

Integrated Flower Vases in Clayware and Wood

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Abstract

The local pottery industry faces tremendous challenges from the increasing interest Ghanaian are showing in imported products because of their functional value, quality and aesthetic appeal. This is due among others, to the monotonous approach to production and finishing of indigenous products, conditions that also marred the philosophical impact they are supposed to convey. To overcome some of these challenges the researchers experimented on the integration clay-wear and wood for the production of flower vases. The qualitative research method where observational, experimental and descriptive approaches were employed to investigate the viability of integrating clay-wear with wood for the project. The research unveiled that clay-wear and wood can be integrated in the production of finished products that are functional, aesthetically presentable and of high quality. Besides, it is also proven that with appropriate manipulation through experiment other locally available raw materials can be used to produce products would convey the Ghanaian culture to would be buyers and the outside world.

Keywords: Clay, Wood, Integration, Decoration, Production.

INTRODUCTION

According to Traditions Hand Crafted Gallery (2014), "Pottery is made by forming a clay body into objects of 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 variety of techniques after which it is dried and then fired".

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 (National Commission on Culture, 2010). However, for the traditional and religious leaders these forms and decorations were philosophical and often had religious connotations, they had attached with them other materials like cowry shells, raffia, fabric, leather, wood etc. These decorations were aesthetically fetishist in their outlook. To Ian (1984), these compositions are believed to invoke some powers for the functioning of the wares.

Contemporary pottery products in Ghana are often decorated by incision, stamping, embossment, sprigging, graffiti and glazing. However, some pieces are often marred by the kind of finishing that are given to them, particularly, inappropriate glazes. These wares are no match to compete with the influx of foreign ceramic wares. Most often achieving variety in colour, desired finishing effects, with the philosophical dimensions of the ware is almost none existence.

This trend, however, can be corrected if other non-conventional materials and techniques are considered. This brings to the fore the need for pottery in mixed media. Speight and Toki (2000) defines 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. Mixed media has been practiced by artists in different cultures to achieve their objectives. According to Graven (1994), mixed media was advocated by the early Dadaists in one way to debunk what he calls the high art, and in another, to bring art and real life together. Pottery in mixed media offers a limitless opportunity for self-expression for the pottery artist. Dona (1969) opines that mixed media provides artists with amazing range of materials and ideas that can easily be expressed by both young and older artists. Mixed media allows the artist to take a fresh look at the most ordinary item and separate them from their everyday environment and uses.

The pottery vase was anciently employed as a container for water (a hydria), wine (an amphora), or oil (a lekythus), or for mixing and serving wine and water (a crater). It had one or two handles, sometimes a lip or spout, and frequently a base or foot; sometimes it was pointed to thrust into the ground or was set into a frame holder for support. Large covered vases were used for general storage purposes.

The cinerary (cremation) vase, or urn, has been common throughout historical times, a famous one being the Portland vase. Modern vases are widely used for flowers. Beautiful in form and embellished with incised patterns, modelled or painted figures or scenes, and sometimes inscriptions, the vase became a work of art in early times. Greek painted vases are in form and colour among the most exquisite examples of ancient art.

Vases or their fragments discovered in burial chambers and through excavations in various countries serve as records of the manners, customs, and history of their peoples. Buddhist and Christian altar objects include

the vase, usually of silver or gold with chased or modelled designs of exquisite workmanship. Bronze and brass are much employed for vases in Asia, as well as porcelain, carved jade, and crystal in China and enamelware in the Satsuma and Kutani vases of Japan. The vase of cloisonné is also much in evidence in East Asia. The Persian pottery type is famous for its blue-green colour, French Sevres for miniature medallions, English Wedgwood for cameo reliefs, and American Rookwood for rich tones and under glaze painting.

