fine and Performing Arts Scholar program at East Tennessee State University. The artist used this development of work to explore personality types, and how they can be portrayed through clay vessels. In particular, the artist shows her work, how she created the vessels, the testing involved, and the struggles she faced. Archetypes is the focus behind the concept of this project. Her work includes four ceramic vessels, created with clay and finished with glaze. The artist cites Carl Jung, Isabel Briggs-Myers, and NERIS Analytics Limited as important research in this project.
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Introduction

My introduction to ceramics came at a very young age, but I was drawn in by one of my favorite high school teachers, Mr. Bennett. He taught me that there are endless possibilities with clay, glazes, and the combinations of the two.

Entering college, I knew I wanted to be an artist. I love the hands-on aspect of creating something out of nothing. My sophomore year, I enrolled in my first ceramics course, beginning throwing, and never looked back on another art form. Pottery was what made sense to me. It allowed me to bring my ideas to life through a three-dimensional form that paper and pencil could not satisfy. I was quickly drawn to functional forms. The thought of the pots I make being used for something and having a purpose pleased me. I started out with the traditional plates, bowls, and cups, but quickly graduated to wanting to make something with a much more specific purpose. Expanding my knowledge of simple functional forms led me to explore the form of flower vases.

Through flower vases I began to explore forms, surfaces, textures, and so much more while still serving a purpose. Having both hand building and throwing skills, I gravitated more towards hand building. Hand building offers endless options, especially when trying to escape the strictly circular forms the wheel creates. Even the more symmetrical objects thrown on the wheel were altered. Between the alterations and the hand building, I began to create unique, functional vases.

My thesis is a way to explore giving vases personality. I was inspired after I learned about the Myers-Briggs personality test I was required to take in my honors colloquium class one semester. I found the different personality traits to be very interesting and the thought of bringing them to life through functional forms seemed like a fun challenge to me.
Background

Myers-Briggs is one of the more well known personality tests. One is asked to answer a multitude of questions honestly, and is then placed into a category that describes a personality based on certain traits. You are either an “introvert” or an “extrovert,” “intuitive” or “sensing,” a “feeler” or a “thinker,” and a “perceiver” or a “judger” (Briggs Myers, 1995). These four groupings can be combined into sixteen different personality types, labeled with the letters I (introvert), E (extrovert), N (intuitive), S (sensing), F (feeler), T (thinker), P (perceiver), and J (judger) (Jung, 1971). These personality types were created by Carl G. Jung (Jung, 1971).

A group in the United Kingdom named NERIS Analytics Limited more recently categorized these four major categories and their respective specific subcategories into named roles. The four main categories being “Analysts,” “Sentinels,” “Explorers,” and “Diplomats” (NERIS Analytics Limited). I found these named roles to be much more interesting than just groupings of letters that were difficult to understand.

According to the NERIS Analytical Limited group, Analysts consist of Architects (INTJ), Logicians (INTP), Commanders (ENTJ), and Debaters (ENTP). Sentinels are Logicians (ISTJ), Defenders (ISFJ), Executives (ESTJ), and Consuls (ESFJ). Explorers comprise of Virtuosos (ISTP), Adventurers (ISFP), Entrepreneurs (ESTP), and Entertainers (ESFP). Diplomats are made up of Advocates (INFJ), Mediators (INFP), Protagonists (ENFJ), and Campaigners (ENFP). These role names provoke more of a personality type that I can convey through ceramics than the Myers Briggs acronyms.

The vase form provided a simple template to approach the subject of personality types. My vessels have always had their own type of personalities, and now I will create vases that symbolize these four main personality types listed above. I wanted to focus on form, color, and
surface. Each vase’s decoration, color choice, and form would reflect on the personality type represented.

