

Typographic Approaches on Ceramic Surfaces

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Abstract: Today, while the meaning of writing represents the hand written calligraphic designs, it is possible to subsume all the artistic works in reference to designing, setting and arranging the typefaces and text blocks and the technological developments in this area, under the typography heading. In the art movements, especially beginning from the second half of the 20th century, art and design turn to a polyphonic structure with widely prominence of interdisciplinary approach. This situation is directly reflected on the art and design products. The subject “Typographic Approaches on Ceramic Surfaces” that we have been working on, deals with the combination of ceramics and graphic design interdisciplinary approaches. This work is important and related not only to the ceramics and typography, but also to the typographical approaches in terms of the form, beauty and the function used on different kinds of ceramic surfaces.

Key words: *Script and Typography, Ceramic Arts, Typography on Ceramic Surfaces, Typographic Form and Function.*

1. What is Typography?

The term typography came into our lives by the usage of metal letters which were the invention of Gutenberg’s press technique in the 1450’s. Nowadays the content of this term is changed and improved, which used to refer to a determined press and typesetting technique at first. It is possible to subsume all the artistic works in reference to designing, setting and arranging the typefaces and text blocks and the technological developments in this area, under the typography heading (Becer, 2007, p.14). Typography is an inevitable communication tool that can be seen everywhere. Every day, we are interacting with type albeit unwittingly. Type is used in various media. Besides being used in the books, magazines, advertisements and in packaging, it can also be seen as a sign, used in web sites and confronted as a moving object in virtual platforms.

2. The Relationship Between Typography and Ceramics

There has been a relationship between type and ceramics since the prehistoric ages with the invention of cuneiform letters used on clay tablets by the Sumerians (Jean, p.14). These clay tablets were the perfect materials for communication in those times and the meeting of type and ceramic based materials were used until the invention of paper.

There are no limits to using typography and this has proceeded experimentally recently. Typography is not formed on paper or on flat surfaces anymore. There are too many ways to express typographic approaches. Ceramic artists are trying to express themselves using typography in their works. The function of typography in ceramics comes with the question of 'What is it for?' Perhaps, the most common function of typography is inevitably communication, however the power of typographic decoration on surfaces is undeniable as well.

According to Justin Vood Good and Peter Good (p.83), it is precisely the modernist desire to separate form and function, in an effort to transcend the historical contingency of style that drove it into a rigid stylistic code insensitive to a given design's actual functional character. The urge to purify the design practices of merely decorative or aesthetic considerations, in an effort to create a new technological aesthetic based on the beauty of mechanical efficiency, ultimately led to a design theory limited by its narrow concept of function.

Using typography as a decorative element on some surfaces gives extra function to the work. "Take the function of a chair: to sit on (modernist), to gaze at (aesthetic), to sell (economic)" (J.V. and P. Good, p.86). According to this idea, the function of something depends on its purpose. And if we want to transfer this idea to typography, the function of typography forms like this; to be read (modernist), to be looked at (aesthetic), to decorate (economic). The typographic beauty on different surfaces questions the functionalism without a doubt. "Beauty is notoriously difficult to square with utility. The modernist solution to this problem was to identify beauty as utility; what is beautiful is beautiful because it is practical. That is, beauty is to be found in the purity of means that come to be defined and organized around the serving of some function. The hand-carved figures on the handle of a medieval broad sword or a blacksmith's hammer might be beautiful artistic expressions, but what do they have to do with the function of a sword or a hammer?" (J.V. and P. Good, p.89).

3. Typography Usage on Ceramic Surfaces as a Design Element

From prehistoric times to the present, clay has been used for many purposes (clay tablets, create functional and storage items, three-dimensional object...) but today multi-disciplinary approach directly reflects to the art and design products and provides life in the context of different point of views. Artistic and industrial ceramic field tends toward different design methods while removing the strict boundaries as a result of interactive interdisciplinary relations.

Using letters on ceramic surfaces as a design element has a broader content and it is necessary to classify these under three kinds of titles. Typography can be used on ceramic surfaces in an artistic way, used in industrial ceramics and used in architectural way. These three titles can be approached from three different points of view. The first group uses typography on its surface in two-dimensional form, the second group uses typography as a relief on its surface and the third group uses typography as a three-dimensional form. The examples which are chosen are going to support these kinds of groups.

