

# **Continuing the Celebration**

**By Kevin Dykstra  
Student ID# 4566505**

**January 23, 2002**

**Ceramics 230 XX  
Professor: Penelope Kokkinos**

# Continuing the Celebration

## Individual Research Project Proposal by Kevin Dykstra

### Research Idea

With this individual research project I'm interested in exploring the many different facets of sawdust firings and the use of opposing textures and forms to create pleasing aesthetics. My hope is to take what I have learned from sawdust firing so far and through research explore this basic firing technique even further. In our first semester with Thérèse Chabot we were introduced to several different firing techniques, the first of which was sawdust firing. We were shown how to do sawdust firing and the use of engobes, terra sigillatas and burnishing to create texture and colour. I used these techniques for our first project, which was called the "Celebration" project.

In my "Celebration" project I worked with basic forms and hand building techniques. Using slabs, coils and pinching I created bowls, beads and non-functional pieces. I then explored basic colour and texture using a combination of black terra sigillata along with different burnishing techniques. My "Celebration" project was developed from my own personal interest in both meditation and Buddhism. There is a popular Buddhist meditation called "the taking and the giving" in which the person meditating takes the suffering from someone by visualizing inhaling black smoke. In a similar way it is the black smoke during the sawdust firing that gives the pieces their black colour. Creating an installation for my pieces, I displayed them as they would be seen on a Buddhist altar (see Figure 1).

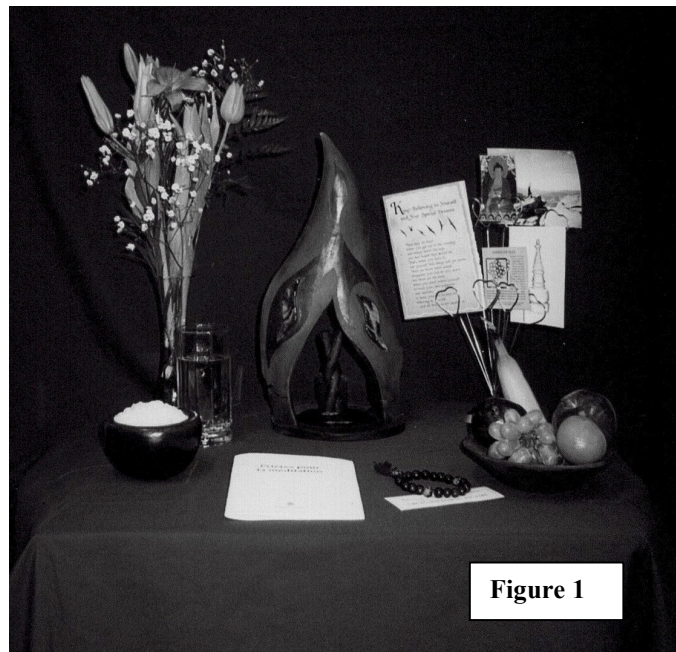


Figure 1

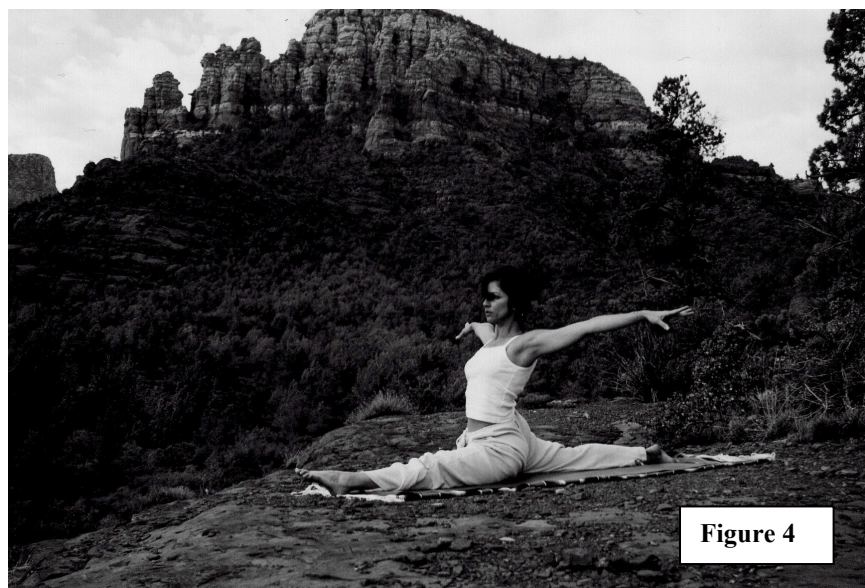
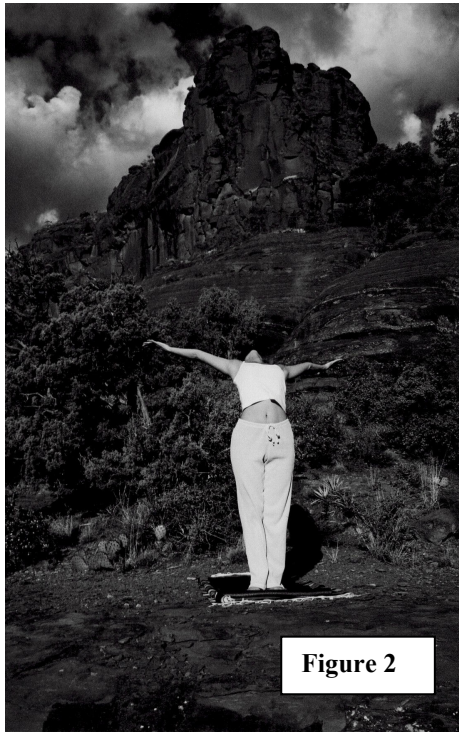
In this research project I want to take these basic skills and explore more advanced techniques in both the sawdust firing itself and burnishing. I know from discussions that I have already had with several ceramists and with what I have discovered in my initial research, there are many different things I can investigate. Although I will continue to use the facilities at Concordia (the garbage cans and the ventilation system) I want to try other clay bodies, specifically clay bodies with less grog. I also want to try different fuels for the firing whether it be in addition to the sawdust or in replacement of the sawdust, for example, cow or horse dung. I'm hoping as well to experiment with the process itself so that I can get the richest black possible on my pieces. To that end I want to understand more about the different additions I can make to the terra sigillata. For example, if I add more iron oxide will that create a blacker black? In some ways I feel that I have found a burnishing method that suites my purpose but I want to continue to explore other methods as well as combining burnished portions with unburnished portions on my pieces to create interesting and hopefully pleasing aesthetics.

