



a natural state

Artist: Stephen Ferrell

Video 3: Process B. Kneading Clay

This is the clay that I washed and blunged, that we allowed to soak, settle and solidify. Here we have my electric pug mill here where the mule or ox would have been grinding or tempering the clay. That is what takes place right at this operation here. (Stephen tosses a clump of clay into the machine.) Slam that in. (Stephen flips a switch and a grinding sound ensues.) And here the blades are chopping up the clay, blending and mixing it all together. And it comes out at the end having been blended together. (Stephen points to a rectangle of clay being extruded from the machine, and then he turns the machine off.) Clay improves by aging, and so I put it into plastic barrels here where, the longer it sits in the wet condition, the more plastic or flexible it is. Clay in this condition is about one fifth water or twenty per cent water. We call the water plasticity, and this is what gives the clay its workability and bendability.

(The potter picks up a large and elastic looking clump of clay and goes over to the work table.) The next step is to wedge the clay. Even though the pug mill has ground up the clay, air bubbles in it and we want to eliminate those in this process. (Stephen slices the clump of clay with a piece of wire that is stretched over the worktable.) Here we cut the clay with a piece of stovepipe wire and repeatedly slam it together. Here I am staying in a horizontal plane, and by compacting it as we throw it down here, we are giving the air bubbles in the clay a chance to escape. So by exposing and then compacting here, hopefully these will go away. When we cut with a wire and no longer see air bubbles in it, when all of the clay is consistently even when we pull a finger across it, then it is something that is all well-blended together and ready to go to the next step which is to knead the clay.

You start the clay in the circular direction that is going to be continued on the potter's wheel. (As the music plays, Stephen kneads the clay and turns it into a conical shape.) And this is what goes onto the potter's wheel with the pointed end down to eliminate base cracking. (Fade to black.)