4. Typography on Ceramics in Architectural Design

On many of the different ceramic surfaces, typography is used as a decorative element rather than its ubiquitous function, which is to communicate. However, in architectural ceramics, the latter is more obvious than the decorative purpose. The communication function has also an important role to play especially in some environmental and informational place names such as names of small streets or names of apartment blocks or buildings. For example, in Matt Nolen's (USA) work, a social history of man is also related through text and images that appear in the sinks, urinals and toilets that occur in each architectural zone. "Each restroom user assumes the identity of the highest male role model for each period, as each fixture carefully labeled with the appropriate title: e.g. ceo for modernism pharaoh for ancient Egypt. Matt Nolen invites restroom users to the experience of going back in time through a narrative history of architecture beginning with modernism just inside the door to ancient Egypt in the back of the space" (Ostermann, 2006, p. 140). These are also important for they are the symbol of status and wealth. While the variety of decorative typeface combines with the decorative style of the artwork, the color source inspiration comes from Italian Majolica ceramics.



Figure. 1 Matt Nolen's restroom for the John Michael Kohler Arts Center



Figure. 2 Details of Sinks

Using tiles on architecture is the evidence of the fact that there is at least one or more tile factories near the area. "The town of Auneuil in northern France has several richly decorated buildings surviving from its nineteenth-century encaustic tile industry, which was operated by the Boulenger family (Herbert and Huggins, p.48)". These successful examples contain also the typography written on some details about the place and the date. They have also an important role on showing the common type characters of their period. Here it is clearly seen that there was a tendency on serif, shaded and inlined type characters.



Figure. 3 and 4 Several Buildings From Auneuil

The use of typography on ceramics in architecture can be seen as an informational purpose in tiles. “A pedimented faience ticket booth and tiled dado by Maws provided an impressive prelude to a journey from Russell Square station on the London Underground” (Herbert and Huggins, p.173). The choice of typeface again refers to its historical background of Arts&Crafts movement in England. It can be seen especially in ‘IN’ and ‘OUT’ letters inform the que for tickets.



Figure. 5,6 and 7 Ticket Booth of Russell Square station on the London Underground.

5. Industrial Tableware Dealing with Typographic Point of View

Dinnerware do not only have various gorgeous patterns but they also have stylish simple designs to be preferred by customers. Instead of coordinate patterns, colors and styles, typographic point of view for tableware is also a good opportunity for clients. In these reasons, many tableware factories prefer typographic approaches for creating personal table settings. Interesting conversations texts, illustrations and dingbats are important elements on different sizes and shapes of plates. With popular attitude of typography creations, it is possible to give messages to users in a very funny way.



Figure. 8 Porland Porcelain Tableware, Turkey

2D and 3D letters can be optimally adapted to dinnerware in ceramic materials, with different shapes and sizes. “Build was initially commissioned to produce the identity for a new online shop called ‘TYPE’ which is based in Hong Kong. The idea of the shop was to sell beautifully made products with a typographic leaning by different designers. After completing the branding, Build was asked to design the launch range for products for the store based on its range, boldly around different typefaces” (Type Addicted, p.120).



Figure. 9 TYPE products, Hong Kong

The 3D letters are manipulated to create letters of 'NUTS', so they gain both the functionality of being an appetizer and a 3D object, which is a sculptural form.

Ceramic production has some strict rules about form and function. There are some points to take into consideration that, there is an important link between form, function and the ceramic production process.

Typographic approaches on tableware have an important role of pottery functions and usage. Fragile sharp corners, fonts that have grift forms are not suitable for final ceramic products. Hygiene and cleanliness must be the key focus points of these productions. In this example (figure 10) 3D sanserif fonts with same line width are good option for form and function.



Figure. 10: 3D Typography Tableware

In Turkey drinking Turkish coffee and reading fortune out of a coffee cup are centuries-old rituals. Porland factory's Turkish coffee cups collections are aimed to discover the hidden fortune stories with clients. It is focused on clients' timeless texts with sophisticated typeface and their narratives approaches with new meanings. They wish to turn serving Turkish coffee into a special occasion.



Figure. 11 Porland Porcelain Turkish coffee cup

6. Various Artists Dealing Ceramics Works with Typographic Point of View

Today's contemporary ceramics have very wide borders. Artists are trying to explain their different backgrounds, philosophies or approaches that ceramic materials offer. Ceramics give artists more opportunities with historical, technological and graphic backgrounds. As Mary White claimed in her book (p.9), today ceramic artists are beginning to realize the potentials of using the alphabet in their works and a revolution is taking place, letter are no longer purely functional. They have become an art form themselves and not necessarily readable.

Duygu Kahraman (Turkey) "You will be crushed under if you like the stone" is the longest time to take the first step to age thirty. Mountains and stones are expressed with the unbearable weight of the oppressor; the letters start talking on the soft clay; if you love stone you can crush it under, you are neither hammer nor paper, you are always lost in the game" said in her own manifesto.