My idea for this project started when I was going through my photo albums and I came across a series of photos that I had take of a friend performing yoga postures while we were in Sedona, Arizona (see examples in figure 2, 3 and 4). I've always wanted to use these photos for a project and with the rugged backdrop of the spectacular canyons along with my friend's feminine form in these yoga positions, these

# Continuing the Celebration

## Individual Research Project Proposal by Kevin Dykstra

images are providing me with the perfect inspiration for this project. My idea is not to create detailed figurines on masses of rock but to create more smooth abstract (yet still female) sensuous forms coming out of rugged terrain in these very beautiful yoga postures. I'm planning to create 6 pieces, each piece approximately 20 cm x 20 cm x 20 cm.



# Continuing the Celebration

## Individual Research Project Proposal by Kevin Dykstra

### Work Schedule

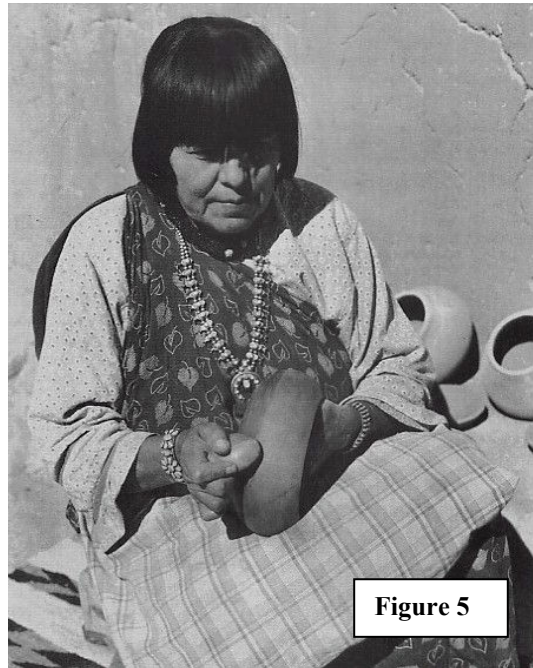
My planned work schedule is the following:

- Proposal research completed by January 21<sup>st</sup>
- Individual Research Project Proposal submitted January 23<sup>rd</sup>
- Research and test pieces completed by mid term critiques February 27<sup>th</sup>
- Ceramic pieces for this project completed by March 27<sup>th</sup>
- Presentation material completed by April 10<sup>th</sup>
- Presentation and critique of Individual Research Project April 17<sup>th</sup>

In order to ensure that I have completed this project by the end of term I will adhere to the milestones established above.

### Research

The artist that has influenced and inspired me the most in the area of sawdust firing is Maria Martinez from New Mexico. Her pots are absolutely stunning! Its very impressive how she can obtain such a rich shiny black on her pots with burnishing and the open firing technique. I understand of course that I have neither the same skill nor the same materials to be able to recreate the same affect with my pieces but I want to see how far I can go with the techniques, the materials and the facilities that I have here at Concordia. Maria Martinez is seen here burnishing one of her famous pots (see figure 5). Other Artists that I have researched so far are Marsha Judd and Gabriele Koch who both create ceramic pieces using dung/sawdust firings and finish them using a burnishing technique.



These projects, as well as all my other projects this year, are focused on my own personal interests in spirituality and provide me with the opportunity to explore my renewed love in this area through my art. This renewed faith in not only seen in my art but is also evident in my daily life and my readings, which for the most part is either about personal growth or Buddhist philosophy. As was mentioned earlier my first project last semester was significant to me because of the “taking and giving” meditation and its use of “black smoke” imagery. Not only are my projects related to my own search of spirituality but they also represent my own personal struggles with my past and a lost faith in traditional western religions. Symbolically, the “black smoke” being drawn into each of my ceramic pieces represents my own suffering and my own healing process. The end result is a “Celebration” of my own efforts and the courage that it takes to find out own unique spiritual path. The combination of rough and smooth textures reflects my life style as I constantly try to balance all the opposing extremes and the use of the burnishing technique represents the perfectionist nature of my personality.

Figure 5. Charlotte F. Speight and John Toki, Hands In Clay 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999