**Technical**

As I began to sketch some ideas, I began choosing the materials that would work best and that I knew how to use. Most of my college career I have used a high-fire (cone 7-10) stoneware called moon white from Highwater Clay in Asheville, North Carolina. This clay is “a very smooth, light firing, dreamy clay” according to Highwater *(Highwater Clays)*. It is a white clay, which I prefer over the more earthen tones. It is very easy to manipulate, and I have conducted a lot of different glaze testing for this clay body. I bisque my work in an electric kiln to cone 08. I then glaze fire my work in an electric kiln to cone 7, which is the lower range of the clay. This method was chosen because the oxidation firing created naturally by the electric kiln is much more of a controlled environment than that of a reduction firing in a gas kiln, per say. Using slips can be dangerous when you get up into the higher temperatures of cone 8, 9, and 10. The slips end up being more vibrant in the more controlled electric kiln, and this is the look I was trying to achieve.

*(Mason stains from Highwater)*

**Testing**

I knew I wanted color to be a big part of these, so I knew I had to make some decisions in the forefront of the process. Clay is a very time sensitive material. Different materials are applied at certain times in the ceramic process, some when the clay is still wet, others when the clay is dry, and some even after the bisque state. I have worked
a lot with mason stains, which are powdered colorants added to glaze, slip, and even the clay body itself. I conducted many glaze tests, and decided the form of slip would be the best. Slip is easily painted on and could be placed on the vessel very precariously, carved through, or even wiped away if needed. It would also provide the vibrant colors I wanted to display through the different personality types.

I wanted my pieces to be glazed. Glaze is usually the last part of the ceramic making process, where the piece is coated in a mixture that essentially causes the surface to become glass. If the point of a vessel was to house flowers, the interior would need to be glazed. I knew some sort of glaze would be needed and I had been experimenting with satin-matte glazes that did not give off the high shine that most glazes do, but I did not know if that would be the right choice for my vases. Most satin-matte glazes are cloudy and don’t show off the slip work that I needed to be seen, so I decided that I would do the coloring of the vases with the colored slips and would clear coat them if I felt like they needed to be glossy. The clear coat would make the vessels not only functional, but would give off the vibrant feeling that I wanted.

(Ben Feiss glazes, and some blue/green glazes found on http://ceramicartsdaily.org)
(Martha Grover Yellow Salt, found on http://ceramicartsdaily.org, base with added mason stains)

(Glazes we already have mixed in the studio with added mason stains part 1)

(Glazes we already have mixed in the studio with added mason stains part 2)
With that in mind I mixed up a batch of Kitten’s Clear glaze, a recipe from Kathy King (Glazy.org). I also mixed up a white slip base, a recipe we already had in the ceramics studio. I mixed up separate batches for each color of slip that I wanted. I used turquoise, sky blue, chrome tin violet, tangerine, mazerine blue, sage gray, and black mason stains to color the white slip base. This way, I could easily paint on the colored slip after I made each vase, and use Kitten’s Clear to clear coat them after I had bisqued the slips on.

(Sky Blue mason stain being mixed into white slip base)

**Ideas**

My artwork is usually inspired by qualities I enjoy in other ceramic artists’ work, but I approached this project with a different mindset. I began listing adjectives for each of the four personality types that I thought would help me to make formal decisions about my pots more...
easily. The Analyst vase adjectives consisted of assertive, rational, strong-willed, utilitarian, and strategic. These words lead me to more of a streamline, contemporary vibe. I wanted to make this one like the super modern houses that are new and upcoming in the architectural world. I envision clean lines and monochromatic colors with lots of ninety degree angles. The Sentinel vase conjured up adjectives like practical, orderly, stable, traditional, and inflexible. I imagined a tall, streamline, tower like vessel with a very symmetrical feel. I wanted this one to have color, but still be very stable. Choosing a single color with a bunch of different hues seems like the best choice here. The Explorer vase evoked adjectives such as fun, risky, captivating, free, and individualistic. This created a very funky, almost mobile type piece. I conceived a very dramatic vase, and wanted it to starkly different than the rest. I thought a hanging vase would display these feelings easily. The Diplomat vase elicits adjectives as in cooperative, harmonious, warm, influential, and gregarious. I planned for a very simple design, with multiple parts that interacted as one vessel.

