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Design and Production of Clay Flower Vases Using Drawings and Splatter Paintings as a Form of Decoration

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to design and produce decorative clay flower vases. It also identified the use of drawing and splatter painting as a method of decorating a flower vase, which is an open container commonly made of ceramic materials such as clay or glass for ornamentation purposes. It sought to enhance its aesthetic qualities to change its use and to increase its demand and utilization. It explored the use of non-conventional material (acrylic paints, among others) integrated into the bisque fired wares as a finishing technique. The study employed the experimental method to find out the effects of drawings and splatter painting on clay flower vases. The 'throwing' method of forming a clay product was also employed to obtain the flower vases, dried, fired and painted by using the splatter method as a form of decoration. The outcome of the study revealed that the splatter method on the vases added aesthetic qualities to the products produced and could complement interior decorations of buildings and offices. It was recommended among other things that, the splatter painting method should be adopted as another design technique for decorating clay products in order to add value and enhance the marketability of pottery wares.

Keywords: Clay, flower vases, drawing, splatter, painting

1. Introduction

According to Oakley (2013), a flower vase is an open container commonly made of ceramic materials such as clay or glass for ornamentation purposes. Modern vases are widely decorated and used to hold artificial flowers. Beautiful in form and embellished with incised patterns, modeled or painted figures or scenes, and sometimes inscription. Greek painted and decorated vases were in form and colour among the most exquisite examples of ancient art. In the 5th and 6th centuries, the Greek potters had widely dominated in the production and exportation of vases across most of the European countries. Greek vases were essentially practical objects. They were sometimes made in various standard shapes, each with a specific purpose – for storing wine or oil or precious unguents, for heating or cooling liquids, for pouring and drinking, for holding flowers in burial tombs. Vases became a work of art in the early Greek times and have had a continuous evolution till now. Today, the purpose of flower vase is important as it used to be in the ancient time. This study seeks to design and produce flower vases with drawing and splatter painting as a form of decoration.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Indigenous pottery products in Ghana are normally decorated with embossment, incision, stamping, glazing and sprigging among others. However, some of these pieces are marred by the types of finishing that are employed, especially, unsuitable glazes. These products are not able to compete with the influx of foreign ceramic wares. This study is therefore meant to enlighten individuals on the use of flower vases for aesthetic purposes and also to explore drawing and splatter painting on vases so as to enhance the marketing of indigenous pottery.

1.2. Objective of the Study

To design and produce decorative flower vases using splatter painting as a decoration to hold artificial flowers.

1.3. Research Question

To what extent can drawings and splatter paintings be done on clay flower vases?

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study is basically focused on clay flower vases with drawings and splatter paintings as the main form of decoration.

1.5. Definition and History of Decorative Flower Vases

In defining a vase, Cooper (2000) explains a vase as “an open container often used to hold cut flowers, having a certain anatomy; lowest is the foot, and a distinguishable base to the piece. The design of the base may be bulbous, flat, or another shape. Again, Cooper (2000) says that “a decorative container without handles typically made of glass or china can be used as an ornament or for displaying cut flowers”. The Dictionary of Architecture (2012), also defines a vase as a “decorative vessel usually higher than it is wide, used as an architectural ornament, usually on a pedestal, balustrade or on roofs.

With all the above definitions, the researchers are of the view that a vase has a hollow vessel or container made of glass, porcelain or earthenware, usually higher than it is wide, and use to hold flowers for decoration.

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2007) states that, the development of decorative vases has been considered as one of the hallmarks of human art evolution. Not surprisingly, most of the pottery man has made have been created to adorn home, serving of domestic purposes, be it glazed or painted.

Bamber (2001) opines that during the period of 550 to 480 B.C, potters in Athens and its surrounding district of Attica had perfectly introduced the decorative style on vases known as the black and red figure pottery technique where an attractive warm colour was applied onto the surface of the undecorated vase by addition of red ochre to the clay. In the black-figure pottery, the vase painters or decorators made figurative scenes from mythology in black silhouette on a mixture of iron rich clay and potash before the vase was fired. The details were achieved by incising lines within the silhouette to allow the reddish clay to show through. The red-figure vase decoration was characterized by drawn red figures and a painted black background. This vase painting was more refined and realistic than black-figure pottery. It depicted scenes in the three dimensional form which allowed the decorators opportunity to work with greater perspective.

