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"The Aesthetic Features in Contemporary Composite Ceramics (Ngozi Omeje as a Model)"

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Abstract

The concept of composition plays a significant role in our daily lives, as it has permeated into the intricate details and external organization of forms. Scientific and cognitive developments have greatly influenced the overall structure of visual composition, particularly in contemporary ceramics. This impact is evident in the direct relationship between contemporary ceramics' display spaces and their artistic evolution, representing a crucial phase in their artistic style. This characteristic emerged due to the variations that encompassed artistic movements and trends, driven by intellectual motivations inherent in the contemporary concept or artistic trends belonging to the post-modern era. The research problem can be formulated as follows: "What are the aesthetic characteristics of contemporary composite ceramics by Ngozi Omeje?" The theoretical framework consists of two main sections: the aesthetic specificity of composition in ceramics and the dialectics of composition and analysis in the style of the ceramist Ngozi Omeje. The third chapter includes a review of the research methodology, while the fourth chapter presents the research results, conclusions, and references.

Keywords: Contemporary Composite - Contemporary Fine Art - Ngozi Omeje

Chapter One: The Methodological Framework

1- Research Problem

Recent critical studies have focused on understanding and analyzing stylistic transformations, as well as the individual studies and artistic experiments related to formal and stylistic formulations and their aesthetic characteristics. This exploration extends to the diversity of materials and processing methods in ceramic production, as art is a universal language that reflects human practices. Consequently, traditional compositional structures have undergone a transformative shift, breaking away from stagnation in many visual arts works.

In light of these new developments in scientific and academic knowledge, philosophical and aesthetic contexts have emerged that influence the field of art. Under these contexts, form is subject to reshaping through its compositional relationships, regardless of its discourse type. Form radiates its effectiveness, which is distributed across various axes related to the objectivity of the vocabulary contained within the form. This artistic effectiveness is an expressive stylistic phenomenon that captures the audience's amazement, revealing the distinctive signs that differentiate it from its practical reality. In other words, visual composition is a circular discourse between the participants in the communication process. The form itself possesses a

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dialogic effectiveness that communicates with the recipient. This convergence reflects the effectiveness of the compositional form, and through these artistic vocabulary items within the generative context, a deconstructive concept is achieved, enabling the recipient to grasp direct signals for engaging in an equal dialogue with the artist, based on mutual understanding.

Building on the preceding discussion, the researchers see that the research problem revolves around answering the following question: "What are the aesthetic characteristics of the compositional ceramics by Ngozi Omeje?"

2- The Importance of the Research

- This research contributes to understanding the aesthetic and artistic awareness of Ngozi Omeje and her uniqueness by focusing on the structural composition of contemporary ceramic art.
- It benefits academics, particularly graduate students in the field of visual arts, and specifically ceramic art, in colleges and institutes of fine arts. Additionally, it enriches the artistic library with a methodical study of the aesthetic characteristics of contemporary composite ceramics, exploring their philosophical, cultural, and social dimensions.

3- Research Objectives

The current research aims to identify the aesthetic characteristics of contemporary composite ceramics by Ngozi Omeje.

4- Research Limits

- Geographical Limits: The Contemporary Art Center, Nigeria, Sabo, Lagos.
- Temporal Limits: Up to 2018.
- Subject Limits: Works of the ceramic artist Ngozi Omeje with a focus on composition.

