

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

School of Arts and Visual Culture

Summer Intensive Studio Course

HAND-BUILDING CERAMICS:

Traditional Techniques and Contemporary Interpretation through Anatolian Civilizations

Instructor

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Course Information

Course Title

Hand-Building Ceramics: Traditional Techniques and Contemporary Interpretation

Course Type

Studio Elective

Semester

Summer School

Duration

6 Weeks

Studio Hours

Wednesday

09.00–13.00

Thursday

09.00–13.00

Total Contact Hours

48

Course Description

This intensive studio course introduces students to traditional hand-building ceramic techniques while encouraging them to reinterpret historical visual languages through contemporary ceramic practice.

Rather than focusing solely on technical production, the course emphasizes the relationship between **material, culture, history and form**.

Students explore clay as both a structural and narrative medium. Throughout six weeks they investigate how ceramic objects can function simultaneously as utilitarian forms, sculptural objects and cultural carriers.

The studio combines technical demonstrations with research-based design. Students learn the fundamental construction methods of ceramics including pinching, coil building, slab construction, sphere construction and relief techniques.

Historical research forms an essential component of the course. Visual references from **Hittite, Phrygian, Seljuk and other Anatolian civilizations** become sources for contemporary interpretation rather than direct reproduction.

Students are encouraged to analyze archaeological artifacts, architectural ornamentation, ritual vessels and symbolic motifs before transforming them into personal ceramic works.

The course concludes with an individual ceramic project presented through sketches, process documentation and a finished artwork.

Course Philosophy

Ceramics is one of humanity's oldest artistic languages.

Across thousands of years clay has functioned not only as a practical material but also as a carrier of memory, belief systems, ritual and identity.

This course approaches ceramics as a dialogue between past and present.

Historical knowledge is not treated as material for imitation but as a foundation for contemporary artistic thinking.

Students are encouraged to investigate how traditional making techniques can generate new visual languages.

Experimentation, observation and craftsmanship are considered equally important components of the learning process.

Course Objectives

By participating in this course students will:

- develop confidence working with clay through traditional hand-building methods
- understand the physical properties of ceramic materials
- learn multiple construction techniques suitable for functional and sculptural ceramics
- investigate ceramic surface treatments
- study historical ceramic traditions of Anatolia
- analyze archaeological motifs and symbolic forms
- reinterpret historical references within contemporary ceramic language
- improve observation and problem-solving skills
- develop an individual artistic vocabulary
- produce technically sound ceramic works

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

Technical Skills

- Prepare clay for construction.
- Apply proper wedging techniques.
- Construct ceramic forms using pinching.
- Construct vessels using coil building.
- Build objects through slab construction.
- Create forms using sphere construction.
- Produce relief surfaces.
- Apply texture and carving techniques.
- Join clay components successfully.
- Finish surfaces for bisque firing.

Design Skills

Students will be able to

- understand proportion

- understand volume
- create balanced compositions
- develop functional ceramic forms
- integrate decorative and structural elements

Historical Knowledge

Students will

- recognize major characteristics of Anatolian civilizations
- identify Hittite artistic traditions
- understand Phrygian ornament
- analyze Seljuk geometric design
- interpret archaeological motifs
- understand symbolism within historical ceramics

Conceptual Development

Students will

- transform research into design
- develop original concepts
- present artistic ideas verbally
- document their creative process
- participate in studio critique

Teaching Methodology

The course combines

Lecture

Short historical presentations.

Technical Demonstration

Instructor-led demonstrations introducing ceramic techniques.

Studio Practice

Independent making under supervision.

Group Discussion

Analysis of artworks and historical references.

Individual Tutorials

Personal feedback sessions.

Critique

Collective evaluation of studio production.

Studio Culture

Students are expected to contribute to an active and respectful studio environment.

The studio functions as a collaborative space where experimentation is encouraged and constructive criticism supports artistic growth.

Respect for shared equipment, responsible material usage and safe working practices are essential components of the course.

Students are expected to arrive prepared for each studio session and actively participate in demonstrations, discussions and critiques.

Attendance Policy

Because ceramic construction develops through continuous practice, regular attendance is essential.

More than two unexcused absences may affect the final grade.

Late arrivals exceeding thirty minutes may be recorded as partial absence.

