

Exploration of Surface Decorations to Enhance the Value of Indigenous Ghanaian Pottery

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Abstract: Ghanaian Indigenous pottery plays an important role in the society. The image of the traditional pottery is ruined because of the surface decoration given. The products are finished and decorated either by incising, embossment, sgraffito etc. The need therefore to explore with non-conventional materials in order to add value, enhance the texture and aesthetic quality of the products. The study adopted the studio-based research method of qualitative research approach in the execution of the project. The study has shown that, mixed media method employed in the project could be practiced to add value, enhance the texture and aesthetic character and likewise improve the marketability of the indigenous pottery products in Ghana. Further, exploring with non-conventional materials will inspire and educate producers, particularly the local potters to improve their creativity and enhance their wares to meet contemporary expectations. The study, therefore recommends that, further research should be done by using different materials to enhance the value of Ghanaian indigenous pottery.

Keywords: Mixed Media, Indigenous Ghanaian Pottery, Surface Decoration, Exploration.

INTRODUCTION

Potters and ceramists have utilized a mixture of techniques to beautify and finish the surface of their wares, from carving plastic clay, incising grooves or burnishing the leather hard clay surface to accomplish varied alluring effects. Asmah *et al.* [1] assert that the forming and finishing techniques employed over years in the production of traditional pottery for their aesthetic, philosophical and utilitarian values in many ways[1]. According to Traditions Hand Crafted Gallery as cited in Adu-Gyamfi *et al.* [2], "Pottery is made by forming a clay body into objects of a required shape and firing them to high temperatures in a kiln which removes all the water from the clay, which induces reactions that lead to permanent changes including increasing their strength and hardening and setting their shape. A clay body can be decorated before or after firing. Once a clay body has been kneaded and de-aired or wedged, it is shaped by a variety of techniques after which it is dried and then fired [2]".

Historically Pottery became more and more complex in style as society grew in population, complexity and more sophisticated in its tastes. Pots which in earlier times were constructed with a flowing profile and had simple decoration, now assumed angular, complex forms, which imitated architectural designs and were ornamented with complex designs [3].

According to Pennisi [4] as cited in Abubakar [3], "surface finishing is any process that is used to alter the surface of a product to enhance its look or to improve its functional purposes. The author explains further that surface decoration and finishing can range from the simplest treatment to the most lavish designs depending on one's personal tastes. Product finishing has become a crucial aspect of production value-chains the world over, due to the important role it plays in determining the market demands of finished products" Furthermore, decoration is considered an aftereffect, an element that can be differentiated from the object it adheres to, sometimes making it superfluous to the object's function[4,5].

Generally, ceramic artifacts in Ghana are normally decorated and finished by embossment, stapping, sgraffito, painting, incising, glazing and piercing. Some of the ceramic pieces are also finished using inappropriate glazes which are therefore ruining the image of the products in Ghana. Hardly would you find people, especially those in the urban areas using traditional artifacts in their homes. This is because to them, they are outmoded and not well finished therefore cannot be appreciated. People, especially those in the urban areas have replaced Ghanaian indigenous pottery with the modern blenders, metallic plates and refrigerators. They prefer using the above-mentioned

modern equipment, these has therefore declined the value and use of the indigenous pottery in the country. Ceramic pieces are produced using complex designs. Asmah *et al.* [1], Adu-Gyamfi *et al.*[2], ascertain that “such wares are no match to compete with the influx of foreign ceramic wares. Most often achieving variety in color, desired finishing effects, with the philosophical dimensions of the ware have been almost none existent⁶.”

According to Rottenberg [7] as cited in Imbeah [5] “An object made of clay offers an impelling invitation to surface enrichment. Its purpose is to enhance the form so the two make a unified convincing completely, rather than a static shape with decoration imposed upon it”. However, using non-conventional materials together with other techniques will help to enhance the aesthetic value and adds textures to the traditional pottery in Ghana. This means there will be the need to incorporate mixed media[7]. Okewu & Deborah [6] explains further that integration of ceramic vases with other materials can add value and improve the marketability of indigenous ceramic wares. Thus, employing the use of mixed media materials will help effectively to achieve high quality aesthetic contemporary ceramic products[8].

Mixed media is a variety of media used in a work of art. It is also a great way to explore the arts for all artists, both new and experiences alike. According to Speight & Toki [8] as cited in Adu-Gyamfi *et al.* [2], pottery or ceramics in mixed media as either a clay pot or sculpture that incorporates different materials such as wood, metal, textiles, sound or light, glass, paint, or any other materials the artist wishes to add to the pottery piece. The author explains further that mixed media has been practiced by artists in different cultures to achieve their objectives⁹. Again, mixed media is a broad and varied type of art that allows artists to mix a wide variety array of material and techniques together to create new and different forms of art [1].

The study specifically explores with non-conventional materials in order to add value, enhance the texture and aesthetic quality of the products.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials and Tools

Materials and tools used for the project include Mfensi clay & slip, thread, office pins, super glue, white glue, sand, powdered glass, and acrylic paint.



Fig-1: Sand



Fig-2: Acrylic paint



Fig-3: Powered glass

The equipment and tools that were employed in the project included, a pair of dividers, bent metallic tool, drilling machine, utility knife, pulverize, pug mill, jaw crusher, rolling pins, potter's wheel guard sticks, pencil, a pair of scissors and brushes.