The vase is an open container, often used to hold cut flowers. It can be made from a number of materials including ceramics and glass. The vase is often decorated and thus used to extend the beauty of its contents. Vases are defined as having a certain anatomy. Lowest is the foot, a distinguishable base to the piece. Next, the body, which forms the main and often largest portion of the piece. Resting atop the body is the shoulder, where the body curves inward. Then the neck, where the vase is given more height. Lastly, the lip, where the vase flares out at the top. Many vases are also given handles. Today, the shapes of vases have evolved from the conventional ones to modern designs and shapes. The vase has also developed as an art medium unto itself. The ancient Greeks famously used vases to depict scenes. MyFundi (2015) has also stated that ‘Traditionally African pottery is largely utilitarian, made to store and carry water and foodstuffs, for cooking in and to serve food and drink. Ritual vessels are also made for ceremonies. Clay can be used for architectural purposes - to coat walls of houses and buildings and to make the actual dwellings’. On the issue of decoration MyFundi *ibid*, has explained that, ‘In some villages, the decoration on the pots echoes the decoration on the houses. Similar motifs are also woven as grass patterns, carved into doors and stools, or appear as tattoos or scar patterns on the skin. All aspects of craft are intertwined in the community’. Vases could either be grouped under indigenous or contemporary depending on their purposes. Indigenous vases are purposely made to serve domestic purpose while contemporary vases are made to serve both domestic and industrial use.

Ghanaian vases come in two major forms, these are the original ancient vases and those that are influenced by contemporary ideas, and the following are samples of such vases.



Source from <http://www.africancrafts.com/ghana.php>

Plate1. Indigenous production technique



Source from <http://abramanta.tripod.com/ServicesGhana.htm>

Plate 2. Pottery developed to make containers to store and transport food such as maize and oil.



Sourced: <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue10/articles/03.htm>.

Plate 2. Pairs of Dagaaba hearth pots, Tuna market, Northern Ghana,



Plate 3. Indigenous pottery wear in different sizes and shapes



source from <http://vases.novica.com/brown/west-africa/ceramic-vase-eagle/22707/> Inspired by archeological pieces of ancient African art, created by Samuel Lovi (2014).

Plate 4: Brown African Vase;



Plate 5: Traditional Pottery, source from <http://gidconsult.gidconsult.org>

The traditional pottery is the benchmark product of women's co-operatives such as the Kpando and Vume Women's groups of the Volta Region, and the Otabenaze group of the Central Region.



Source from <http://gidconsult.org>

Plate 6: 'Background ceramics'

Background Ceramics are items made of clay and other allied materials (feldspar, quartz, calcium, dolomite, etc.) that have undergone firing and include pottery, bricks and tiles (Gidconsult 2015)

Flower vases over the years have served the purpose of ornamentation and beautification in the houses of many citizens, originally indigenous Ghanaian vases were meant as containers for food and other house hold items, however, this has changed as a result of external cultural influences. To further promote the production and uses of vases with Ghanaian touch it is necessary to spend ample time to explore new ideas that can best be applied in the pottery industry. The determination of the researchers to pursue innovations in the pottery industry influenced them to consider the possibility of integrating wood and clay, two uncomplimentary materials in the production of vases; indeed the integration of wood and clay is rare in the production of vases, something which has never been considered. In Ghana, the pottery industry has a high potential for resuscitating the economy as there are a lot of raw material deposits and employable skills. The development of the pottery industry is therefore likely to help ease the massive unemployment problems plaguing the economy.

The indigenous pottery industry faces tremendous challenges among these are,

- Encroachment on clay deposit fields by landlords,
- The unavailability of regular market share and the
- Outmoded production techniques and finishing,
- Lack of conscious efforts to introduce innovations that would meet contemporary needs,

These challenges have imparted negatively on the industry and contributed to the increasing interest of Ghanaians in imported finished products because of their functional value, quality and aesthetic appeal. Many of the historic pottery industries have collapse, typical among them are Apeadu and Pankrono, they were noted as renowned pottery centres in Ashanti Region. It is crucial for a study to be done to find out wholly what all these challenges entail and how the pottery industry can be revived in the shortest possible time to avoid its total extinction as a source of employment for the various indigenous communities.

To help salvage some of the challenges the industry is facing the researchers set out to design and experiment on the manufacture of vases by integrating wood and clay. A unique type of vases produced with available local materials to enhance the value of indigenous pottery industry. the experiment unveil how other local materials other than the known traditional ones such as sand and cement can be used in manufacturing a vase, and how feasible it will be.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers' effort was geared towards the introduction of new approaches to the manufacture of vases with by employing the integration of wood and clay, two materials primarily considered to be uncomplimentary in the production of vases.

