



DETAIL FROM "STONE MUSIC"



DETAIL FROM THE SERIES "IN THE BEGINNING"

## SHAPING LEADERS

### LETTING CLAY FORM THE WORDS

BY **KATIE DANIEL**

A practicing artist for more than 25 years, Ed Bamiling has been a facilitator with Leadership Development for ten years, guiding creativity sessions with both public and custom programs. At The Banff Centre, he is the Ceramics Facilitator with Visual Arts, in charge of all aspects of operating the ceramics studio, as well as consulting with and assisting resident artists on their projects. He has exhibited his work widely in solo and group exhibitions, both nationally and internationally.

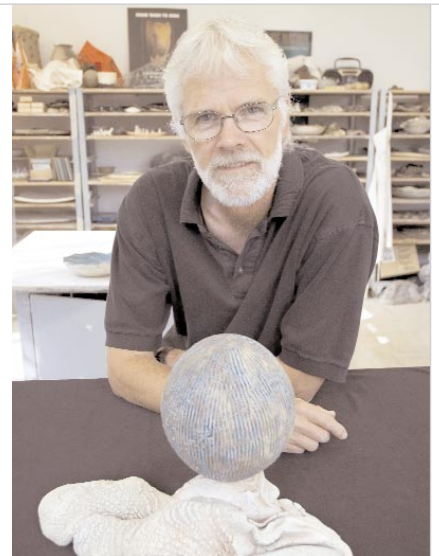
For Ed Bamiling, the first time he saw someone throw a pot began a life-long fascination with, and dedication to, working with clay. "I was mesmerized by it and wanted to try it. I still have the first pot that I threw on the wheel thirty years ago, because it actually worked out. I think it was beginner's luck, but I was hooked." The process, the aesthetic, the tactile medium spoke to him from the very start and in turn, he uses this medium as a way of helping people (re)discover and explore their own creativity, both personally and professionally. What Bamiling does with clay for Leadership Development is just one of the rich diversity of artistic practices that have been an idea source at The Banff Centre for over a decade.

WHAT'S THE 'COLOUR,' THE 'TEXTURE,' THE MOOD OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT? HOW CAN IT BE MADE MORE STIMULATING, A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE FEEL ENERGIZED AND CREATIVE?

One of the Banff Centre's pioneers in using creativity practice as a metaphor for leadership development, Bamiling was among the first invited to share his craft with business leaders. It took time, he says, not only for artists like himself to know how to integrate their art into the learning concepts but also for the other facilitators in a program to learn how to lead up to the creative experience, and give some context to the sessions after the fact. Eventually, Bamiling says, "the debrief of the creativity sessions became very important. The evening or next morning after the session, groups debrief each other through a creative playback of what they learned. Not what they did, what they learned. It's a big difference. I still think these are some of the most energized times, when participants can actually consolidate and apply this knowledge in some way."

This creative playback, this notion of demonstrating learning, triggers a strong memory. "One group always sticks out in my mind. They were amazing. In the group was a lawyer, a very quiet young man. When we were invited into their breakout room, me, the other facilitators and the rest of the participants, we could see that the room was set up for a trial. We were the jury. The lawyer was the prosecutor, wearing a tablecloth for his robe. The group put a fictitious company on trial for not supporting creativity in the workplace. They put on a full case, with both defense and prosecution. And we, the jury, had to decide. It was brilliant. They had fifteen minutes to put this together. It was so exciting, not just for me, but for them, to see their colleagues in ways they'd not seen before.... not in this kind of interpretive, metaphoric thinking."

Depending on the program, participants now have many options to explore a variety of artistic disciplines including mask-making, theatre improv, ceramics, opera, drumming, sculpture, writing, photography, clowning, or jazz. While he admits that this sometimes takes participants outside their comfort zone, Bamiling also feels that the choice to come to Banff, as opposed to other professional development programs, is in part because they "think there's going to be something different. There's a chance to explore something intriguing. They are generally very open. As long as it's kept safe, they're ready to explore."



ED BAMILING

Bamiling characterizes his medium "as particularly friendly because lots of participants played with clay, or mud, when they were kids. There's a tactile memory that makes it pretty safe. It's very pliable and malleable; everybody can create something. I think that eases the way." And he finds that his often non-verbal exercises open new ways to brainstorm, work in teams, understand differences in perception, and communicate. "There are many ways of getting from 'a to b,' from concept to result. One, often the most obvious, may be fast, efficient, streamlined – the most direct route. But maybe that's not always the best way. Perhaps a more circuitous route is going to be more satisfying, produce a result which will last longer, and be more engaging because people feel better about it, it's more elegant, even on aesthetic levels."

That's also one of the key concepts that Bamiling hopes participants experience in his sessions, to take a new-found appreciation for aesthetics back to the workplace. "If the board room is where most decisions are made, do you dread going into it because it feels too linear, too rigid? Or is it set up so that it feels good? If not, are there things you can do to warm it up, make it more user-friendly? What's the 'colour,' the 'texture,' the mood of the work environment? How can it be made more stimulating, a place where people feel energized and creative, where new ideas are welcomed?"

After a decade of programs, Bamiling seems as committed to the concept of creativity integration as ever and says that a large part of his continuing interest comes as much from what he receives, as what he gives. "I think we're on the journey together. I happen to be familiar with a certain practice, certain materials, a certain way of working – and my role is to facilitate a collective exploration of ideas and possibilities. I like seeing those little light bulbs go off in people's minds about things they can do, directions they can pursue, revelations they may have. Those discoveries are hugely exciting and keep it very rich for me." ■