Research Design

The study adopted the studio-based research method of qualitative research approach in the execution of the project. The qualitative research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new

knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice [9]. The qualitative approach was used in the discussion and analysis of results in a descriptive. The various tools and equipment, materials and the production process were described vividly.

Source of Inspiration and Design Planning models

Drawing inspiration from an irregular gourd fruit series of sketches were made until the final designs were obtained. In the planning stage, the shape and the size of the art pieces were considered greatly here.



Fig-4: Source of inspiration-irregular gourd fruit



Fig-5: Preliminary designs

Procedure

Material preparation

The clay was obtained from Mfensi in a rock-like mass. The rock like Mfensi clay was left in the clay pit for a week in order to aid leaching. The clay was conveyed to the pug mill where it was processed into a cylindrical form. The processed clay was kneaded to rid the excess air and rolled in a lump form for throwing.

The sand was also obtained from 'Ayeduase' in the Ashanti Region and sieved using the 100-300µm mesh. The sand was graded according to the particle

size with each performing a specific decorative task. The glass was also obtained by crushing coke bottles in the jaw crusher and then transferred to the pulverizer to further break down the particle sizes.

Forming

The clay lumps were used in throwing five pieces of bowls of different diameter and height. The bowls were allowed to dry for about six hours and with the help of the cutting wire the bowls were cut from the drying boards for turning.



Fig-6: Throwing the bowl

The turning process helped in creating spiral lines on the bowls and also creating a hole at the bottom of the bowl. Smaller bowls of equal diameter were thrown on the potter's wheel which served as the sound hole. Slabs of equal diameter to the five biggest bowls were rolled and cut out to cover the bowls with the help

of clay slip and a fork. The surface of the covered bowls was designed using a bent metallic tool. A slab of about 4.5" thickness was rolled and with the help of the knife in the head and neck of the "Tambara" guitars were cut out.



Fig-7: Joining the bowls

The smaller bowls were inserted by cutting a circular hole, according to the diameter of the small bowl, it helped in creating the sound hole. The cut out head and neck of the guitar was made to conform to the shape of the bowl and with the help of the clay slip and fork they were fixed to form the head and neck of the

"Tambara" guitars. In order to give stability to the guitars and help them to stand, around base of about 5" were thrown and design with the turning tools. The base was attached to the forms in order to aid it in standing. The art pieces were allowed to dry and fired in an electric kiln to a temperature of about 850°C.



Fig-8: The dried pieces

Finishing

The designing process addressed the concept of ceramics mixed media from the perspective of African aesthetics. Variety of materials were considered during the designing process. Sketches of the "Tambara" guitar with its imagined end products were made. The biscuit fired wares were then cleaned with water and white glue was applied to the exterior surface, after the application of the white glue it was then allowed to dry for about 10minutes. The fine sand was mixed with acrylic paint and poured evenly on the surface of the form in another to serve as the background of the form after which the coarser once were also poured into.

The form was allowed to dry in a controlled atmosphere. The glass was also used mixed with acrylic paint and allowed to dry in order to be used hand in hand with the sand. After a thorough drying of the forms, the office pins were inserted at the head of the guitar and some parts of the smaller bowl projections with the help of super glue. Each form took at least 5 pieces of office pins. After inserting the pins, a sewing thread was carefully coiled around the office pins to create that suiting sound and struck.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The creative genre referred to as "mixed media" is a particularly broad and varied style of art, because it permits artists to combine a good array of materials and techniques along to form new and completely different sorts of art. From the bottom right up to the pinnacle are all aesthetically embellished with non-conventional materials. The final art pieces were then arranged in order of magnitude to portray "the

sound life gives at every stage in a person's life". Nancy Selvin mixed media art influences the surface decoration of the art pieces.

The artwork is titled "The sound life gives at every stage in a person's life". The life has a rhythm of sound which played at every stage in a person's life and the ability to dance to that theme of sound will determine how you would be able to handle things at that particular period of time. The sound of life played in a child's life would be different from an adolescent likewise an old man or woman.

The sound of life only slops a death and the predominate sound that would be heard in that instance is silence. The art pieces have been arranged in order of magnitude such as birth, adolescent, marriage, family, death to depict the predominate activity in a person's right from inception. The last stage, which is death has no strings attached to it because it is a place of silence. Therefore a person's ability to sail through all these stages will determine the make of silence in his final place of abode.

The threads were designed to give a particular rhythm of sound in relation to the sound to the sound hole. The first art piece with the smaller hole as the sound area talks about the fact that more of the life existence is dependent on another person, since it is the early stage of life, whereas the other three had a similar string design but with different sound holes. These sound holes depict how every single strand of string affects one's existence has the sound is played. The last art piece has no string or thread attached to it because it is known as the silent stage.



Fig-9: The final pieces

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that, mixed media method employed in the project could be practiced to add value, enhance the texture and aesthetic character and likewise improve the marketability of the

indigenous pottery products in Ghana. Further, exploring with non-conventional materials will inspire and educate producers, particularly the local potters to improve their creativity and enhance their wares to meet contemporary expectations. The study, therefore

recommends that, further research should be done by using different materials to enhance the value of Ghanaian indigenous pottery.

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