

Think Piece #1: Ceramics Studio Visit

It is meaningful that we first experienced the ceramics making process at the Harvard Ceramics Studio prior to any visit to the museum. The ceramics-related experience most people would ever encounter is seeing and appreciating ceramics from a distance at a museum or art gallery. The visit to the studio, however, made it crystal clear that this is art can best be appreciated by experiencing foremost the tactile endeavor ahead of any intellectual ones. Indeed, any superficial interaction between the eye and ceramic piece as subject is not meaningful without having experienced the real interaction between hand and clay. Another important lesson from the hands-on experiences that demanded so much precision is that the beauty of the ceramic art genre may be in its unrivaled proximity to the hallowed process of trial and error.

One aspect of the studio that left me wanting was its lack of concern for tradition and historicism. While there was brief mention of kaolin clay dunes on the Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard and gathering clay from underground during Boston's "big dig" construction project, I wish the instructor had spent more time discussing indigenous ingredients and methods, especially Native American and early colonial ware from the region. Perhaps this expectation for tradition derives from my personal preconception about ceramics, influenced by dominant Korean perspectives that view ceramics as part of a proud national heritage but not much more. Also, it is true that the purpose of the Harvard Ceramics Studio is to facilitate pottery-related activities for a general student audience, not to emulate historical pottery-making practices from the area. Still, I cannot help but think that the idea of Harvard and its education as a lofty, hovering intellectualism that can be said to be "detached from the

land” in many ways. During my personal experience at Harvard, instructors and students generally seemed to disavow the local and specific in order to focus their energies on the broader global and general issues and theories. Furthermore, there also exists the issue, when it comes to Native American culture specifically, of an implicit commentary on the quality of indigenous ceramics cultures by the Studio in its lack of observable interest.