The lists I created lent themselves to my initial sketches, which were rough and not exactly what I wanted. I started building, got feedback, refined the form, and ended up destroying what I had first created because it was not what I wanted it to be. I knew I could make it better. Since I was not sculpting something that already existed, or even something that was realistic, I started to push the boundaries of the forms. I wanted to be bold with not only the colors, but I wanted to be bold in the form. I wanted to take a chance that it all may fall apart in the heat of the kiln, but wanted to push myself to new levels.
(Fiore, Flor, and Fleur vases, 2016 - These vases were my initial study in specific flower vases that were thrown and altered with hand built components.)

Work

I started making the Analyst vase first. I knew what I wanted this one to look like. The Analyst group was a very strictly defined group, and I wanted them to be represented with a very modern architectural look. I built this vase using 1/4” slabs. I started with a rectangular shaped box with an open top. Then added on an open-topped cube to one side and an open-topped “L” shaped box to the opposite side. I embellished this vase with some rectangular and square appliques to create a more interesting surface. Once the clay dried to leather hard, which is when you paint on the slips, I began painting. I wanted this vase to be very clean cut, so a monochromatic palette of grey, black, and white was used to create the Analyst personality.
Next came the Sentinel vase. This vase I wanted to be taller than the rest and have a guard tower look. I began again with 1/4” slabs. I started by building the tapered box that is the base, I then built the pentagonal section on top and added height to the pentagon by adding a darted cylinder on a double layered squared base between the two parts. I used shades of blue to paint the Sentinel vase one it became leather hard because blue evokes a sense of trustworthiness and responsibility, which is exactly what a Sentinel does in my mind. The stability of the hues of blue grounded the vase and gave it a sense of not only control, but an air of confidence.
Then I built the Diplomat vase. I had in mind that the Diplomat vase would be multiple parts that were either combined or set together to be united piece. I used a slightly thicker slab of 1/2” to start because I knew I would be thinning it out as I manipulated the slabs. I also wanted to carve into them, and the thicker walls allowed for this. I rolled the slabs around a wooden tube to use as a mold for the cylindrical shape that I wanted. I added bottoms to them and before the clay got too stiff. I proceeded to dart the vases to create a dynamic bend in different portions of each vase. I carved lines around the vases in varying heights and placements on the vases to unite them together without making each one the exact same. I wanted the Diplomat vase to be more subtle. I inlaid some slips, but didn’t like the harsh look, so I ended up wiping on some patina, which is a chemical compound, that when combined with water, makes a stain. I used red iron oxide, which is more of a rusty red, and red iron oxide mixed with gerstley borate, which makes more of a brown. I chose only to glaze the inside of the vases, for functional purposes, and then glazed the carved lines to give some dimension to the darker parts.
Finally, it came time to build the Explorer vase. I wanted this vase to be fun and daring. I decided I wanted to make a hanging vase. I threw a round form for the part that would hang, altered it by trimming it dramatically and adding an 1/4" slab base with a hole cut in it for the plant to come out. I also punched holes in the top to hang the vase from. Once the base was leather hard, I extruded some thick coils out of the extruder, which is just a fancy machine attached to the wall that pushes clay out of a certain shape to make even coils. Once I had the coils cut to the desired length, I shaped them to be arches and pinched them to give them texture. As the layers of the coiled arches got taller off the base, I made the coils thinner to one, make the vase less heavy since it was hanging, and two, give it more visual interest. I chose the bright colors of purple and orange to create an almost complementary color scheme. These bright colors give a creative, expressive feeling to give the Explorer vase an air of ambition.
Struggles

There are always a lot of factors that cannot be controlled in ceramics. This means that the life of a potter is unpredictable. There are things we do not have complete control over, such as what happens inside the kilns. I took every precaution I could take to have my work not crack and warp, but some warping is inevitable. Pretty much everything stayed the same through the bisque, but the Analyst vase warped in the glaze firing. The glaze firing is about a thousand degrees hotter, so it makes sense that some warping occurred, but I feel that it was extreme in the case of the Analyst vase. A small crack also occurred in one of the corners of the Analyst vase, but the stress from the warping also probably caused that.