The concept of her works is private stories about internal feud against and questioning her life. The installation has approximately a hundred ceramic stones. Each piece, which uses a metaphor, presented here are reflection of the artist's own life and experiences. The stories deal with the inner growth and conflict and negative feelings of life. Choosing bold and majuscule type characters also support her feeling of harshness and the negative appeal. The words on ceramic stones represent living a mark upon a body or making an impression on someone.



Figure. 12, 13 Duygu Kahraman, 'If You Love Stone You Can Crush it Under'

Elif Agatekin (Turkey), "My grandmother, who spent all her life cooking amazing meals for us with great love, used to look at us in the eye when we ate at her generous table and feel satisfied instead of us...Now, since she passed away, we all have the flavors of her meals in our mouths which we know we will never be able to taste again... and in the cupboard are those old plates which were full with her meals for years...If I knew that these plates would be filled with those amazing flavors at her table again, just one more time, I would have either picked them up or written the names of her meals, whose flavors are still on our palates, on these old plates..." (Agatekin, 2018)

The artist uses alternative and innovative cutting techniques to express her feelings on ceramic objects with letters. It can be very fascinating and captivating to see letters as a 3D design element on ceramic plates. "The Flavor of Love Remaining on the Palate" collection was produced by water-jet cutting technique on grandmother's memorial plates used daily at home. This technique encourages her to find new and strong expressive language to create ceramic objects with type characters. It is not a coincidence to choose handwriting characters all in miniscule letters. Artist made a reference to her grandmother's sincere relationship that she misses always.



Figure. 14 The Flavor of Love Remaining on the Palate -Stuffed Grape Leaves Q 30 x 5 cm 2013



Figure. 15 The Flavor of Love Remaining on the Palate Series -Tarana Soup Q 30 x 5 cm 2013

Ezgi Hakan Verdu Martinez (Turkey) “In the 20th century lettering has turned into a visual material, besides the messages it carries became a design element in the contemporary ceramic art, in this aspect. The techniques of transforming inscriptions into design elements as a source of inspiration, and the effects of inscriptions on the whole design, as a visual material has been a wide approach in the contemporary art and design. The effect of expressions carrying type writing and handwriting interpretations by artists is making the art works more impressing with the aesthetic value and form diversity” (Hakan Verdu Martinez 2018).

Hakan Verdu Martinez has a thesis about lettering on ceramics. She used many typographic elements on her wall relief design. In this work letters have been a significantly transformed communication tool to design element using many ceramic techniques. Usage of 2D, 3D, negative and positive letters gives her even more opportunities to creative more effective and expressive designs.



Figure. 16 Ezgi Hakan Verdu Martinez, Wall Relief

Artist combined Turkish cultural significance with artistic value of a pillow with handwritings elements. In Turkish tradition, there is an idiom about a newly married couple “Bir Yastıkta Kocayın” meaning “Have a Long Lasting Marriage” It is believed that using a long and traditional pillow, which covered with lacework support intimacy between couples.

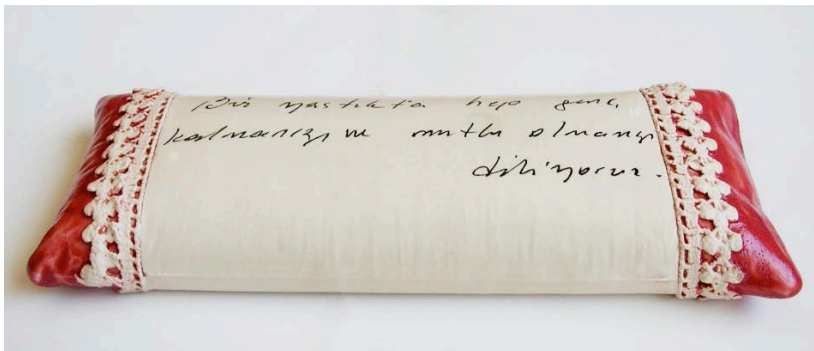


Figure. 17 Ezgi Hakan Verdu Martinez, Pillow

Mary White (England) is a very famous ceramic artist who uses many different types of characters in her ceramic works. She has many researches about lettering on ceramic surfaces and also a book, which named “Letterings on Ceramics”. This is one of her work from her very wide ceramic works series. Mary White’s nation can be indentified easily in the chosen typeface on the rounded bottle. Half uncials characters were first used by the romans early in the 6th century and were brought to Ireland by Roman missionaries and them to England. The letters on the form were pressed with plaster stamps. The typefaces

were filled with oxides for colouring and then after bisquite firing it was glazed with transparant glaze to have light and shade effects.

