

A CLAY ARTIST'S ROLE

MANY THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, early people decorated cave walls, made baskets and vessels for storage and cooking, and created objects for ceremonies and daily life activities. These traditions have continued, so that around the world, people make objects for daily use, for ceremonies, and to add to the beauty of our already beautiful world.

One of the oldest traditions is that of making things with clay. Throughout history, before industrialization, most communities relied on their town or village potter to create clay objects needed for daily life. Your own community probably has its share of people who make things out of clay. They may do this to make a living or just for fun. You may wish to know more about the potters in your locality.

INTERVIEW A MAKER

Seek out an opportunity to talk with someone who makes something out of clay. This may be someone considered a professional artist, someone who works with clay as an avocation or "hobby," or anywhere in between. The maker you interview may be a member of your family, a neighbor, teacher, friend, or total stranger. You will find that most people would be pleased to talk with you about their experiences with clay.

LOCATE A CLAY ARTIST ■ You may know someone in your family or neighborhood who makes things with clay. Ask friends and family members for suggestions. Discover clay artists or pottery studios in your local community. Many communities have art or craft shows where you will find clay artists showing and selling their artworks. Search online for "clay artists near me," "clay studios near me," or "pottery classes near me."

PREPARE YOUR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ■ Most people like to talk about things they make and how they make them. You might find that a conversation will flow easily with just a few questions. Here are some questions to choose from. Feel free to come up with questions on your own.

1. What kinds of things do you make out of clay?
2. How long have you been making things out of clay? How did you get started?
3. What inspires you to make what you make?
4. How do you decide what you are going to do with the clay each time you begin?
5. What materials do you use in your working process? What kinds of tools do you use?
6. As you work with clay, what do you think about?
7. Do you have a favorite tool? How do you use it? Why is it your favorite?
8. Where do you work with clay? Do you have a special studio or space where you like to make things?
9. Do you have a routine that you follow when you are making things with clay? If so, how important is it that you follow this routine?
10. Do you like to work alone or do you prefer to have others working along with you? Why?

11. What challenges do you face working with clay? What makes it difficult?
12. How do you know when your piece is finished? What kinds of things do you consider as you decide that a clay piece is the way you want it?
13. How important is it that your finished piece is beautiful?
14. How important is it to you that your finished piece is functional or useful?
15. What do you do with the objects you make? Use them yourself? Display them? Sell them? Give them away?
16. Are there people in your life who have served as mentors (or influences) for you in your art making?
18. What are your hopes or plans for working with clay in the future? Do you want to make something that you have not made before? Do you want to make changes to the way you work or the things you make? Where do you go from here?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that you have interviewed a clay artist, what will you do with what you have learned? Here are some ideas:

1. Interview another clay artist and compare how the two makers answered the questions.
2. Invite the artist to speak to a group of people you know—a club or community group.
3. With written permission from the artist, share what you learned. For example:
 - You might write about the artist for a community publication.
 - Create a bulletin board in a local library, arts center, or pottery studio (perhaps where this artist works) and feature a different artist each month.
 - Organize an exhibition of clay objects and include stories about artists you have interviewed and whose clay works are on display. Gather information from your interviews to compose the stories. Your writing might be housed in a catalogue for the exhibition.
4. Again, with written permission from the artist, create a video with excerpts from your interview, close-up views of the artist's clay objects, and possibly footage of the artist working.
- Create your own book of artists' stories, including photographs and the artists' answers to your questions.