In pursuance of the project, *the* qualitative research method was used for the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), "qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern human behaviour." (p.2). It can best be explained as investigating the why and how of decision-making as compared to what, where and when of qualitative research." According to Lofland (1984), "The simplest definition for qualitative research is to say, collection and analysis of data that are non-quantitative." However, qualitative approach was used in the discussion and analysis of results in a descriptive. The purposive sampling technique was also used by the researchers to source for information on wood and clay the two main materials involved in the research and those who work with these items.

Project One (Working Drawings)



Figure 1. Working drawings for project two

PROJECT TWO (Working Drawings)

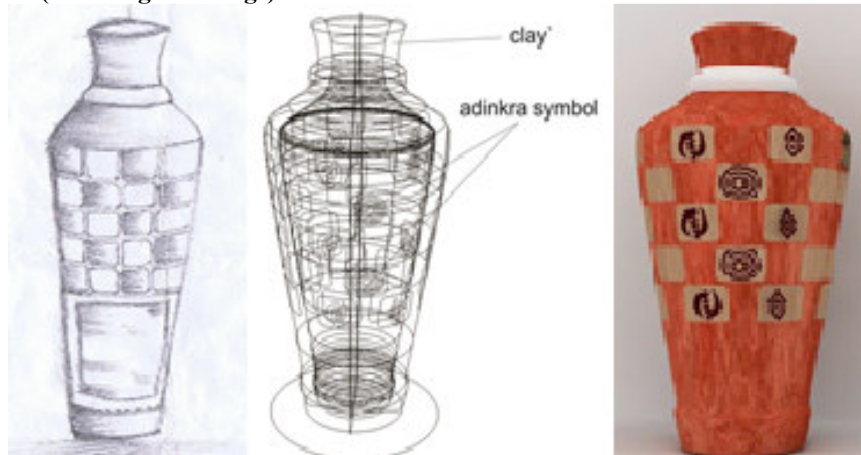


Figure 2. Working drawings for project two.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Plastic Clay: The main medium that forms the structure of the vase. Sand paper: For smoothing the surface of the work. Wood: A fibrous material that is used for the integration with clay. Sanding Sealer: for base coat on wood. Rolling Pin: It is a cylindrical wooden stick use for exerting pressure on the lump of plastic clay to slabs. Hammer: A tool meant to deliver an impact to an object. Sack board; is a flat board covered with jute use for rolling lumps of plastic clay into slabs. Sand paper; is a heavy paper with abrasive material attached to it surface. Potters Knife; is a Tool used for shaping and cutting both leather and wet plastic clay. Foam; it was removing water from pots and smoothen the surface of wares. Spatula; Use for modelling and forming clay in plastic state and also for carving and pressing to create a variety of decorative and textured effects. Sack board; is a flat board covered with jute use for rolling lumps of plastic clay into slabs. Veneer: for weaving. Lathing machine: For Sharpening of the wood. Spray gun; It is a tool that holds water which is sprayed on a ware to prevent excessive during to keep the ware in an even consistency. Pottery gauge; Use to measure the height of pots. Ruler; It is use together with callipers and pottery gauge to take measurements. Potter's wheel; It is an equipment that is use for throwing cylindrical (pots, cups, vases etc.) wares. Cutting wire; it is use for cutting through plastic clay to ensure easy removal of foreign materials. Electric Kiln; It is equipment which is powered by electricity to fire bisque wares into vitreous permanent state. Bats; Bats appears in diverse shapes made of wood and highly refractory materials. It is use for throwing, turning and as a support to hold wares in the kiln during firing. It also helps in the transfer of wares from one place to another without distorting the shape. Guard Stick; is a pair of supporting wooden sticks with equal dimensions which ensures uniform formation slabs. Fevicol branded glue is a white Synthetic resin adhesive intended for wood working and various materials where one of the surfaces to be bonded is porous (Wikipedia 2015). It appears as a white viscous paste, that is, able to fasten a variety of materials firmly together. Well-seasoned pieces of wood was selected taking into consideration their physical properties of expansion and contraction in relation to the character of the fired clay portions where the joining processes take place.

