

## ***Statement of Teaching Philosophy***

Vince Pitelka, 2016

My approach to teaching centers on building the potential for self-expression in the student. I reject the old academic model of the teacher as font of knowledge and the student as sponge. The teaching of studio art works best as a highly interactive exchange of idea and information between teacher and student and among fellow students. My goal is to enable and empower my students and see them become confident and capable.

A primary challenge of teaching art in higher education appears early in undergraduate school. An enormous gulf in concept and expectation exists between high school art and university studio art, where the student must quickly become proactive in learning materials and technique and in visual expression. The most effective strategy for bridging this gulf is to get the student truly involved in and committed to the content and direction of their own work. Starting at the introductory level, I encourage students to bring personal interests, concerns, and life experience into the content and style of their work, fostering an increased enthusiasm for the medium and personal confidence in original individual expression.

In general, contemporary university art education is in need of far greater focus on materials, technique, and craftsmanship. I fully support this, believing that the development of material knowledge and skill expands and liberates the vocabulary of self-expression. Ceramic sculpture and pottery involve an extraordinary range of materials and technique. In order to maximize the potential for individual expression (and personal safety) the student must engage in thorough material study, exploration of technique, and a focused familiarity with studio tools and equipment, especially in light of the importance of mixed media in contemporary art. I encourage constant exploration of material and process in both traditional and innovative ways. In my own work I try to push the physical potential of clay, and I encourage students to do the same, lest they be held back by lack of faith in the capability of the material.

I do not recognize formal or aesthetic distinctions between ceramics and sculpture, utilitarian and non-functional form, or art and craft media. I teach the craft of ceramics as a fine art, within the context of historical and contemporary art, addressing all ceramic objects in terms of sculptural form, and bringing in ideas and influences from a broad range of art media and expression. In all levels of ceramics, my teaching incorporates the history of art and craft, with considerable focus on ancient and tribal art. This provides a broadly expanded context for self-awareness, and further empowers the student in the development of original style and direction.

I am energized by any material or medium pushed beyond perceived limitations, and I encourage innovative experimentation and expression. I believe that technical fluency and a good knowledge of historical and contemporary precedents activate the imagination and provide the vocabulary for effective self-expression.