

# In Studio with Robert LaWarre III

*Workshops with Robert are always lively and imaginative. Apart from his neat tool box, he has pouches full of laces, braids, stamps etc. He explains to us in this "In Studio" talk why texture for him is so important.*

Evelyne Schoenmann

**R**obert, why do you make ceramics?

Working in clay was a natural fit for me as I worked with my hands growing up in the family machine shop. The moment I sat down at the potter's wheel I realized the connection to working on a conventional lathe.

I was drawn in by the ability of clay to mimic other materials but with the flexibility beyond what other materials are capable of. My experience working in metal,

It is my dream to share with students and viewers alike these things along with ideals of problem solving and finishing things well.

*Your mugs have peculiar faces, your teapots unusual shapes, the surface of your pieces is full of intricate patterns. How would you describe your own pottery style?*

I would describe my vessels as playful sculptures with a character that gives them a life of their own. They exude dy-

travelling through the contrasting and complimentary components to provide the visual movement that encourages the viewer to explore the work in its entirety.

The quality of great Yixing teapots inspires me, where every surface has been addressed inside and out. I prefer to blend my connections inside making them seamless, while the outside seams are emphasized and exaggerated at times. Often these exterior edges are detailed with stitches, rivets and screws as evidence



wood, and plastics has also influenced my approach to object making in clay.

*You are a dedicated teacher, is this your dream job?*

I enjoy working different jobs.... It's like using a variety of media and creating multiple bodies of work. I call this process "cross-training". This means my life and work are less predictable and boring. I am a teacher to the core, though I don't have to be in a classroom daily to teach, reach, encourage, or inspire.

dynamic movement inspired partially by growing up in the "Space Coast" area of Florida, where my family worked in the aerospace industry.

Many of my forms start off simple then I stretch the slabs to create as much volume as possible while keeping hard edges. Having the sides expand out gives it the illusion that it is able to breathe ... These objects must express life. Keeping the vessels thin and light allows for uniform stretching but also adds a delicate nature to the work. The forms have fluid lines

of process. Mechanized forming such as throwing or slip casting techniques as the process is implied, making the viewer think deeper of how an object is made. It is satisfying when ceramic collectors and connoisseurs must study my forms to determine the process, as it is evidence of the importance of craftsmanship.

*I just saw your serpent skin teapot in the Yingge Museum in Taiwan at the Golden Teapot Competition. Can you please expand on how you began to use*

*pattern and how it has evolved over time?*

Initially the textures that I used were created from recycled automobile parts, which are important from my family history in auto racing. I press these items into the clay to obtain a “clean” texture in my slabs. The process of stretching the clay is aided by surface texture, allowing the clay a natural path to pull between the high points. In looking for other texturing methods I realized my connection to the Art Deco movement which celebrates the Machine Age. It is described as being lavish, eclectic, explicitly containing man-made materials, and having a festive character. For this reason, I looked for fabrics and textiles to impress into the clay. The fabric enables the slabs to shed moisture from their textured surface while retaining moisture on the underside.

to fit the template, depending on what form I am making. The template is made by rolling the balloon from one side to the other, using the nipple as its starting and end point for reference.

A variety of techniques is used for texture and division of space, from textured rollers, stamps, to fabrics. Heavy white plastic sheets are used to mask areas under the fabric to create contrasting areas for the viewers’ eye to rest.

Before assembling, slab edges are trimmed at an angle on the backside, then they are flipped with the texture side facing up and the edges are lightly tapped down. This softens the edge and allows a more refined layering of the slabs.

The slab is rolled around the balloon, using a strip of clay to secure the ends together at the top. The clay-encapsulat-

Another important part of my building process is making a tight-fitting lid. To do this, a continuous ring is added to the top of the form to create the flange seat. This ties all the slabs together and allows a uniform surface to fit the flange to. The opening is bevelled in downward toward the belly.

A long, “L”-shaped strip of slab is then rested in the opening and then cut off where it overlaps. The ends are attached together forming a ring with a flange. When leather hard, this ring is pressed to the shape of the opening. The lid top is then attached to this ring and blended together.

*And where lies your future?*

My future lies in continuing to create, learn, share, and make things better in every way I can.



This is my key to maximum slab stretching. Soft touch, with more hand-surface touching the exterior surface of the vessel, allows me to preserve texture. Having a light weight armature such as styrofoam or balloons is also very helpful for preserving texture in larger forms. This building technique allows the work to float or walk across a surface, achieving visual lift.

*Would you describe for us your building process using this “balloon armature”?*

I start by texturing a slab large enough

ed balloon is rested in a fabric hammock made by stretching cotton fabric over a bucket. This supports the clay uniformly as the fabric adjusts to fit the form.

When adding side-panels to the body, I create “custom templates”. This is done by wetting the slab edges on the body where the side-panel will be attached. The side-panel is pressed to the wet surface then peeled back to reveal where the connection point will be. Trimming outside of the connection point allows for sufficient overlap for a strong bond.

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Evelyne Schoenmann’s next interview is with  
**Lynn Frydman Kuhn, CH & USA**

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