Studio Safety

Students will receive demonstrations covering

- safe handling of ceramic tools
- clay dust management
- correct lifting techniques
- use of carving tools
- glaze safety
- kiln safety procedures

Proper studio behavior is required at all times.

Assessment

Attendance and Participation — 15%

Weekly Studio Exercises — 25%

Sketchbook & Process Journal — 15%

Historical Research Assignment — 10%

Final Ceramic Project — 35%

Required Materials

Students are expected to maintain a personal studio toolkit including

- pottery knife
- wooden modeling tools
- metal rib
- rubber rib
- sponge
- needle tool
- wire cutter
- loop tools
- fettling knife
- brushes
- sketchbook
- apron

Recommended Reading (Preliminary)

Peterson, Susan — *The Craft and Art of Clay*

Cooper, Emmanuel — *Contemporary Ceramics*

Rhodes, Daniel — *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*

Rice, Prudence — *Pottery Analysis*

Leach, Bernard — *A Potter's Book*

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WEEK 1–2

Hand-Building Ceramics: Traditional Techniques and Contemporary Interpretation through Anatolian Civilizations

WEEK 1

Theme

Introduction to Ceramic Materials and Hand-Building Fundamentals

Weekly Learning Objectives

By the end of Week One students will be able to

- understand the physical characteristics of clay
- identify moisture levels suitable for construction
- prepare clay using proper wedging techniques
- understand the concept of plasticity
- create balanced ceramic forms using the pinching technique
- construct vertical walls using coil building
- join clay successfully without structural failure
- understand the relationship between wall thickness and drying behavior
- evaluate the functional qualities of ceramic vessels

Historical Context

The Origins of Hand-Building

Before the invention of the potter's wheel, civilizations across Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Near East relied entirely on hand-building methods.

Pinching and coil construction represent some of humanity's earliest ceramic technologies.

Examples include

- Çatalhöyük
- Hacilar
- Çayönü
- Early Hittite settlements

Students examine archaeological examples showing how simple construction methods evolved into sophisticated ceramic traditions.

Wednesday

Studio Session

09:00–13:00

Lecture (09:00–09:30)

Introduction to Clay

Topics

- What is clay?
- Types of ceramic bodies
- Earthenware
- Stoneware
- Porcelain
- Plasticity
- Shrinkage
- Moisture control

Discussion

How does clay transform from earth into ceramic?

Demonstration (09:30–10:15)

Preparing Clay

Instructor demonstrates

- wedging
- air bubble removal

- moisture correction
- cutting clay
- storing clay correctly

Students observe body mechanics and efficient working posture.

Demonstration (10:15–10:45)

Pinching Technique

Instructor demonstrates

- forming a sphere
- thumb insertion
- gradual wall expansion
- rotating the vessel
- controlling wall thickness
- shaping the rim

Students learn how pressure influences volume.

Studio Exercise I (10:45–12:15)

Pinch Bowl

Students produce

One functional bowl

Requirements

Diameter

12–15 cm

Uniform wall thickness

Approximately

6–8 mm

Rounded rim

Stable base

Individual Tutorials (12:15–12:45)

Instructor evaluates

wall thickness

symmetry

hand position

rim quality

surface condition

Reflection (12:45–13:00)

Students photograph their work

Sketch observations

Record

What worked well?

What should improve?

Homework

Produce

Three pinch bowls

Each exploring

different proportions

different rim profiles

different depths

Sketch

Five archaeological ceramic vessels from Anatolia.

Thursday

Studio Session

09:00–13:00

Lecture (09:00–09:30)

Coil Building

Topics

History of coil construction

Advantages

Structural behavior

Joining methods

Examples from

Hittite storage jars

Early Anatolian vessels

Demonstration (09:30–10:15)

Instructor demonstrates

rolling consistent coils

building walls

compressing joints

joining with slip

strengthening the base

maintaining circular geometry

Demonstration

10:15–10:45

Mug Construction

Topics

wall compression

rim refinement

base alignment

functional proportions

Studio Exercise II

10:45–12:15

Students construct

One ceramic mug

using

coil building

Handle is added

using pulled or rolled clay.

Technical Demonstration

12:15–12:40

Surface compression

Removing fingerprints

Joining handle properly

Avoiding cracks

Weekly Critique

12:40–13:00

Discussion

Which parts became structurally weak?

How does wall thickness influence drying?

How does form affect usability?

Instructor Notes

Students often

make walls too thin

use overly wet clay

compress joints insufficiently

attach handles too early

These issues are discussed collectively.

