

# POP ART VASES

*"Pop art looks out into the world. It doesn't look like a painting of something, it looks like the thing itself."*

—Roy Lichtenstein



## **Nancy Corrigan Wilbert**

**R**oy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) is considered to be one of the greatest artists of the pop art movement. His use of familiar subjects like comic strips makes his art memorable. His original efforts in this style were for his children. The story goes that his children poked fun at their dad by saying that he could not paint as well as the images in their comic books.

In 1961, Lichtenstein produced about six paintings showing characters from comic strip frames. It was at this time that he made use of devices that were to become signatures in his work: Benday dots, lettering, and speech balloons.

## **Vase Templates**

I introduced images of Lichtenstein's art to my ceramic students. They were in awe of his work and loved it. I asked them to bring in images of their favorite comic or animated character. The image had to include the head and shoulders and be big enough to be enlarged to a clear 8 x 10" (20 x 25 cm) photocopy.

The next day, I compiled and photocopied the images. Students then traced a contour of their enlarged images onto lightweight tag board. These images were cut out to serve as templates for pop art vases.



### Working with Clay

To begin building, large slabs of clay were rolled to a ½" (1.25 cm) thickness. Using the templates as a guide, students cut out the contours with pin tools. The slabs were placed on sheets of old cardboard covered with plastic bags, which enabled the vases to be built flat and be stored safely during the process without drying out.

The sides of the vase were added next. Long, thick coils were made and rolled to a ½" thickness. The flattened coils were trimmed with a pin tool and ruler to a 2½" (6.25 cm) width. These strips were added to the top of the contour shape after students scored and slipped the area.

Reinforcing coils were added on the inside of the strips and the outside seams were gently smoothed. These side strips echoed the contour of the form. Depending on the lengths of the flattened coils, additional strips were made to finish the sides of the vase. I reminded students to leave an opening wide enough to serve as the top of the vase.

### Final Contours

The next step was to add the final contour side to the form. To do this, plastic bags were placed inside the form. The sides were then scored and

heavily slipped. A large ½" thick slab was rolled and placed on top of the form. The plastic bags prevented the slab from sagging.

A pin tool was used to cut away the excess clay from the sides of the form. The top of the box at the opening could be cut straight across or echo the front shape. The new seam was carefully closed and thin reinforcing coils were attached at the opening. The forms were then loosely bagged and set aside for a day to become leather hard. It is important that the vase remains flat on the covered cardboard during the

entire building process and that the plastic bags not be removed up to this point.

The next day, the interior plastic bags were removed and the vases were set upright. Using long-handled modeling tools, additional thin reinforcing coils were added and blended to the inside of the vase. Since only slip and coils at the opening of the vase were used to attach the final side, students had to look inside the vase and add coils wherever they could reach. Vases were smoothed, set aside to dry, then bisque fired.

**I introduced images of Lichtenstein's art to my ceramic students. They were in awe of his work and loved it.**

### Decoration

Once the vases were bisque fired, they were wiped with a damp sponge, and the exteriors were coated with a single layer of white glaze. The interior was coated with three layers of black glaze, which hid any flaws from the building process. Since graphite burns off in firing, details of images were added in pencil and painted with one coat of velvet underglaze. Color areas were then outlined in black underglaze with a fine brush, followed by two layers of clear glaze topcoat. The first coat of clear glaze was "patted" on with a brush to prevent the underglaze colors from bleeding. After this coat was dry, the second coat was added and the vases were fired. 🌀

*Nancy Corrigan Wilbert is an art teacher at Seekonk High School in Seekonk, Massachusetts. wilbertn@seekonk.k12.ma.us*

### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.*

### WEB LINK

[www.lichtensteinfoundation.org](http://www.lichtensteinfoundation.org)