

PAINTING IN CERAMICS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PAINTING AND CERAMICS

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ABSTRACT

Art is as varied as the life which produces it. Each artist portrays different aspect of his world in his or her creation, giving depth and meaning, either as a painter, a ceramics or both. This paper is about painting on ceramic wares, which tends to bridge the gap between the two creative disciplines. It discusses meaning and content, techniques, styles and the other elements of its languages, such as shapes, lines, colours, tones and textures. The sensation of volume, space, movement, lines and shades are also investigated. The functions of painting as a ceramic process will be discussed in terms of its similarities and differences to those of the canvas, watercolour and mural paintings. Common grounds on the basis of criticisms, evaluation, aesthetics and appreciations of both ceramic and canvas paintings will be examined. Finally, the paper will analyse the character, mood and inspirations of the ceramic artist as a distinct creative personality.

Introduction

Whenever we contemplate on a work of art, we project ourselves into the form and message of the work. Our feelings are determined by what we find in it through our sense of critical observation and evaluation. Formal relationships are further created when two or more colours are explored. According Read (1963), "all art is a development of formal relationship". In other words, there is so much to an individual's reaction to a work of art, and form is definitely not all there is to a work of art. A ceramic vase, for instance, is not built solely for utilitarian purpose, as it equally serves an aesthetic purpose; as an ornamental object, as an object for a drawing class, and also as a historic document of a culture of a given time and place. It can be used to tell stories of events, transfer messages for certain levels of communication. These aspects make up the content of the ceramic product.

Great artists of the past and present have been able to take some aspect of art creative media to give depth and meaning to human existence. They made use of many devices that are common to painting such as

composition, colour, form and texture. To Masterndrea, & McRee, (2001), painting in ceramic wares has offered the ceramic artist a fluid and flexible media to express his or her ideas and emotions through the creation of certain aesthetic qualities on the surface of the ceramic ware in a two dimensional visual language. According to Chararrie, (2000), the element of this language is used in various ways to induce the sensation of volume, space, movement and light on the ceramic surface.

Historical Background to the Origin of Ceramics and Painting

Ceramics and painting are among the first of the arts known to man. The earliest potteries were shaped by hand from processed clay that is dug out from the earth, while the earliest paintings were found in ancient caves centuries ago. These ancient works of ceramics and paintings still move us through their expressive qualities. Through the discovery of fire, potteries were made more durable. Furthermore, the invention of the wheel added rhythm and uprising movements to the concept of ceramics forms, while the concept of glazing brought

colour and numerous ideas associated with painting into ceramics. Ceramics is not only the representative art of the sensitive and intellectual civilizations, it plays a vital role in the historical documentation of artistic movements. For instance, as Greek vessels describe a type of classical harmony, the Chinese and indeed the oriental vessels extended the Greek aesthetic qualities of static harmony to a more dynamic finish. It is interesting to note that ceramic and painting share a common but humble origin, as well as a common characteristic in terms of their colourful appearances.

Today, through the different creative painting mediums, techniques and styles found in ceramic wares, the two works of art have become, in some sense, liberation of the personality that created them. They have become a living movement, a representation of the artist's sense of colour harmony. Ceramics is primarily a plastic art and a form of sculpture, which it is most nearly related to, and has a similar quality of imitative intention. The significant phases in the development of painting within the last century; from fauvism and cubism to Pollock's action paintings, and finally to the postmodernist tendencies, have greatly influenced design elements and the character of architecture, sculpture, ceramic wares and other commercial and industrial designs over the years. This is largely because of the rapidly changing social and cultural patterns. According to Read (*ibid.*), "technical methods have become more important than the power of invention, and cultivated solutions to problems have also become more important than personal experiments." Today, in ceramic and canvas paintings, the artist's total personality has dominated the making of creative decisions. Art is no longer based on a number of static concepts but has changed and extended its boundaries to other areas in response to the shift of emphasis in the intellectual and emotional situations of each period in history, as well as the commercial and economic need of the society that absorbs it.

By adding colours in a technique of painting, ceramic artists demonstrate primary concern for visual response to the inevitable

influences of social subjective preferences, arising from the need to satisfy social-economic and aesthetic demands of a ceramic work.