WEEK TWO

Theme

Sphere Construction and Slab Building

Weekly Learning Objectives

Students will

construct hollow forms

understand internal support

learn mold-assisted forming

produce functional ceramic objects

learn slab measurement

understand right-angle joining

create architectural ceramic forms

Historical Context

Sphere construction appears throughout

Anatolian folk ceramics

storage vessels

ritual bowls

and architectural ornament.

Slab construction later became fundamental for

Seljuk tiles

architectural ceramics

Islamic geometric surfaces

and contemporary ceramic design.

Wednesday

09:00–13:00

Lecture

Sphere Construction

Topics

Building with clay spheres

Joining curved surfaces

Internal pressure

Compression

Organic texture

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

rolling identical spheres

using plaster bowl molds

joining spheres

compressing interiors

maintaining form stability

Studio Exercise

Students construct

One decorative bowl

using

uniform clay spheres

The interior surface

is compressed smooth

The exterior texture

remains visible.

Individual Tutorials

Evaluation

sphere consistency

joint quality

composition

surface rhythm

Homework

Sketch

Five natural textures

that could inspire future ceramic surfaces.

Thursday

09:00–13:00

Lecture

Slab Construction

Topics

Rolling slabs

Measuring

Compressing slabs

Reducing warping

Planning functional forms

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

slab rolling

cutting

bevel joints

scoring

slipping

joining

compressing corners

Studio Exercise

Students produce

One ceramic cup

and

One pour-over coffee dripper

using slab construction.

Topics discussed

filter angle

wall thickness

drainage hole

ergonomics

Surface Refinement

Students refine

edges

rim

base

surface

before drying.

Weekly Critique

Students compare

sphere construction

versus slab construction

Which technique offers

greater freedom?

Which creates

better structural strength?

Week Two Assessment

Evaluation Criteria

Construction Quality — 30%

Technical Accuracy — 25%

Craftsmanship — 20%

Creativity — 15%

Studio Participation — 10%

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WEEK 3–4

Hand-Building Ceramics: Traditional Techniques and Contemporary Interpretation through Anatolian Civilizations

WEEK 3

Theme

Surface Language, Texture, Relief and Ceramic Decoration

Weekly Learning Objectives

By the end of Week Three students will be able to:

- distinguish between decorative and structural surface treatments
- apply relief, carving, impressing and texturing techniques
- use underglaze decoration appropriately
- understand how surface influences light and shadow
- develop ceramic surfaces inspired by natural and historical textures
- integrate decoration with the overall ceramic form rather than treating it as an afterthought

Historical Context

Throughout history, ceramic surfaces have carried visual information beyond decoration. In Anatolia, surface treatments recorded identity, belief systems, craftsmanship and regional traditions.

Examples include:

- Neolithic impressed pottery
- Hittite relief ceramics
- Phrygian geometric decoration
- Seljuk underglaze tile painting
- Ottoman cuerda seca and underglaze techniques

Students discuss how surface becomes a narrative rather than merely an ornament.

Wednesday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture (09:00–09:40)

Surface as Visual Language

Topics

- Form versus Surface
- Relief versus Incision
- Positive and Negative Texture
- Natural Textures
- Architectural Ornament
- Contemporary Ceramic Surface Design

Visual References

- Peter Voulkos
- Magdalene Odundo
- Hans Coper
- Ancient Anatolian Ceramics

Demonstration (09:40–10:30)

Texture Techniques

Instructor demonstrates:

- impressing with natural materials
- textile impressions
- carved wooden stamps
- rope texture
- sponge texture
- found-object textures
- rolling texture tools

Discussion

How different textures interact with glaze.

Demonstration (10:30–11:00)

Relief Construction

Topics

- Low Relief
- High Relief
- Layering Clay
- Building Without Collapse
- Controlling Thickness

Studio Exercise

11:00–12:30

Students create

three experimental ceramic tiles

Each tile explores

a different surface language.

Examples

Tile One

Natural texture

Tile Two

Geometric texture

Tile Three

Symbolic relief

Individual Tutorials

12:30–13:00

Instructor discusses

texture hierarchy

surface balance

composition

light behavior

Homework

Collect

10 natural textures

Leaves

Tree bark

Stone

Fabric

Architecture

Draw

Five possible ceramic surface compositions inspired by them.