I tested the Kitten’s Clear glaze, and several people in the studio have previously used it. I was not confident that it would go perfectly, but the clear glaze we have mixed in the studio right now called Haystack Clear has been acting up, and I knew the Kitten’s Clear would be more reliable than the Haystack Clear. Some strange anomalies happened on the surface of the
Analyst vase. I took extra precaution while waxing the bottom of my pieces, but there is a chance that my waxed paintbrush hit the surface and resisted the glaze. I think that it was more likely due to the fact that I had to pour on the glaze. Normally with smaller pieces, I dip the piece straight into the bucket of glaze, but the dimensions of my vases were too large to do this. In hindsight, I probably should have used a spray gun and sprayed the vases, but I had a deadline to get them in the kiln and I was trying to get them done as soon as possible. I was also apprehensive to spray them because some of the glaze would have been thicker in some parts than others, and sometimes when clear glaze gets too thick it bubbles and gets cloudy, which would have defeated the purpose of the vibrant slips.

With the time restraints I had, I was unable to do any testing of the slips I mixed up. Most of the time slips are fairly close to the color they mix to be, but when adding mason stains, it is a challenge to make it fully opaque. Usually, one must paint several layers of the slip on anyways, but some of the colors I used, such as the sage gray and sky blue still looked streaky on the vessels. These are things that could have been controlled more if I had done some testing beforehand.

On the Diplomat vases, the two patinas I used turned out to be lighter than I expected. The brown I inlayed in the carved lines should have overpowered the clear glaze, but somehow, the clear glaze whitened it out. If I could go back, maybe I would have kept the dark slip inlaid in the carved lines so it would have been darker. The vases did turn out as the quiet, warm feel I wanted, though.
Conclusion

Through creating this body of work, I feel that I have taken a step out of my comfort zone. I normally stick to very feminine forms and use lots of blue, as you can see through most of my glaze testing. I feel like my previous work embodies my personality, so it was fun to branch out to create other personalities. Expanding on my idea of functional flower vases allowed me to clearly define a purpose behind them. Usually my work is just made for specific function, and there is not really a concept behind them. My work serves a purpose and that is the concept. It has been an interesting journey to find a narrative based concept that interested me enough to be inspired to create a whole line of work.

Through studying about the different personality types, it made me wonder what vase represented me, so I took the NERIS Analytical Limited group test to see which group I was categorized into. I am an “Advocate” which falls under the Diplomat category. I am an INFJ according to Myers Briggs/Jung. That means I am an introvert, intuitive, a feeler, and a judger. As an Advocate:

the personality type is very rare, making up less than one percent of the population, but they nonetheless leave their mark on the world. As members of the Diplomat Role group, Advocates have an inborn sense of idealism and morality, but what sets them apart is that they are not idle dreamers, but people capable of taking concrete steps to realize their goals and make a lasting positive impact. (NERIS Analytics Limited)

I think this is a very accurate representation of me, although I would not have automatically put myself into the Diplomat category. I would have initially thought that I would be in the Explorer
category, but they seem to be more bold and spontaneous than I tend to be once I read about them.

Making these vases taught me a lot. I used a lot of old skills, and several new skills. Hand building was one of the first skills I mastered in my ceramics career, but there are so many techniques that I’m learning to day. These skills help make my work physically stronger and more aesthetically pleasing. I also gained a lot of technical skills this past year. I had never mixed my own glazes or slips. I have not only learned a lot about all the ingredients that go into the recipes, but what each ingredient is used for. I also developed a lot of problem solving skills. I think using clay in general allows you to develop these skills. Clay is a malleable material and it wants to be pushed around, but you have to find the line that it cannot be pushed past, because once you push it too far, there is no going back.

In the future, I think I would like to continue my work with functional ware, especially flower vases. I feel like there is still so much unexplored territory for me to conquer. My tulipiere vases *Fleur*, *Fiore*, and *Flor* are a great starting point to the work I want to be making. I feel like I just have one foot barely out the door in the world of what I want to make. I want to make vases that are simple, elegant, and refined. I want to define the relationship between the flower and the vase. The relationship between the two is essential. Making a vase that the flowers look put together in, but effortless is a hard task, and I want to master it. I want to find the balance of utility and beauty. By doing this, I think I will start to become the artist that I want to be.
Works Cited


Jung, Carl. 1971. Psychological types (Collected works of C. G. Jung, volume 6, Chapter X).