According to Cooper (2000), in the Ming dynasty, after the breakdown of the Mongol domination of the east brought the return of a new Chinese dynasty after an unsettled period, a time of prosperity encouraged renewed flowering of the arts. Enormous creative activity within the visual arts was reflected in the great variety of vases produced. The introduction of the ritual practice of the wabi-style tea ceremony was associated with Zen Buddhism into Japan from song China. At first, conceived as an aid to meditation and developed as a major aspect of Buddhism. As the tea ceremony spread from the Zen Buddhist monasteries to the wealthier classes, demand grew for suitable utensils. Tea masters took a personal interest in the vessels required, often collaborating with the potter, who as a result gained an elevated position in the society. The ceremony required a number of specific ceramic items, each of distinctive. These included a small jar for the powdered tea, a drinking bowl, a washing bowl, a cake dish and occasionally a water holder, incense box, incense burner, fire holder and a decorative vase to hold a single spray of flowers. So highly regarded were the finest tea ceremony vases that a samurai would often select a valuable one as reward for service.

As regards to use of vases, the Encyclopedia Britannica (2007), mentions the significance of a decorative flower vase; (i) decorative flower vases can be used to brighten up an interior decoration of a room, (ii) vases are also used in corporate branding or identity to advertise product or services of an institution or company, (iii) a vase made of glass can be used as a terrarium in offices, hotel receptions and living rooms, and (iv) the ancient pottery vase was mostly used for domestic purposes. Addressing the characteristics of a flower vase, Cooper (2000) ascertains that the keen features of a decorative flower vase are: a flower vase should have greater depth than width; the shape of a decorative flower must have smartness of style and conform to balance and proportion; and a vase should always be well embellished on the surface with attractive decorative techniques.

1.6. Definition and Characteristics of Drawing

Ruskin (1991) mentions that the term “drawing is the linear realization of visual objects, concepts, emotions and fantasies including symbols and even abstract forms; as a language form which other written languages and visual communications have developed; and drawings are marks on a surface produced by hand”. Henn (1999) opines that drawing is invariably of pencil marks made on a sheet of white paper. He continues to outlines the uses of drawings as (i) drawing is used in the preparation for a painting, (ii) it is the simplest and most efficient means of communication ideas to the general public, through images, (iii) drawing is used to express one’s creativity, and (iv) drawing helps to explore ideas with emphasis on observation and problem solving using sketches.

In the opinion of the researchers, drawing could be the art of representing ideas or forms on a surface using a suitable tool.

Farthing (2011) explains the characteristics of drawing as follows: it must place the elements or principles of design in the art to communicate ideas and feelings to the viewer; the composition of images can help determine the focus of the art piece, and result in a harmonious whole that is aesthetically appealing and stimulating; and a drawing should also portray visual accuracy if more refined and detailed.

1.6.1. History of Drawing

Gair (1994) posits that drawing is one of the most elementary of human activities. Its origin goes back to the beginning of recorded history, when the early homo-sapiens began to depict hunting scenes on the walls of caves with charcoal outlines coloured with earth pigments around 30000BC to 10000BC. This mankind also drew and carved through the designs on the surface with primitive tools made of sharpened reeds and ink of powdered earth to draw hieroglyphics of pictures representing words on sheet of papyrus. But these early drawings were stylized and served a purely symbolic purpose. They also decorated their walls of their temples and tombs with scenes of daily life in a flat profile view.

According to Farthing (2011), for about 400’s to 1400’s, monks in the European monasteries illustrated bibles and prayer books with drawings. These beautiful decorated illustrations were made on manuscripts of prepared vellum of parchment (calf skin). Drawing

became more modernized and increased steadily in the renaissance period (1400's) in Italy. This was because paper had become cheaper and easier to be obtained and because of the new importance attached to drawing. Artists carefully studied the physical structure of the human body for the first time and began to draw from nude models which portrayed figures in realism.

1.7. Definition and Characteristics of Splatter Painting

Stokstad & Marilyn (2008), say that "splatter is a style of painting in which paint is spontaneously dribbled, splashed or smeared onto the canvas rather than being carefully applied; a method to create random, small dots of paint; and a technique where the paint is being sprayed or flicked onto the surface of a painting using a paint brush, toothbrush or a spray diffuser". Emmerling & Leonhard (2003), also define splatter painting as "a form of abstract art in which paint is dripped or poured onto the canvas." According to Marion (2006), there are the two main types of splattering paint onto a surface namely; drip method- it is the process of dripping ink or paint and splash method- the process of splashing ink or paint.

