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The thesis consisting of a number of functional  
objects in clay and demonstrating the evolution of a  
design idea was exhibited at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery  
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A 35mm slide of each thesis work is on file at the  
University of North Carolina Library in Greensboro.

A STUDY OF CLAY  
INVOLVING A COMBINATION  
OF HANDBUILT AND WHEEL THROWN  
UTILITARIAN OBJECTS

by  
Marilyn Houser Hartness

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
May, 1972

Approved by

Walter Barber  
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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May 4, 1972  
Date of Examination

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## CATALOGUE

	TITLE*	NUMBER OF PIECES
1.	Spice Bags	Four
2.	Bag Planters, Design I	Three
3.	Bag Planters, Design II	Five
4.	Tea Bag-Cups	Four
5.	Vinegar Bag-Bottle	One
6.	Vase Bag	One
7.	Butter Dish	One
8.	Group of Jars	Ten
9.	Slab Plate	One
10.	Slab Cup	One
11.	Big Slab Bowl	One
12.	Small Slab Bowls	Four
13.	People Goblets	Four
14.	Tea Pot and Four Cups	One

\*All objects are in clay

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In working with clay I discovered unique qualities which naturally define the medium if only allowed to exist when an object has been formed. Using simple shapes and being conscious of the plasticity, possibilities in irregular form, and changable surface allows the essence of the clay to emerge. My search for the essence of clay was inspired by the German Expressionist school and particularly the abstract expressionist potter, Peter Voulkos. The utilitarian objects which I have made are shaped to evoke visual, tactile, and emotional involvement; at the same time remain known as clay. They are formed by handbuilding and/or wheel throwing techniques.

Because of the numbing effects that technology has had on human sensitivity, I have chosen this approach to define clay. Products made of clay and simply mass produced may not retain any likeness to the medium at all. I select only the wheel throwing techniques which improve the function of my handbuilt utilitarian pottery. I want to direct attention to the value of man creating and expressing himself with clay: handling clay instills an appreciation for its natural beauty and origin which is earth.

I chose a functional theme and the design of each piece was first begun by working with a slab of clay. In the exhibition (which remains available for viewing on slides)

the order of my pieces listed exemplifies the evolution of my design idea: using handbuilding for functional pottery and incorporating wheel throwing techniques whenever the technical efficiency of the wheel could improve the utilitarian value of the clay object; and, at the same time, being constantly aware of treating the clay itself with reverence and preserving the clay's natural identity. Natural clay is a beautiful contrast to many of the manufactured household goods in our modern world such as moulded furniture of plastic or geometrically shaped furniture of wood, chrome, leather, glass, or fabric. The contrast seems to make the clay shape more outstanding when it reflects the raw appearance of the medium. I do not want to lose the clay's distinctive earth-like characteristic of conveying natural forms which are irregular in shape.

My irregular functional shapes have evolved over a period of three years and the reasons for their development are explained in the rest of this paper. The "bag" design came about from my using a slab of clay, turning up the edges, folding and pinching them close together. This folding captures the essence of the clay's plasticity. When the piece hardens, the visual concept of softness remains, encourages a tactile approach, and thereby defines the clay through one of its natural characteristics, plasticity, which is conveyed in an irregular functional shape. The spice bags and the planters began as slabs and were folded to provide simple functional cavities with the form.



Natural "bag" forms led to other possibilities like tea bag-cups and vinegar bottles. The folded slab design was made technically better by smoothing the edges on the potters wheel. The relaxed "bag" forms are simple to make when clay is considered as important as its function. The approach is direct, deliberate, and quickly done to capture spontaneity and freshness in the appearance of the finished product. I became aware of how these clay forms helped define the medium. They demanded to be felt with the hands and through touching the surface, the clay was recognized.

Slab plates really happened on their own. They help define the naturalness of the media by the irregularity of the edges. The plate preserves the initial form which just appeared as my hands pressed into the clay. The glaze enhances the surface texture and confirms the statement of a slab of clay. The bottom of the plates are wheel thrown. This assures a level plate and enables the center of the plate to relax in a concave shape. The design of the plate is simple, direct, deliberate, and executed spontaneously so the clay surface would remain natural, emphasizing beauty in our natural environment. I hope that by using such a plate man enjoys its "imperfections" and can identify his fallibility with it.

Groups of pots are how I define what is sometimes called a set. However, I use the word group because the pieces of pottery are similar and have a common shape yet are not

identical as objects of a set usually are. Each one of the group of bowls were formed from slabs of clay and pressed together without denying the place where the edges were joined. The petal shaped slabs require careful handling so the forms look alive and each bowl will stack upon the other. Constant consideration of form and function and material is necessary. The bowls also have a wheel thrown base which eliminates the possibility of tipping over while being used.

The group of jars involved all handbuilding but the top edge of the jars and the under side of the lids. Throwing these parts on the wheel assures a good fit. The variation in sizes of the jars creates an interesting spatial relationship. The texture is visually irregular and invites the hands to feel and define the medium as clay.

As the slab kept appearing in a different shape, so did the functional ideas. Combining methods of handbuilding and wheel throwing became a difficult challenge. The people goblets consist of two hand formed slabs which are attached to a wheel thrown base. The lip of the goblet is also thrown and works good in the over all design. The teapot consists of a slab cylinder with a wheel thrown spout, lid, and opening. The transition between the slab and the wheel thrown parts is made by attaching the wheel thrown parts with a direct technique. It is hard to determine the best technique without much sketching, trial and discovering many possibilities.

Defining clay and expressing the feelings I have three dimensionally keeps me searching for the best most honest approach to this problem.