5- Research Terminology

Characteristics (as terms):

- Defined by Safira as "all the distinctive qualities by which something is uniquely identified, determining its essence and pointing to its specific attributes that differentiate it from others, making it uniquely expressive of itself."(1)
- Defined by Fouad as "the essential state of matter that carries the intellect by its nature to perceive it in itself, to have clear ideas about the distinguishing features of physical objects, such as size, shape, and movement."(2)
- Defined in the philosophical lexicon as "an attribute that is inseparable from an object and distinguishes it from others."(3)

Aesthetics (as a term):

- Defined by Baumgarten as "the science of sensory knowledge and sensory representation."(4)
- Defined by Lalande as "the science whose subject is evaluative judgment, distinguishing between the beautiful and the ugly."(5)
- Defined by Stace as "a combination of sensory perception and mental representation, where beauty consists of the radiance of the idea through sensory subjects. Anything beautiful consists of two elements: the idea and the perceiver's sensory content."(6)

Procedural definition of aesthetic characteristics:

"A set of qualities that the artist uniquely embodies in their ceramic creations to convey a

distinct discourse, especially in terms of the structural composition of ceramic forms. Additionally, it reflects its effectiveness in terms of impact and response for the recipient through sensory perceptions and mental images."

Composition (as a term):

- Defined by Herbert as "the construction of a new conception of the components of reality and its data, in the invocation of ideas and the mechanism of organizing them through form and image, to achieve a new structure that creates sensory and aesthetic effects on the viewer."(7)
- Defined by Marshad as "the hidden relationships between elements that make up the structure and play an active role in creating elements with meaning and significance. Therefore, it can be said that the function of composition is both structural and semantic, making the functions of vocabulary explicit and contributing to the formation of compositional meaning."(8)

Contemporary: described by Bahnesi as "progress, development, and the aspiration for renewal, implying creativity."(9) Willesky defined it as "human activity that occurs today, dedicated to the production of images, sculptures, pottery, drawings, engravings, and other similar subjects as hidden places."(10)

The procedural definition of contemporary composite ceramics is that it is:

The performance style followed by the ceramist in shaping their creation with their own vision, but it possesses the quality of modernity and is in line with the technological advancement, formal work, and the method of assembling materials in ceramic work, based on the diversity of expressive, sensory, and aesthetic values, according to a structural system in the composition of ceramic forms that keeps pace with the present era.

Chapter Two: The Theoretical Framework

First Section: Aesthetic Specificity of Composition in Ceramics

The concept of beauty holds significant importance in human thought and the structural composition of things. Despite variations in the interpretations of philosophers and thinkers regarding beauty and its nature, they all agree that beauty is connected to perception and the activation of the recipient's awareness. This is achieved through reflecting the conditions of beauty requirements in ceramic production, by generating stimuli expressed through various signs and symbols related to the semantics of structural composition. These associations are realized on the level of perception, through references to historical and cultural contexts, enhancing their values in accordance with the concept of beauty.

This notion affirms the relationship between achieving beauty and the mental process. Beauty is considered a "concept inherently related in one way or another to various aspects of our human life."(11) Plato argued that "form, not content, is what makes an artwork beautiful" and also asserted that "beauty is independent of truth and utility."(12) Aristotle shared a similar perspective, stating that "beauty must be linked to the content of awareness and perception." In other words, the sensation of beauty corresponds to the content of human knowledge, and thus, the sense of beauty is endowed with attributes related to intellect, thought, and will. This means that the sense of beauty has qualities tied to the mind, intellect, thought, and will. It is a matter of awareness that has degrees based on the level of consciousness.(13)

John Dewey elaborated on this, explaining that the sense of beauty is achieved through "the recipient's response or receptivity to the perceptions of the environmental context and the extent to which it harmonizes and aligns with this context." According to his view, beauty is associated with purpose and utility. Through it, humans achieve specific functions, as beauty is connected to human subjectivity without exceeding the boundaries of experience and expertise.(14)

As for Kandinsky, he stated, "Art is the inner necessity of form, and nothing but form."(15) Consequently, aesthetics usually adds significant value to the "form" in art, as the value of an artwork is based on form rather than content.(16) Sensory data plays a crucial role in art and in obtaining aesthetic experiences, as they are linked to emotional states and act as stimuli and motivators for artistic creation. Therefore, aesthetic awareness is not just the acceptance of sensory data in the artwork, but it presupposes that it does not rely on the retrieval of factual realities. Instead, it alerts to the elements of beauty that evoke meanings and imaginations in the recipient's experiences.(17) Philosophical aesthetics is based on the compositional presentation within the framework of contemporary thought philosophy, following the mechanisms of vitalistic physical philosophy.(18)

