

Ceramics

Ceramics is an art form that includes pottery and other items made of clay. Pottery was one of the earliest crafts developed. Clay is abundant and easy to dig up and shape into vessels and figurines. When clay vessels and figurines are baked in a fire (*fired*), the clay changes. It becomes hard. Pottery dating back to the Late Stone Age period has been found at sites around the world. As lifestyles changed from hunting and gathering to farming, pottery was even more important. It was used to carry water and to store crops.

Some potters still dig their own clay, but most purchase it. Clay has to be processed to remove debris and impurities before it can be used. Sometimes different types of clays are mixed together to improve the quality of the clay.



Bowl and teapot by Sarah Frederick.

Potters use lots of different techniques to shape clay. Some “throw” it on a potter’s wheel. Throwing is almost magical to watch. You can watch a potter throwing on a wheel here - <https://ket.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/1662decc-24a4-44ed-8360-ca73736fba9c/ceramics-chris-strecker/>

Other potters roll the clay out in slabs by hand or using a slab roller. Or they might build up forms using coils of clay or press clay into a mold.

After the clay is shaped, it is fired. Today most potters use a kiln instead of an open fire. A kiln is a kind of oven that gets very hot. Some kilns are wood fired. Others use gas or electricity. Often the last step is to coat the fired pottery with glaze and fire it again. Glaze is a mixture of materials that can be painted, sprayed, or dipped onto the pottery. When the pot is fired a second time, the glaze bonds to the pot. The pot is then waterproof. Glaze also changes the color and texture of the surface.

Some clay objects are “functional.” That means they have a practical use. Others are decorative. That means they are used as wall hangings, figurines, or sculptures.



Rivers of Colors: Wall Hanging by Susan Goldstein