



# The Language of Shape and Colour

*A one-day exploratory workshop in ceramic design*

Inez Michiels

**As a ceramicist, you are constantly making decisions about shape and colour, sometimes based on a concept, sometimes on intuition. But how do you know they're working together? Why can a minor adjustment in proportion, volume, or colour make a shape feel heavier, lighter, more active, or more restrained?**

This one-day workshop investigates these issues through hands-on experiments with colour and clay. You'll look at simple contrasts like warm and cool, light and dark, still and active, ordered and irregular, light and heavy, angular and rounded.

Instead of memorising fixed meanings or a set of rules, you will observe, compare, and test how changes in colour and shape affect the character of a sculpture. As the experiments progress, connections begin to form.

The day concludes with a simple ceramic exercise that combines several qualities into one form, followed by a group assessment of the results.

**This one-day workshop is an exploratory introduction to more structured colour and shape analysis, as well as to making more conscious decisions.**

## ONE-DAY PROGRAMME

### 09:30–09:45 **Introduction**

A short introduction to the workshop and to the role of colour and shape in ceramic practice.

### 09:45–10:30 **1. Finding opposites**

What makes two colours or forms feel different?

Through simple exercises with colour and shape samples, we explore oppositions in the parameters that make up their appearance.

### 10:30–10:45 **Coffee break**

### 10:45–12:00 **2. Approaching and distance**

What makes a sculpture more or less accessible?

Colour temperature, shape direction, and structure, are used to investigate qualities such as attraction and withdrawal, proximity and distance.

### 12:00–13:00 **Lunch**

### 13:00–14:15 **3. Weight and power**

Can a form look dominant or submissive?

Working with volume, proportion and colour lightness, we explore how visual weight and presence can be created.

### 14:15–14:30 **Break**

### 14:30–15:45 **4. Activity and modesty**

What makes a form feel calming or activating?

We investigate qualities such as colour chromaticity, shape roundness and quantity to create exuberant dynamics or modest calm in a sculpture.

### 15:45–16:15 **5. Bringing the discoveries together**

The experiences from previous exercises are brought together. We look back at the morning and afternoon experiments and identify connections between the different observations.

### 16:15–17:15 **6. A final ceramic experiment**

Each participant receives a combination of three qualities and creates a small ceramic form that brings them together through shape and colour. The aim is to explore how several qualities can coexist within one form.

### 17:15–17:30 **Looking together**

We place the forms together and reflect on what we observe.

What is communicated through colour? What through shape? Where do they reinforce each other, and where do they create tension?

The day ends with questions to take back into your own ceramic practice.

## WHAT YOU WILL TAKE AWAY

### 1. Sharper observation

A more sensitive eye for the nuances of shape and colour.

### 2. New connections

An understanding of how changes in colour and shape can alter the character of a form.

### 3. More possibilities

A simple structure for questioning and developing your own intuitive choice.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Duration

One day, 6.5 hours

### Included

Teaching materials, shape and colour samples on paper, clay.

### Language

English – Dutch

### Target audience

designers, artists, ceramicists, students and anyone interested in colour, shape and meaning

### What participants should bring

Sketch paper, drawing materials, sculpting tools and brushes, small mixing containers, apron, towel or paper towels, camera. Lunch and drinks.

### Level

no previous experience with the methodology is required

Participants work with colour samples, simple paper exercises, paint and clay. The emphasis is on looking, comparing, making and discussing rather than on technical ceramic skills.

The workshop is exploratory: there are no fixed meanings to memorise and no prescribed forms to reproduce. The structure is there to stimulate curiosity, sharpen observation and open up new possibilities for making.



Fig.1: Student working on a shape exercise in the Colour and Semantic Design course at ENSAV La Cambre, academic year 2023–2024.

## LECTURER



**Inez Michiels** has taught colour and semantic design at ENSAV La Cambre in Brussels and has been a visiting professor at various universities and higher education institutions, including MICA (Baltimore), LASALLE (Singapore) and the University of Antwerp.

Her research on non-verbal communication has supported design agencies and multinational companies. She is the author of *Symbolen Constructies*, the *Design Semantics Knowledge Graph*, and co-founder and board member of CITY OF 8 and the Interdisciplinary Colour Association Belgium (ICA-Belgium). She is also a visual artist with a background in ceramics.

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Fig.2: Graphic design students sorting colours in the Semantic Design workshop at MICA, Baltimore, November 2019.