Therefore, the concept of beauty in ceramic art is a result of what the ceramist presents as an idea or a process of artistic treatment on the ceramic surface. One of the most important aesthetic values that achieve visual imagery is how to handle color and technique. This plays a crucial role in demonstrating the value of the artwork. Additionally, each element within the formal composition and the process of harmony and structural coherence holds significance, creating a distinctive feature that sets it apart from other works and contributes to the overall aesthetic image of the ceramic piece. "The construction of the composition has an active and primary impact on crystallizing the artistic product, giving it both a structural and an aesthetic dimension."(19)

The aesthetics of the composition are closely related to the aesthetics of the artistic concept. This is because the raw material must acquire its functional purpose as a substructure and then take on its aesthetic quality. What distinguishes contemporary ceramics is its transcendence of the material function of aesthetic materials. It is driven by various motivations that have led contemporary artists, influenced by emotions, rejection, liberation, beliefs, inner thoughts, and philosophical tendencies, to go beyond the traditional form of artistic work. They introduce advanced new elements that achieve the material's aesthetic form in addition to its traditional functional form.(20)

"The aesthetic characteristics in the composition's structure are based on the aesthetic values of formations such as rhythm, repetition, contrast, volumes, spaces, and texture, collectively referred to as the sensory surface of the world."(21) Among the aesthetic requirements demonstrated by the spaces of indoor and outdoor areas is the prominence of the element of alienation in contemporary ceramic products, which goes beyond the conventional and breaks all established contexts for the viewer. This curiosity inspires a reconsideration of ceramic art.

The Second Section: The Dialectics of Composition and Analysis in the Style of the Ceramist (Ngozi Omege)

Ancient philosophical thought has dominated human knowledge since the dawn of civilizations. It has played a significant role in providing a clear vision of the concept of dialectics. This vision is derived from the nature of the cultural scene associated with those

civilizations, characterized by diverse forms of inquiry into the nature of existence and its relationship with human beings. This has produced philosophical ideas and insights, each offering a unique understanding of this term.

Dialectics, as understood by Plato, is an evolutionary process of knowledge where higher truths are sought through the transition from the sensible to the rational. The unity of meaning is envisioned through the supposed whole. Plato also believes that beauty is not limited to living bodies and images but also extends to straight lines, circles, and all shapes.(22) Aristotle contends that truths lie in abstract forms that reside in the eternal and transcendent cause.(23) Kant argues that "form and content are a unified structure that takes on the character of the artistic ideal." (24) Hegel emphasizes the importance of organizing the form that genuinely corresponds to the idea, as the idea does not yield its true universality without a form that genuinely corresponds to it. (25) What happens in form is the organization of relationships realized through cohesion among the units constituting the artwork in general and ceramic art in particular.(26) Therefore, any flaw in an artwork does not result solely from the artist's skill but also from shortcomings in the content.(27)

In conclusion, the artistic form cannot be separated from the aesthetic value itself because the artistic form, or the artwork in general, is the embodiment of beauty as a unified entity. (28) This underscores that the form is an influential factor in the effectiveness of the visual space and imparts perceived movement within it.(29)

Art has a human inclination that has shaped its form, type, philosophy, and the artistic movements and schools that influenced its development from the Romantic era to the Dadaist movement. This period defined the concept of taste and human elevation. However, the structural upheaval of the cosmic discourse afterward altered its concepts and production. This led to historical deviations in reshaping the image of art in contemporary directions.