Marion (2006), states that a splattered work should not portray patterns or designs of specific emotions. Instead, they are meant to touch and attract the observer deep in the mind, evoking a collective sense of visual language. The droplets of paint are usually created in the form of a massive mess (unplanned). Splatter painting has a great way to add some life and aesthetic values to an artwork.

1.7.1. History of Splatter Painting

Emmerling & Leonhard (2003) claim that splatter painting sometimes called gestural abstraction is a style of painting which was widespread from the 1940's until the early 1960's, and closely associated with abstract expressionism. This technique was experimented within the first half of the twentieth century by such contemporary artist as Jackson Pollock who found the drip and splash painting to his liking. He used tools like sticks, hard brushes and even basting syringes to create a large and energetic splattered works. Jackson Pollock physically moved his body around a large canvas on the floor. The paint splatters depicted his flowing movements and expressed his thoughts and feelings.

1.8. Definition and Characteristics of Clay

Peterson & Peterson (2003), defines clay as "a hydrated (water containing) silicate of alumina". Hamer and Hamer (2004), also defines clay as "a heavy, damp, plastic material that sets upon drying and can be changed by heat into a hard, waterproof material". Scott (2007) says that "clay becomes ceramics when it is exposed to extreme heat, which fuses the particles together and hardens the body to produce a stable material that is often more permanent than rock itself". In another definition, Clark (2006) states that, clay is a natural material (hydrated silicate of alumina) which occurs throughout the world.

Scott (2007) again describes the natural properties of clay as; clay has the unique ability to be molded by hand into objects of beauty that becomes permanent when exposed to great heat of temperature. Also, clay improves with age, and if left in soft condition it increases its plasticity.

1.8.1. History of Clay

According to Speight & Toki (1999), the earliest use and discovery of clay dates as far back in time as the ice age, 37000 to 12000 years ago. Examples of clay objects formed by humans were unfired representation of animals modeled on a moist clay bank in a cave in France and some fired clay animals. Female human figures, male figures and others of no specific gender found at an ice age site in Eastern Europe.

Scott (2007) explained that the knowledge and techniques to transform dump clay into ceramics objects also developed at various times in different cultures. Villagers prepared clay to make domestic pottery wares such as storage jars, bowls, cups and all kinds of vessels. Also, Neolithic families gathered wild and cultivated seeds and stored them in a tightly woven basket often coated on the inside with clay to form a more effective container during the early appearance and development of agriculture.

Peterson & Peterson (2003) reiterate that historically, clay has been used to create some of the world's best art; the tiles of the Persian mosques, the sculpture of the early dynasties of China, Pre- Colombian figures in Mesoamerica, the jars of Mycenae from 2000 B.C and much more.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Materials and Tools

Materials used for the study were as follows: Abonko clay slip, tins of acrylic paint, and mansion polish.



Figure 1: Abonko clay deposit.



Figure 2: Tins of acrylic paint.

Some equipment and tools that were used in the study included: cutting wire, turning tools, foam, throwing rib or kidney, pencil, paint brushes, spray diffuser and palette.



Figure 3: Cutting wire.



Figure 4: Trimming tools.



Figure 5: Foam.



Figure 6: Kidneys



Figure 7: Pencil.



Figure 8: Brushes.



Figure 9: Spray diffuser.



Figure 10: Palette.



Figure 11: The potter's wheel.



Figure 12: The firewood kiln.

2.2. Purposes of Materials, Tools and Equipment

- Clay – a sticky earth material which was used to form the vases.
- Acrylic paint – a liquid pigment used as colour on the bisque fired vases.
- Cutting wire – it was used for removing the thrown vases from the potter's wheel.
- Turning tools – they were used for trimming the body and the foot of the vases at the leather-hard stage.
- Foam – it was used for cleaning clay surfaces after trimming and also helped in throwing.
- Throwing rib or Kidney – it was used in straightening the pulled clay on the potter's wheel.
- Pencil – it was used for drawing images on the vases.
- Paint brushes – they were chiefly used for applying and splattering paint on the vases.
- Spray diffuser – it was used for dripping or spraying paint onto the pottery vases.
- Palette – it was used for mixing paint and other chemicals.
- Potter's wheel – it was used for the 'throwing' of the clay vases.
- Firewood Kiln – it was used for firing the bone-dry vases into bisque wares.