Significance of the Topic

The intent of this paper is to examine the rudimentary forces common to ceramic painting and other type of paintings, which are brought into being through brush marks, dimensional relationship of element and principles of art, as well as juxtaposition of colours which give the individual artist talent and opportunity to express himself in a visual reality. There is nothing expressed on canvas that has not found its equivalent in the painting of a ceramic surface. From landscape, portrait, abstract expressions to naturalistic paintings, the modern and the postmodernist colour ideas, techniques of rendition, forms and imageries, meaning and messages have all found common grounds in both ceramic paintings and other conventional forms of paintings. As lines give the ceramic paintings clarity and dynamic rhythm, colour adds one further element to the complexity of a complete ceramic ware; it enhances verisimilitude to the work. The artist achieves this by selecting the dominant tone, which may be arbitrary and more often in conformity with the style and mode of the artist.

Absorbability of Painting

Painted ceramics are prototypes of the artist's passions and aspirations of humanity in general; it is not the impression of vitality of production but a good command of sublimation. There is no doubt that painting is the centre of all forms of art whenever there is an examination of the actual structure of a work of art. The indispensability of a painting makes it absorbable to other forms of art just as it has been absorbed into ceramics. Other forms of interior decoration tend to dispense with the painting on the wall in today's decorative arrangements, making the relative importance of the art of painting to be challenged. In canvas painting as well as in ceramic painting, the problem of style, technique and the science of composition are handled in the same manner and approach. In judging their aesthetic qualities, it will be correct to observe that there is an inherent quality of beauty in terms of colour

harmony in both forms of art, irrespective of their utilitarian purpose, size, form and material use. Every painting passes through a process and these processes are simply the successive stages in the artist's mind. These follow physical elements such as rhythm of lines, shading of forms and management of space, as well as light and shade. In ceramic painting, the above elements of design are considered in close relationship with a defined outline, which is rhythmic. The control of the surface of a ceramic work as a painting ground share the same artistic feeling for space in a canvas painting. In both, space is controlled through composition of objects and subjects, light and shade. The technique of adding colour patches and the linear forms that dominate some of the ceramic paintings is only an aspect of a style of painting in mural, stain glass or even canvas painting.

In ceramic painting, the potentiality of line goes beyond just a suggestion of an outline, in the hand of the oriental painter or Chinese ceramic artist. To Sartiges, & Boutin, (2001), lines are used to express movement when painted on ceramic wares. Here, mass movement can be expressed, not just in the obvious sense of object in motion but more aesthetically and rhythmically expressed in a technique which is easier to appreciate than explained. In some ceramic linear expressions of colour, lines are often used in its capacity to suggest mass or forms that are rendered in continuous display of subtlety and swiftness. Colour tones (light and shade) are dominant features in most successful paintings; this represents the passage of light into darkness within the field of one or multiple colours. This again, is a major feature in both ceramic and canvas painting.

Major Differences between Ceramics and Painting

We can see that there is a great measure of similarities between ceramics and paintings, for they are both painted in the same style and technique. They are also used to depict similar concept, motifs, ideas, meaning and content on a familiar ground. However, a major difference between the two rests on the ability of the two type of painting to communicate. The ceramic paintings are so

intelligently done that every man on the street understands and appreciates them, while some paintings are so abstracted that their messages are often very difficult to understand and appreciated without any interpretation whatsoever from the artist. Again, quality in ceramic colours is relatively easier and cheaper to enhance through glazing, while gloss is achieved in painting through the quality of paint and the amount of linseed oil used. The processes involved in ceramic production is technically complex as every part of the process must be perfectly and meticulously executed, while it takes the displacement of several elements of paintings to make it go wrong.

Painting on Pottery and Ceramics

Some recent experimentations on painting either as a form of installation art, mixed media or exploration of different painting media on different grounds have directed many painters into painting on a well primed ceramic pots for display as a work of art. This has created a new form of interdisciplinary art that involves painting with oil or acrylic colour, while using fired traditional clay pots or other forms of pottery materials as successful painting ground. Indeed, this has further taken painting from a two dimensional art on canvas board, wall and glass painting ground to a three dimensional or multi dimensional creative dialogue.