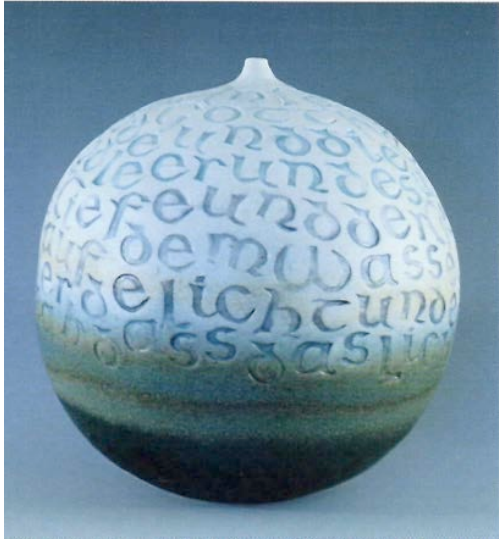


Figure. 18 Mary White, Bottle

Stephanie DeArmond (USA) is another artist who works on ceramics related with typography. “Stephanie DeArmond’s work explores language - taking slang phrases, colloquialisms, and snippets of conversation and abstracting them into sculptural form where meanings are revealed and obscured through typography and letterforms. She uses traditional hand-building techniques to make complex constructions from slabs of clay. The typographic forms she creates are based on her own hand-drawn lettering and vintage letterforms. Each piece is unique – finished with glazes, vintage ceramic decals, or painted-on black slip.” (<http://stephaniedearmond.com/bio.html>)



Figure. 19, 20 Stephanie De Armond typographic ceramics

Cj Oneil (UK) is another ceramic artist who use letters on ceramic surfaces. She enjoys re-designing everyday ceramics objects with multidisciplinary ways. Her artistic approaches,

exploring everyday ceramics objects as art objects with combination of letters and images. “*Re*presenting: artistic interventions exploring everyday ceramics* explores issues around authorship, value and collaboration through the use of everyday ceramic objects in combination with narrative through both handmade and industrial processes. My interest is in how these objects can connect people, enabling them to construct their own narrative.” (Oneil 2018)



Figure. 21, 22 Feeding Desire Plates Collection

“This collection uses water-jet cutting to remove material and lasers to mark a piece. The words and imagery have been chosen because of their ambiguity, allowing the viewer to add value to the pieces through their own associations. Another key aspect of the collection is the way it plays with society’s continual desire for new objects. Discarded objects are rejuvenated and transformed to help inspire people to reuse materials in innovative ways” (Fragile p.58).

“Richard Milette (Canada) has been re-examining prototypical Greek vessel in various series of works for more than a decade. Not only does the question again the museum status of broken Greek pots, but also Notion, role and value of narration in art. Milette’s appropriated Classic Greek forms have now lost their “true” (real) historical narrative content because the original storytelling image (the art) has been painted over, and therefore erased. The theatrical arena the territory where the real narrative based on recognizable was initially located, has now been invaded by a discontinuous text. By cutting text and words randomly, both lose their veritable meaning, thus annulling the narrative” (Ostermann, 2006 p.135).



Figure. 23, 24, 25 Richard Milette, (Ceramic Narrative p.52, 53)

“The ceramic object must now be re-evaluated for its own merit. In the reconstruction process the neo Greek vase has now become the image of itself” (Scoot, p.106). The Roman serif capital letters, which have antique atmosphere based on Trajan Column in Rome. This style face set to have been invented by Romans is also commonly referred to as Roman. It is one of the most often used and also one of the most legible styles. The style is very comfortable and familiar to all readers. Trajan letter shapes based on ancient Roman lettering. Milette’s Neo-Greek vase with recontextualization process matched perfectly with these historical roots of typeface. In figure 25, the arrange of ‘HATE’ type looks like the famous pop art icon ‘LOVE’ type of Robert Indiana.

7. Conclusions

This work is important that it was shaped within the frame of titles below in accordance with this interdisciplinary approach and search for the answer these questions like; ‘How can the relationship between typography and ceramics be evaluated’, ‘How typography is used on ceramic surfaces as a design element’ and ‘How typography is undertaken as a form element in the field of artistic and industrial ceramics’. Referring the artists dealing ceramics works with typographic point of view is a significant contribution to the field. Because of the lack of too many written notifications about the subject, it is useful for the upcoming researchers. The available examples enlighten this work, also motivate researchers to do search broader about this subject in historical and contemporary dimensions. Due to the ceramic designs that are created using by typographic elements, exemplified over the local artists from Turkey, it is differentiated from the earlier published works.

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