2.2.1. Procedure

The study was informed by earlier research works, on mixed media (Bosworth, 2006 and Adjei & Nsiah, 2012) that examined the best ways of combining and applying different materials together to help shape the study and explained the techniques to be adopted. The research process involved a review of related literature on vases, the splatter painting, and mixed media to identify the appropriate technique to be adopted. Structured observation (Cohen et al., 2000) was used to evaluate the 'thrown' vases in terms of sizes, shapes, quality and materials. This exercise was provided the basis for assessing the result of the study. Materials, equipment, tools, techniques and procedures were observed as described by Razavieh (2002). Drawing and splatter painting were experimented on the bisque flower vases to ascertain their efficacy for aesthetic purposes.

2.2.2. Designing - Preliminary sketches made

The designing process addressed the concept of ceramic mixed media from the perspective of aesthetics. The sketches of the indigenous pottery vases with its envisaged end products were made. The circular shapes were representations of the aesthetic and socio-cultural significance of motherhood (respectable of benevolence). The image of butterfly was used for decoration because of the aesthetic appeal and multi-coloured features of its natural colours. Again, among the Ghanaian cultural beliefs, the butterfly is a messenger (Baffour-Ankomah, 2015). As a result, using this image would send the message to the ceramic world about marketability of the indigenous clay flower vases. The final sketches of the decorative vases had been shown in figure 11 on the next page.

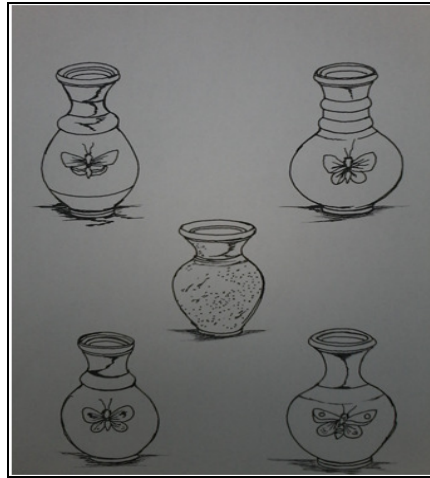


Figure 13: The final sketches of the decorative vases.

2.3. Materials Preparation and Forming

(a) Clay Preparation

A lump of dried clay and water were mixed together in a basin with the help of a wooden stick to form a uniform mixture of clay slip. The mixture was later soaked by sieving it through a 120 mesh net into the clay pit. Any unwanted particle such as gravels, broken pieces of glass and plastics were trapped in the mesh allowing only the finer particles and clay slip to pass through into the pit. The clay slip was left in the pit to soak for about a week or two to improve its plasticity.



Figure 14: The soaked clay in the pit.

(b) Kneading and Wedging

After the clay has soaked enough, it was collected from the pit to the studio ready for kneading and wedging. The clay was manipulated by hand and cutting wire to expel trapped air and to make the mass homogeneous readily for 'throwing'. Again, the kneading was done to remove any unwanted materials contained in the ball of clay that could disturb the 'throwing' processes.



Figure 15: Kneading the clay into lumps.

(c) Forming Processes - The forming method used in the production of the vases was the 'throwing' method. The researchers critically followed these stages in the production of the flower vases;

(i) Centering – This was first stage of the throwing process. The kneaded clay was placed firmly on a bat which has been stuck on the rotating disk with the elbows tightly anchored against the lap of the potter's wheel. The lump of clay was giving an exerted force by fixed hands and repeatedly bringing upward and inward pressure from the bottom to the top of the clay as the wheel rotates speedily fast. The researcher also added water periodically to allow the hands to slide smoothly over the clay and remove friction. This rapid process continued until the clay has form a symmetrical lump on the wheel.



Figure 16: centering the lump of clay.

(ii) Opening – The centered clay was pressed by the hand at the middle to create hollowed clay of reasonable depth, leaving enough clay beneath as the base of the vase.



Figure 17: Opening the centered clay.

(iii) Pulling – After the lump has been opened, the walls were thinned by pulling the clay between the surface of each hand moving upward from the base. This was done gradually until a desired cylindrical height was achieved.



Figure 18: Pulling of height of the vase.



Figure 19: Initial shaping of the vase.

(iv) Shaping – The left hand was used to push outward while the right hand guided it from the outside. This step required slower speed and relaxed hands.



Figure 20: Final shaping of the clay vase.



Figure 21: Samples of 'thrown' vases.

(v) Turning – After the 'thrown' vases have reached the moderate leather-hard stage, they were trimmed to remove excess clay from the vases, and also the foot was well created for stability.



Figure 22: Leather-hard vases turned upside.



Figure 23: trimming of excess clay from the vase.