Thursday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture

Underglaze Decoration

Topics

History of underglaze

Color planning

Layering

Line quality

Brush control

Historical examples from

Seljuk

Iznik

Contemporary Ceramics

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

- underglaze application
- brush loading
- linear decoration
- filling techniques
- masking
- layered decoration

Studio Exercise

Students decorate

their previously constructed

Pinch Bowl

Coil Mug

Sphere Bowl

using underglaze.

Students are encouraged

to reinterpret

Anatolian ornament

rather than copy it.

Weekly Critique

Discussion

How does decoration change the perception of form?

When does decoration strengthen the object?

When does decoration become excessive?

WEEK FOUR

Theme

Anatolian Civilizations as a Source of Contemporary Ceramic Design

Weekly Learning Objectives

Students will

identify major visual characteristics of Anatolian civilizations

understand symbolic meanings

analyze archaeological ceramics

reinterpret historical motifs

translate symbols into contemporary ceramic design

combine research with studio practice

develop personal design vocabulary

Historical Lecture

Anatolia as a Crossroads of Civilizations

Topics

Neolithic Anatolia

Hittites

Phrygians

Urartians

Seljuks

Discussion

How does culture travel through objects?

Wednesday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture

Hittite Art

Topics

Sun Disc

Double-headed Eagle

Stag

Bull

Winged Creatures

Sacred Trees

Orthostats

Ritual Vessels

Discussion

How symbols communicate belief.

Visual Analysis

Students examine

museum collections

archaeological drawings

excavation photographs

ceramic fragments

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

how historical motifs

can be simplified

into ceramic design.

Rather than copying

students

extract

geometry

rhythm

proportion

symbolic meaning.

Studio Exercise

Students design

a decorative ceramic plate

inspired by

Hittite visual language.

Thursday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture

Phrygian and Seljuk Ornament

Topics

Phrygian geometric rhythm

Meander

Textile influence

Seljuk eight-point star

Girih

Interlacing

Symmetry

Architectural ceramics

Discussion

How geometry creates visual harmony.

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

translating

architectural ornament

into

hand-built ceramic surfaces.

Studio Exercise

Students select

one civilization

and produce

either

a wall tile

or

a decorative plate

using

their own contemporary interpretation.

Direct copying is discouraged.

Students are expected

to

research

simplify

reinterpret

transform.

Group Critique

Questions

Which historical reference is recognizable?

Which decisions are contemporary?

Does symbolism remain understandable?

How does craftsmanship support concept?

Week Four Homework

Students prepare

their Final Project Proposal.

Proposal includes

Research Board

Historical References

Material Tests

Surface Studies

Color Strategy

Construction Method

Sketches

Concept Statement

Week Four Assessment

Historical Research

20%

Surface Development

25%

Design Quality

25%

Technical Skill

20%

Participation

10%

Recommended Reading

John Boardman

The Archaeology of Ancient Turkey

James Mellaart

Çatalhöyük

Tahsin Özgüç

Hittite Art

Oya Pancaroğlu

The Seljuks of Anatolia

Susan Peterson

The Craft and Art of Clay

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WEEK 5–6

Hand-Building Ceramics: Traditional Techniques and Contemporary Interpretation through Anatolian Civilizations

WEEK FIVE

Theme

Design Development and Individual Studio Project

Weekly Learning Objectives

By the end of Week Five students will be able to:

- develop an original ceramic concept based on historical research
- combine multiple hand-building techniques within a single project
- solve structural and aesthetic problems during construction
- evaluate functional and sculptural qualities of ceramic objects

- receive and respond to constructive critique
- refine their personal artistic language

Historical Context

Throughout history, ceramic production has evolved through continuous reinterpretation rather than repetition. Ancient Anatolian artisans adapted inherited forms and motifs to suit changing cultural, technological, and social contexts.

This week encourages students to adopt a similar mindset by transforming historical references into contemporary ceramic works through observation, experimentation, and critical thinking.

Wednesday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture (09:00–09:40)

From Research to Contemporary Design

Topics

- Developing an artistic concept
- Research-based design methodology
- Translating historical references into contemporary objects
- Functional versus sculptural ceramics
- Object identity and visual storytelling

Demonstration (09:40–10:15)

Planning a Ceramic Project

Instructor demonstrates

- creating thumbnail sketches
- planning proportions
- selecting construction techniques
- anticipating shrinkage
- designing structural stability
- planning decoration before construction

Studio Project I (10:15–12:30)

Students begin developing their individual final project.

