

Sacramento State Wood-Fire Process

This communication is to provide notice that the Department of Art will be using its low-emission, wood-fired kiln on campus Tuesday, April 15, through Thursday, April 17. The kiln, commonly referred to as the “smokeless kiln,” was designed by Japanese ceramic artist Masakazu Kusakabe. This kiln facilitates a wood-fired process that allows students to create unique effects on ceramic pieces by letting the wood ash melt onto the ceramic ware, as well as allowing flames to pass through the work.

This process serves significant pedagogical and creative purposes. Using the kiln is a labor-intensive process, requiring students to work together and develop an understanding of the elaborate wood-firing process. The availability of this kiln helps to distinguish Sacramento State’s ceramics program. The Department of Art is open to visits and questions from students, faculty, and staff interested in learning more about the process.

Please visit its website (www.csus.edu/college/arts-letters/art/) or contact the department office by leaving a voicemail at 916-278-6166 or emailing us at art@csus.edu.

If you have environmental or safety questions, please contact Environmental Health and Safety at (916) 278-2020.

FAQs

Q: How long has the kiln been used on campus?

A: Since 2009.

Q: I understand that lead and other heavy metals are used in pottery glazing. Does the firing of the wood kiln release metal fumes into the environment?

A: No lead is used in this process at Sacramento State and no toxic fumes are released into the environment by the kiln.

Q: Why do you use wood rather than electric or gas kilns? Doesn’t wood fire cause more pollution?

A: The effects produced by the wood firing are unique to the process and cannot be emulated with applied glazes. The finish on the ceramic pieces comes from direct contact with the flames and the wood ash melting onto the clay surface. The volume of pollution is relative to the size of the kiln and relative volume of works to be fired, as the wood kiln is at least double the size of any of our other kilns and requires far less glaze to be used. It would require a similar amount of firing time to run multiple small kilns ending up with the same volume of work.

Q: What materials are used to fuel the kiln, and why does it seem to produce more smoke at times?

A: Dry hard and soft firewood are used for fuel. Soft woods are used at the beginning of the process and hardwoods are later added to produce coals in the kiln and aid in slow cooling. We avoid pitchy pine as it has proven to create more smoke.

Q: Does the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD) allow the use of wood-fired kilns?

A: **Yes.** During the Fall 2016 semester, a third-party Source Testing Consultant monitored the air emissions from the Kiln operation and determined that they were within the allowable limits set by the SMAQMD. The Art department also moved the scheduled burn times to ensure that the kiln operation will not occur during the SMAQMD's "Check Before You Burn" periods between November 1st and March 1st.

Q: Are wood-fired kilns common in university art programs? Are there others in the CSU system?

A: It is estimated that approximately half of ceramic programs nationwide have woodfired kilns. At least two other CSU's have wood kilns and several community colleges in this region.

Q: Who is responsible for the operation of the kiln?

A: Professor Scott Parady is on campus for the duration of each firing.

Q: Can I see the kiln, or the materials made in the kiln?

A: The Department of Art is always open to sharing the process with interested individuals. You are welcome to contact the Department of Art office (art@csus.edu) if you are interested in learning more about the woodfiring process. Or just stop by the Art Office!

Q: Why is the kiln fired during the week, as opposed to the weekend when less people are on campus?

A: The kiln is fired during the week to make the most of scheduled class times and class involvement. This process builds a strong community amongst students as they work together on this labor-intensive endeavor. The people involved with the firing will be practicing social distancing during the whole process.