

MANIPULATIONS: CLAY CONSTRUCTION

Kim Spradling

Background

The slides in this sequence depict some of the steps that Andre utilized in producing an abstract sculpture form, which he titled a "clay construction."

Andre is, in these slides, five years, three months old. He previously had produced several of these constructions, as well as other forms in clay. He regularly draws, using a variety of media, at home, in his kindergarten class at school, and during his art lessons. His use of clay occurs only during his art lessons. These lessons are once a week, twice a week during the summer, for one hour. He determines what media he will use during a lesson, and what he will produce.

The clay constructions follow some patterns. The construction may be made entirely upon a potter's wheel, partially upon the wheel and partially by hand, or completely by hand. Various manipulations of the clay occur; however, not all are used with each construction. The manipulations of the clay are: tearing or cutting of the clay, squeezing the clay, poking the clay (using fingers, knives, or other tools), twisting the clay, pounding the clay with a hand or tool, spinning the clay on the wheel (with or without including one of the other manipulations), pushing sections of the clay together, and finally immersing each section, or the whole, in water. The last manipulation is the only one done consistently to each construction Andre has produced.

A time element also is involved in the production of a construction.

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The clay is held underwater for a specific number of seconds. Andre chooses the length of time the clay is to be underwater, or asks me, or anyone available, for a length of time. The time, so far, has been between five and twenty seconds. Usually it is a multiple of five, and the seconds always are counted out loud.

The fired constructions usually are glazed and some, after the final firing, are titled. The titles may be descriptive of a representational image Andre visualizes in the form, such as "Dog" for one he believed looked like a dog, or they may be descriptive of the form itself, such as one he called "Amorphous Shape."

The Slide Sequence

The slides show some of the steps in making an untitled construction during October of 1979. (The slides are not reproduced in this publication.)

Slide 1: Andre has just removed a section of the construction from the water.

Slide 2: The clay is being squeezed and twisted.

Slide 3: Two sections of the clay are being pushed together to form a single section.

Slide 4: The two sections joined in the previous slide are being cut apart.

Slide 5: A hole is cut in the clay with a knife.

Slide 6: Two more parts are joined together.

Slide 7: A finished section of the construction, one of three sections.

Slide 8: Another section of clay just after being removed from the water.

Slide 9: Squeezing two more pieces of clay together.

Slide 10: Adding marks, with a knife, to the surface of a section of the

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construction.

Slide 11: The completed section with knife marks, holes and other decorative elements.

Slide 12: The finished construction, glazed. Arrangement for photograph was done by Andre.

Comments

Manipulation of the clay is the major aspect in the production of the clay construction. The photographs are evidence of the amount of manipulation involved in each work. Sections are divided, rejoined, and divided again. The clay is dipped in water, bent, twisted, squeezed and cut. The final form is often of little resemblance to the first form that emerged from the clay. The constructions, when completed, show the amount of manipulation involved in their production by their often deeply textured surfaces, and by the multiple-sectioned nature of each whole work.