An exploration such as figure; 1, offers a new dimension to the age long tradition of ceramic painting where direct or indirect application of colours to ceramic wares have survived different world civilizations and are still in practice all over the world. Interestingly, these forms of direct painting on fired clay pot, not only induce a colourful aesthetics to the otherwise very ordinary traditional pot, they also add design, texture, colour, compositional techniques and other painting qualities to the surface of the clay pots. It also enhances the value to the pot as it takes it from the surface level of a utilitarian object to a decorative domestic item. The different kinds of paintings that have appeared on ceramic wares across different traditions and civilizations and history are such that their designs allude to the symbols and motifs of the culture and

traditions that produced them. It is common knowledge that cultural materials and traditional ways of living in most ancient civilizations can be traced from the painting of cultural activities found on their ceramic wares and pottery. According to Jones, (2012), archaeologists and anthropologists were able to study the traditions of ancient Greece, Egypt, and China and so on, from the different painting found on these wares. It is therefore not out of place that contemporary painters have found traditional clay pots as suitable ground to explore indigenous painting forms, styles, ideas, motifs and symbols such as uli wall and body paintings using modern or industrial painting materials for durability. This brings about a new marriage between the old and new, traditional and contemporary; a synthesis of traditional motifs and symbols into contemporary communicative material. This further assures the survival of our fast fading African rich cultural heritage.

The long tradition of painting different objects in different colour schemes has turned the ceramic artist into a painter. Art critics will agree that virtually everything, including the concepts and themes that the painter is capable of registering on canvas has also been done on the surface of a ceramic ware. From the Chinese landscape, seascape and mountains to English flowers and floral objects; to the different motifs and abstract ideas that contemporary ceramic painters have explored, there is no doubt that the ceramic artist has explored the width and depth of painting ideas and techniques on ceramic surfaces. Portraits of peasants and dignitaries have been successfully painted on ceramic surfaces with rich command and mastery of naturalism and realism. To Davies, (2004), different animals, fruits and aquatic creatures have been painted by ceramic artists. Numbers and letters of different characters, as well as different display of pallet colours have also been painted on ceramic wares. This paper is therefore designed to bring this beautiful interdisciplinary practice of painting on ceramic or earthen wares into the focus of contemporary art discuss. This will in turn establish the fact that a good ceramic artist can double also as an exceptional painter.

Conclusion

Ceramic painting and other forms of conventional paintings offer artists the opportunity to transmit their emotions freely in an intellectual way due to the unique nature of the processes involved in producing them. According to Hill, (2003), both forms of painting represent the exact state of the artist's spiritual or mental vision. Also, they both require equal and significant measures of creative drive for artists involved in them to produce any outstanding work of art. The individual character of these forms of paintings automatically becomes the artist's personality and the product of his surrounding circumstances. The purity or value of ceramics and canvas painting ultimately transcend the individual, his time and his circumstance. In the course of such paintings, the artists, through the virtue of his intuitive power, manipulates colours and the other elements of composition and balance in painting to communicate his perception of the reality around him to his audience. These different forms of paintings do not only stir physical reactions, they also induce therapeutic effects. The homage paid to the canvas or ceramic painting is one paid to an artist that gives us a sense of satisfaction. That beauty is akin to moral goodness is simply true of paintings done either on ceramic, canvas, wall or stain glass.

It has been ascertained in the paper that the concept of painting as a creative phenomenon has always been an integral part of ceramic art and production in different cultures, traditions and civilizations. The paper is also designed to create further understanding, appreciation and recognition of the important role of painting in the aesthetic and functional evaluation of ceramic wares as a type of artwork. As an embodiment of two creative art disciplines, painting on ceramics, no doubt bridges the gap between the two creative art departments. In a situation where ceramic artists undergo more training or borrow more courses in painting and vice versa, painting students should not be afraid of exploring the different possibilities that are locked within the area of ceramics production, in terms of using them as painting ground. The

paper therefore calls the attention of curriculum developers and all stakeholders in the business and education of visual art to

create more opportunities for cross-disciplinary training between the two disciplines.



Figure; 1: Painted traditional pottery, by Okpara C. V.
Source: The artists collection 2010.

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