



WILD CLAY COIL POT WITH BLACK UNDERGLAZE DESIGN

MATERIALS: SHORELINE CLAY DEPOSIT + UNDERGLAZE PAINT

SIZE: 3 ⅛" X 5 ½"

ARTIST: TAWNEY CROWLEY

A few summers back, my dad called and mentioned he might have stumbled upon a clay deposit at the shore near their home out the road. He bagged some soil and saved it for me to examine. After a closer look, it did appear to be wild clay. It was mixed with dirt and other shoreline debris, but the texture and plasticity indicated the presence of clay within.

I brought the material home and started breaking it into smaller pieces before soaking it in water in a 5 gallon bucket. After soaking, I agitated the water to help heavier organic particles sink and allow the lighter clay particles to suspend. I worked my way through three different sizes of strainers and colanders to remove the large debris, sticks and rocks. I then used the smaller size strainer to remove dirt clumps, and other small rocks. Each time, I had to let the clay particles settle , so that the water could become clear and I could see the progress. Unsurprisingly, the most difficult material to separate from the clay was the sand. Eventually I strained the clay slurry through cloth to remove as many of the sand particles as possible.

I waited for the clay and water to separate one last time before I could remove the excess water from the bucket. Once most of the water was scooped off the top of the clay, I was able to pour the slurry onto a piece of plaster to begin removing the last bit of moisture. This would leave behind the clay and remove enough moisture to make it workable. About 24 hours later, I was able to scrape the clay off of the plaster, and begin molding it.

Texture wise, the clay molded fairly easily, it could crack and split just as easily. If I was going to work with this clay, I would have to keep it very well hydrated during the

working process. The color was a very rich dark gray color. The clay had a pleasant smell like the earth and ocean. Not surprising, considering where it was found, but it made me think there was quite a bit of organic material in the clay.

I started rolling coils to make a pot, remembering to keep the clay very well hydrated to prevent cracking. If I'm honest, I was worried that the coils would split when I turn them into rings, and while some small cracks did appear, the clay was very workable! The clay slip was also very rich, like paint. When I let the pot dry out, it turned a light gray color, but on the outside of the bowl, you could still see bits of sand that I had missed. As you turn the ball in your hands, you can see a slight sparkle to the surface.

I put the clay pot in the kiln at around 1880°F, and let it cycle for about 18 hours. When I popped open the kiln lid to take a peek, I had expected the pot to have exploded, or have some other failure, but it was perfect. No cracks, no splits, no damage whatsoever.

I was taken by surprise at the color of the fired clay. It had changed from the dark, rich, gray to a vivid, rusty red. This color would come from iron oxides that would have eroded, and eventually settled on the shoreline, mixing into the clay. I am not practiced in Lingít formline so I did not want to decorate the pot in that style without the confidence. So, instead I chose a black underglaze and painted on a design that reminded me of button blanket regalia. I settled on representing the bold lines and buttons that I see on the local tribal regalia.

I wanted to give this pot to The Nolan Center so that it's story can be shared with all who appreciate a good mashup of history, culture and art. This clay had a wonderful journey; it was buried, built up, settled into the shoreline and eventually was turned into something beautiful.