Projects may include

- Decorative vessel
- Ritual-inspired object
- Ceramic sculpture
- Architectural wall tile

- Functional serving set
- Contemporary interpretation of an archaeological artifact

Students are encouraged to combine techniques such as

- Pinching
- Coil Building
- Slab Construction
- Sphere Construction
- Relief
- Surface Carving
- Underglaze Decoration

Individual Tutorials (12:30–13:00)

Each student receives individual feedback regarding

- proportion
- craftsmanship
- concept
- historical interpretation
- technical feasibility

Homework

Students prepare

- construction schedule
- color plan
- surface strategy
- firing preparation checklist

Thursday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture

Functional Design and Ergonomics

Topics

- Balance
- Weight
- Grip
- Handle Design
- Lid Construction
- Stability
- Human interaction with ceramic objects

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

- correcting warping
- strengthening weak joints
- refining rims
- improving surface transitions
- finishing techniques before drying

Studio Session

Students continue constructing their projects.

Instructor circulates throughout the studio providing one-on-one guidance.

Special emphasis is placed on

- craftsmanship
- structural integrity
- concept development
- originality

Midterm Studio Critique

Students present

- sketches
- research board
- historical references
- construction process
- current progress

Peer feedback is encouraged.

Week Five Assessment

Concept Development — 20%

Historical Research — 20%

Technical Development — 25%

Construction Quality — 25%

Participation — 10%

WEEK SIX

Theme

Completion, Reflection, Exhibition and Final Critique

Weekly Learning Objectives

Students will

- complete an individual ceramic project
- demonstrate technical competency
- articulate artistic decisions verbally
- present work in an academic critique
- curate and install a small exhibition
- reflect on their creative process

Wednesday (09:00–13:00)

Lecture

Preparing Artwork for Exhibition

Topics

- Cleaning ceramic surfaces
- Photographing artwork
- Writing artwork labels
- Installation methods
- Artist statements
- Professional presentation

Demonstration

Instructor demonstrates

- documentation techniques
- artwork photography
- lighting considerations
- portfolio preparation

Studio Session

Students complete

- finishing details
- cleaning
- underglaze touch-ups (where appropriate)
- documentation
- display planning

Individual Consultations

Each student prepares

- title
- concept statement
- material description
- dimensions
- historical inspiration

Thursday (09:00–13:00)

Final Exhibition

Students install a temporary exhibition within the studio environment.

Each student presents

- Final Ceramic Artwork
- Sketchbook
- Research Journal
- Process Documentation
- Material Experiments

Final Critique

Each presentation includes discussion of

- artistic concept
- technical decisions
- construction methods
- historical references
- symbolism
- strengths
- future development

The critique emphasizes constructive dialogue and reflective practice.

Final Project Requirements

Students submit

Studio Work

One completed ceramic artwork demonstrating at least **three** hand-building techniques learned during the course.

Process Journal

Including

- weekly reflections
- sketches
- research notes
- material observations
- design development
- technical problem solving

Research Board

Containing

- visual references
- archaeological sources
- museum objects
- historical motifs
- color studies
- compositional analysis

Artist Statement

300–500 words

Explaining

- concept
- historical inspiration
- making process
- artistic intention

Final Assessment

Attendance and Participation — **15%**

Weekly Studio Exercises — **20%**

Research Journal & Sketchbook — **15%**

Historical Research Assignment — **10%**

Final Ceramic Project — **30%**

Final Presentation & Critique — **10%**

Learning Resources

Students are encouraged to visit and study collections from:

- **Museum of Anatolian Civilizations (Ankara)**
- **Istanbul Archaeological Museums**
- **Sadberk Hanım Museum**
- **Mevlana Museum (Seljuk ceramics)**
- **The Met Collection (online)**
- **British Museum Collection (online)**

Research may also include digital museum archives and academic databases to compare historical forms, motifs, and ceramic traditions.

Concluding Statement

This course views ceramics not merely as a technical discipline but as a medium through which material knowledge, cultural memory, and contemporary artistic inquiry intersect. By combining traditional hand-building techniques with critical engagement with Anatolian visual heritage, students are encouraged to develop original works that are technically competent, historically informed, and conceptually meaningful.