PROJECT ONE: STAGES IN CONSTRUCTING OF THE VASE ONE

1. A ball of clay was prepared, centred on the potter's wheel and thrown to produce the neck of the vase.



Plate 5. Preparation of the neck

2. The prepared neck was left to dry till it became leather hard.

3. 2 inches line was measured from the bottom, and a circular line was drawn around the neck from where 5cm line was measured upward for further circular line to be drawn. Circular lines measuring 1 cm apart were drawn within the 5cm circular space.

4. With some carving tools, Woven designs were drawn and carved out around the neck within the 5cm marks drawn, as a means of decoration as in plate 5, and then left to dry thoroughly, after which it was fired.



Plate 5. Woven designs carved around the neck of the pot.

5. With the aid of lathe turning machine, 9 pieces of wood were turned into the shape of a cylinder with the top measuring 4.5 inches and the bottom 2.5 inches with a height of 24 inches.



Plates 7 Pieces of wood cut into cylindrical form.

6. The wooden pieces were next joined together into cylindrical shape with the aid of an epoxy.

7. The neck of the pot was sanded and placed on top of the joined cylinders and stacked together with fevicol, the fluid nature of the glue enable it to fill open spaces easily for effective bonding.

8. When the adhesive got dried, the neck was painted with dark brown acrylic paint.

9. Transparent spray lacquer was next sprayed on the integrated clay and wooden vase to finish as in plate 8. The choice of the lacquer is due to its property of moisture-resistant, fast drying and its potency for application on products such as wood, ceramic, plaster, glass and metal.



Plate 8. Finished integrated clay and wood flower vase.

PROJECT TWO: STAGES IN CONSTRUCTING OF THE 2nd VASE

1. A ball of clay weighing 5kgs was prepared and thrown on a potter's wheel for the base of the vase it was next left to dry into leather hard state.
2. The base was next left to dry into leather hard state.
3. Clay slabs were rolled up and cut into strips with each one measuring 5cm wide and 10mm thick, as in plate 9.



Plate 9. Slabs of clay.

4. With the aid of clay slip, the individual clay slabs were built on top of the base, one after the other until the desired shape and height of 90cm was reached.
5. Another ball of clay weighing 5kgs was thrown to build the neck.



Plate 10. The neck of the pot

6. When the neck was dry to the leather hard state it was joined to the top of the vase with a slip as in plate 11.



Plate 11. Joining the neck to the base.

7. Square shape holes were then cut out of the side with each square measuring 6 cm.



Plate 12. Cutting out the square shapes

8. The work is then left to dry and fired.
9. Square shape block measuring the same as the cut out of the vase were cut out in wood.
10. These square pieces were sanded and fixed tight in the holes on the vase with the aid of epoxy.
11. When the epoxy got dried the clay portions of the work were painted, leaving out the wooden portions.
12. Lacquer was then sprayed on the entire piece of work, that is, both clay and the wooden portions as in plate 13.



Plate 13: Finished integrated clay and wood vase.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having gone through the various experimental processes two clay-ware flower vases integrated with wood were produced in response to the researcher stated objectives. The research demonstrates that clay and wood can be integrated in the production of finished products that are aesthetically presentable and of high quality; an innovation that is hoped to enhance the local pottery industry, to meet contemporary needs. It unveiled that the pottery industry can further be enhanced through the identification, designing, manipulation and integration of appropriate local materials for the production of varied cultural artifacts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMEDATION

In summary, this study has shown that the mixed media materials employed in the projects could be used

effectively to achieve high quality aesthetic contemporary pottery products. It also ascertains that materials such as wood could be a wealth of additional resources to enhance indigenous pottery products.

In conclusion, non- conventional materials integrated with indigenous pottery products could be an effective means to provide alternate and unlimited opportunities for traditional potters to explore and enhance their wares for maximum economic benefits.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that, further research should be done to open up other opportunities that could be secured for the sustaining the pottery industry and for job creation. Students and vase producers should be urged to explore on the integration clay and other available local raw materials for the production of flower vases.

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