

CURRICULUM THEMES

Elements of Art; Saskatchewan Voices;
Ceramics; Sculpture

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

GRADE 4 | CP4.8: Students will explore the concept of three-dimensional forms in relation to two dimensional shapes and designs through learning to make a clay bowl or other form using a slump mold.

DONOVAN CHESTER

Early in his artistic career, Donovan Chester was well-known for his paintings as well as his pottery. This is not surprising given the similarities between the painted canvas surfaces of his abstract paintings and the glazed and raku-fired surfaces of his pots. Karen Schoonover wrote about Chester's ability to integrate his innate sense of design with his naturalistic surface decoration to create entrancing sculptural art works. She described how he works his alchemy in his studio, "... manipulating raw materials (clay, pigment, powders, paint) into forms infused with an energy and life of their own. Intent on integrating form and surface he relies on spontaneity and intuition to guide him." (Schoonover 1987)

Over time and with much research and experimentation, Chester has developed his own recipe for his strong clay body that can survive the sudden temperature changes during the firing process and still retain a smooth surface quality. As Chester describes his clay body in a 1989 interview, "Raku clay is less vitreous and is often thinner than other clay forms. As a result, it is lighter for its size than other pottery." (Dandie 1989)

Chester has used Raku firing methods for many years and has become a master of this firing process. An old Japanese firing technique, raku involves loading the clay into an already hot kiln. A raku kiln is designed to heat up very quickly to provide easy access for inserting and removing the pieces. (Dandie 1989) The pieces are often placed in combustible materials which have interactions with the still-hot glazes. "I love the suddenness of Raku," says Chester, "The firing process is so short that the clay never has a chance to slump in the kiln, so there is a bit of leeway in terms of the type of form you can use." (Dandie 1989)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

How does Chester's artwork relate to other forms of art or art movements like architecture, applied design and abstract expressionism?

Why are the surface decorations and markings on a three-dimensional artwork important?



Donovan Chester, *Untitled*, 1991, raku. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of Grant and Mary Armstrong.

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ACTIVITY

Utilizing a Slump or Hump Mold

Chester often uses a mold as a starting point in his production. Try out a very simple molding process for yourself!

- Find an interesting shaped object that you want to copy for your own bowl or plate. Cover either the inside or outside of the shape/form with soft paper, newspaper or cloth. You may need to make cuts in the paper to get it to lie flat on the object.
- A slump mold is when you plan to place your clay inside another shape to copy it, and a hump mold is when you plan to place your clay over the outside instead.
- Roll out a slab of clay.
- Drape the clay over or inside the object covered in paper or cloth. Allow the clay to dry until the clay will stand on its own. It should be hard but not completely dry. This is called the leather-hard stage.
- Optionally, cut into the edges and build up the lip or edges with pieces of clay that you have designed to augment your pot. Be sure to scratch up any surfaces you are connecting, and use a paste made from a little of your clay mixed with water to make a glue between the two pieces. This is called slipping and scoring. Think about movement and line as you apply your clay decoration and build up your form.
- Finally, add scratches, dents and marks to the surfaces of your creation to decorate it. Think about how to make these decorations compliment the form.

WHAT YOU NEED

- bowl, plate, cup or anything with an interesting shape
- Paper, soft cloth
- Air-dry clay or play clay
- Small bowl with clay and water mixed together.
- Tools to add designs in clay- knife, pencils, etc.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Donovan Chester attended the University of Regina, in Regina, Saskatchewan with the intention of becoming a school teacher. One of his last course requirements for the Education degree was an art course, which lead him into a life-long career of exploring the challenges and enjoying the creativity and freedom of art-making. Born in 1940 near Carievale, in the South-Eastern corner of Saskatchewan, Chester moved to Regina in 1965. He was associated with the University of Saskatchewan's Regina Campus (which later became part of the University of Regina) for many years as a student and a teacher before branching out on his own as a self-employed artist.

Donovan Chester was introduced to clay in 1965 by Jack Sures at the University of Saskatchewan's Regina Campus. Despite some early recognition in clay, Donovan spent the early part of his career, with some success as a painter. He returned to clay in the mid-1970's and soon began to teach. In 1977 he became the Head of the Department of Extension's ceramic studio at the University of Regina, a position he held until 1987. Since that time, Donovan has worked as a professional artist and craftsperson in Regina." (Kallio 2001)

Chester has won the Excellence in Clay award at the Saskatchewan Craft Council's annual exhibition, Dimensions, on three separate occasions. He is a master of Raku firing and his elegant works and functional pottery are represented in many collections.