2.4. Firing of the Dried Vases

After the trimmed pieces had dried enough, they were stacked in the firewood kiln and given a heat treatment. The process gradually began with the pre-heating stage where chemical water evaporated from the vases through the chimney. The rate of firing was progressively increased until a maturing temperature between 850°C - 950°C was achieved in the kiln. The fire wood kiln was allowed to cool down before the wares were taken off from the kiln.



Figure 24: Firing of the vases.



Figure 25: The bisque fired vases.

3. Results and Discussion

It came out that the flower vases were well fired and ready for the decoration purposes. It was started by adopting the following processes with the studio hand-painting technique;

(a) Cleaning of the Vases- A wet foam was to wipe off smoke ash and dust from the rim and the body of the vases. This process helped paint to apply smoothly and adhere onto the surfaces of the vase.



Figure 26: Cleaning of the pot's rim.



Figure 27: Cleaning of the pot's body.

(b) Background Painting- After the moist vases have dried, the bristle paint brush was used for spreading paint onto the vase in layers between the neck and the belly. The researchers also painted some of the vases with an overall coating of desired colour.



Figure 28: Applying paint on the pot's neck.



Figure 29: Overall coated vases.

(c) Making of Splatter Patterns - Here, a combination of dripping and splashing style of splattering paint onto the vases were adopted. Dripping – The spray diffuser was used to create small droplets of paint by blowing air through a pipe to force paint to drip carelessly on the vases.



Figure 30: Dripping of paint on vases.



Figure 31: Samples of dripped vases.

Splashing – The paint brush was flicked by hand to throw liquid paint spontaneously onto the vases.



Figure 32: Flicked brush splattering.



Figure 33: Splashed vases.



Figure 34: Dripped and splashed vases.



Figure 35: coated vases ready for splashing.

(d) Drawing on the Vases- Pencil was used to produce simple outline drawing of butterflies on the vases after splattering has been done.

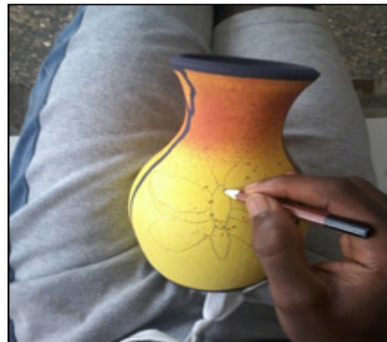


Figure 36: Drawing on the vase.



Figure 37: Vases with outlined drawing.

(e) Painting of Drawings on the Vases

The outline drawings were filled with paint in different colour forms to show variety in the butterflies.



Figure 38: Painting of drawn images on the vase.



Figure 39: Variety of images of butterfly.

(f) Detailing Drawings on the Vases

Realism and motion were added to the images by painting carefully on the outlines with a black colour and to cover pencil marks.



Figure 40: Application of black paint on the outlines of the images of the drawn butterfly



Figure 41: Finished detailed drawings on the clay flower vases.

(g) Finishing

After drawings and splattering painting have been done successfully, the researchers applied varnish on the vases to make them shiny and permanent.

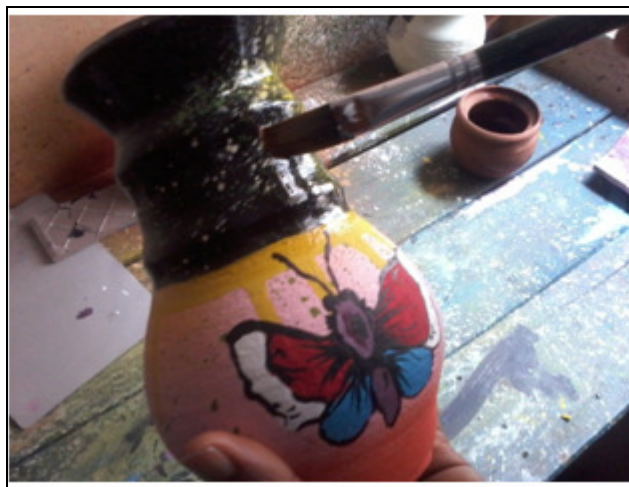


Figure 42: Application of varnish on the vase.



Figure 43: Display of the finished decorative clay flower vases.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study has shown that the splatter painting as a decorative technique on the vases has been used effectively to achieve high quality of aesthetic pottery flower vases that could match contemporary ceramic wares.

It is also recommended that indigenous potters, ceramic artists and designers should adopt this technique as a form of decoration, more especially when glazes are not available. This will improve the marketability of indigenous pottery.

It is recommended that ideas for future experiments could be done to develop further this decorative style.

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