

Ceramics TECHNICAL

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Flexible Ceramics Process of a Mug



Bas Kools finds an unusual method for moulding

I WANTED TO BE ABLE to give presents to people. A mug for me is a special object because its use is uncomplicated and intimate. It is the making of a mould for the production of just one mug that takes time and is limited when you want to work quickly. Therefore the process has to become more flexible and playful. My goal was to be able to make a mould in a short time, without spending too much money and without the problem of a mould that doesn't release the object.

I began experimenting with paper, fabric, foam and sponges. I found that materials like paper and textiles are too flexible and did not allow me to use them as a cast. After many tests I found one kind of sponge that worked in a similar way to slipcasting in plaster, through the build up of a wall thickness in the mould. These sponges, seen near most of our kitchen sinks are cheap and common. They come in various colours, every brand with its own texture and flexible enough to



Top: Finished mugs.

Above: The process of making the moulds.



*Top: A series of approximately 50 mould experiments.
Above: Casting in some of the moulds.*

use with the sewing machine. The material, called 'cellulose sponge cloth' is made from wood pulp treated in a chemical process, but can still be composted. Using mostly Canadian wood pulp, its main production is in China where they make it in bulk quantities to distribute over the whole world. Here in London I buy the sponge cloth in a pound shop or supermarket and use it to sew my moulds.

Working with the sponge cloth creates an entirely new set of variables. As the porcelain slip is cast the texture of the sponges, the creases in the material and the sewn stitches, all leave their impressions on the final object. This means that the entire outside of the object is covered with texture. Construction and decoration by normal stitching, zig-zag, even embroidery is suddenly directly applicable to the mould with the result that the object shows exactly how it was made and deformed. Casting is enabled directly after the



mould is made which makes casting suddenly a flexible process. With this working principle, I began to look for the most appropriate way of expressing the qualities of its process. Sewing gives the possibility to make a mould in ± 10 minutes and a collection is easily made, resulting in a series of vessels, each unique.

When using the same mould for multiple casts difference is created through gravity and creasing of the mould that cannot be controlled. The result, to a certain extent, will always be a surprise. This is another valuable effect of working with this technique. The mould can be fired, which is not toxic, or reused when you, for example, sow in a zip or work with clamps to enable you to open the mould. To show the origin of the object I removed the mould before firing. I undid the stitching and presented the mug, glazed, fired and packaged in the mould used for its casting. The unique production process of the mug carried by its packaging.



Mould and mug detail.



*Left top – bottom: Square mug mould, square mugs, mould and mug, pile of moulds.
Above: Mug being used.*

Experimenting with other ways to express the flexibility of the mould I cast cups in a system of four, nine or more in the same mould. During the casting process the cups influence and infect each other's shape as they deform under gravity and pressure of the liquid clay. This results in a collection of objects that has a strong relation to each other. A family or puzzle created as one group, that can only fit together in one way yet each part remains unique. In the bisque firing the mould disappears and the cups remain ready to be glazed.

Flexible ceramics is a project as part of the theme 'The world is square'. This is my graduation theme at the Royal College of Art in London studying Design Products 2007. 'The world is square' is a comment on our rigid thinking society, working from personal issues and things I see around me. I try to find different approaches to current objects, materials, systems and thinking. This project started with a self-inspired brief and an obsession with mugs and resulted in a physical and conceptual expression of the theme. What I try to catch in the way I work is by experimenting to find what you had never expected, as the character Zaphod Beeblebrox expresses in Douglas Adams's, 'Hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy': 'I don't know what I'm looking for. Why not? Because ... because ... I think it might be because if I knew I wouldn't be able to look for them.'

Bas Kools is a ceramic artist from The Netherlands.