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Week 2 – Deepening Technique

Congratulations! I am excited to see how much you've taken the last week's assignment to heart. It led to many thought-provoking discussions contributing deeply to the success of this course. It shows that we can confront our abilities with courage. Now we can explore ways of moving forward with Vision, Design and Technique.

The rest of the course will help you develop strength with Technique and Design. As the Forum discussions have revealed, Vision, Design and Technique are tightly linked; gaining strength in one reinforces the others. I have separated them to structure the course material and facilitate the discussions we're having.

Today we are starting Module 1 on Technique. During this module, we will look at four different approaches to developing Technique. This week, the focus is on improving Technique through “**Technique Deepening**”. I have developed this to enable the artist to revisit a favourite technique and push it to new heights. You will have a chance to explore your new ideas in the Studio next week.

Too often we collect techniques without mastering them. As a result, we may abandon techniques that could produce powerful pieces if only we took the time to develop them. Instead, we move on to a new technique, thinking the best one will be around the corner. Or, we see other people pushing a technique we use further than we could imagine and this may make us feel we've missed a trick.

What are we to do? How do we take a technique we know, even are bored with, and make it the next big thing? Here's an approach which I call “**Technique Deepening**”. It works like this:

Consider a technique you know inside out. It can be one you have developed or one you have worked with for some time. Do this:

- 1) Write down a **description** of your chosen technique,
- 2) identify the **assumptions** you have made in your description, and
- 3) **challenge** each assumption.

To illustrate this approach and explore it in detail, I will take the familiar caning technique and see how Technique Deepening helps evolve it. Let's take each step in turn:

1) Description

When describing the technique, be as precise as possible as each word is going to act as a seed-pod from which ideas will germinate. This is my description of canework. I kept it short here, but the more you write, the better. Please note: For the purpose of the exercise, the focus is on cylindrical and not stacked canes.

“Canes are rods of coloured clays whereby the clays are placed together to form a pattern along the entire length of the cane. The pattern can be simple or complex. The cane is sliced in thin cross-sections. The slices are then applied to a surface.”

2) Assumptions

Look at each significant word in the description and identify as many assumptions as you can. These are either prevailing assumptions in the polymer clay community or your own. I have identified a few assumptions to illustrate:

Assumption 1) A cane is a rod which is assumed to be a uniform cylinder.

Assumption 2) A cane is a rod which is assumed to be made from solid clay.

Assumption 3) The canes must be sliced thinly.

Assumption 4) The slices are produced from cross-sectional cuts.

3) Challenges

Finally, challenge each identified assumption. For example:

Assumption 1) A cane must be a uniform cylinder.

Challenge: What if the cane were shaped as a non-uniform cylinder? Maria Petova challenges this assumption by forming her cane in the shape of a sausage. See Showcase.

Assumption 2) A cane is made from solid clay.

Challenge: What if my cane were not solid but hollow or partly hollow? My “Curl-up Cane Bangle” resulted from my challenging this assumption and working with a hollow cane. See Showcase.

Assumption 3) The slices must be thin cross-sections.

Challenge: What if the slices were cut in chunks rather than sliced thinly? Julie Eakes challenges this assumption by using the whole length of the cane, making it part of the structure of the piece, instead of just a decorative component. See Showcase.

Assumptions 4) The slices are produced from cross-sectional cuts.

Challenge: What if the cane were cut along its length instead? Ford and Forlano challenge

Assumptions 2, 3 and 4 by curving a hollow cane and cutting a slice off its side. This changes our preconceived idea that canes should be salami sliced. See Showcase.

There are many more assumptions and challenges - the list goes on. See what you can come up with.

Note: The point of the exercise is to generate as many ideas as possible. The more you practise this process, the better you will become at generating new insights into techniques that you think you can develop. When you do this exercise, feel how your attitude toward your initial technique starts to change.

Week 2 – Assignment

Applying Technique Deepening to your own technique

This assignment applies “Technique Deepening” to your own work. Consider a technique you know inside out, preferably one you would like to use as a vector to explore Design and Vision. Take it through the Technique Deepening method discussed above.

For each assumption you identify, generate as many challenges as you can. Don't worry about how you propose to implement your challenges.

Optional Extra: For those of you who are looking for an additional challenge, consider The Skinner Blend for this exercise.

Let me know how you're doing. Don't feel pressured to share your definitions and challenges. Use the following link to do this:

<http://voila.eu.com/forums/Forum/week-2-technique-deepening/>