Art witnessed rich intellectual and aesthetic propositions, with opinions sometimes aligning and sometimes conflicting. In our contemporary world, it has become impossible to reach a unified intellectual vision. Modernity itself did not assume a specific intellectual, formal, or stylistic pattern. Therefore, research and imagination have become essential in confronting traditional forms of art production.(30)

Visual art, including ceramics, has played an active role in human life, nurturing the principles of interpretation and debate concerning matters that do not rely on conscious reason but are influenced by the language of imagination and dreams, conveying numerous symbols since symbols must be connected to and express meaning(31). Since the 20th century, the art world has witnessed transformations and shifts toward renewing unfamiliar systems that reflect the perspective of its creators. This defines paths linked to the cultural diversity observed in the art scene, with poets, theorists, and writers engaging with artists in cultural gatherings and dialogues. These dialogues raised questions and sought solutions to new social and cultural issues while embracing the notion of the exotic.(32)

Contemporary artists have surpassed the limitations of sensory perception, reflected in artistic realms through realistic forms. They tap into their hidden cognitive potentials of imagination and intuition. This energy finds its extent through a comprehensive vision capable of creating a knowledgeable space, delving into the hidden aspects of the self and existence.(33)

The structural composition adopted by ceramist Ngozi Omeje (34) is influenced by both internal factors (visual elements) and external factors (the exhibition space). The final form

varies as the compositional work on shapes differs from one artistic perspective to another. All elements of the complete artwork live in an intertwined internal connection, working together to create a unity that holds more value than the mere sum of its parts. These elements resonate within the personality that dominates and molds them into a unity. This unity represents the direct emotional perception of the subject before the artist.(35) Most of these units are executed by hand and vary in size, created either with traditional molds or freely

The form of an artwork implies the reflection of a set of visions and ideas that achieved this creative image. The artist's ability to innovate within the artistic product depends on these visions and ideas. The majority of these units are executed by hand and vary in size, created either with traditional molds or freely.(36) "The form can be simple as a dot when it is confined to itself, or it can be highly complex and intricate when the elements come together."(37) The form is the sum of several elements, (38) and the form's character is about how these elements interact. The form strives towards a goal, an end, and it is the original source of perfection. Therefore, the form becomes congruent with the essence of things, while the material descends to a secondary, low-value position(39). Formative organization involves assembling shapes according to specific organizational laws. It aims to move our emotions in a specific way(40). Formative organization is the process of highlighting it in its defined dimensions or expressing the emotion integrated by the artist.(41) Art is a system of formal relationships(42), and as simply stated by Raskin, "organization means putting several things together, so that in the end, they become one thing."(43) Mass (volume), line, color, texture, luminance value, space, and others are elements that the artist attempts to organize into new formulations.(44)

These ideological developments contributed to the emergence of innovative, non-conventional artistic products. The reason for this lies in the nature of contemporary artistic tendencies that appeared in the second half of the last century, as they focus on the context of the immediate event. Conceptual art, in its general principle, is based on the idea(45). Compositional art, which has become an artistic trend, is used in organizing artistic production within exhibition halls.(46) Artistic production is a direct form of human communication that undergoes many human experiences through models that interact with each other and with society, its cultures, and its civilizational systems(47). The meaningful form is a way or style of organizing sensory elements in the artwork.(48) This underscores that the structural composition is achieved through a set of characteristics and cognitive organization within a system of interconnected relationships from particles to the entirety of the artwork. Consequently, contemporary arts encompass absolute concepts beyond their abbreviations, such as minimalism, conceptualism, poor art, or performance and kinetic art(49) , which are among the most important plastic genres that rely on the integration of volume into space creatively, merging utilitarian functions with aesthetic functions.(50)

The theoretical framework has resulted in several indicators:

- **Aesthetic Characteristics:** The aesthetic qualities of the ceramic artwork are realized through the reflection of the artist's impact, whether from an emotional, innovative, cognitive, or kinetic perspective. It also involves how the artist manipulates the structural composition and its constructive relationships within the ceramic form.
- **Diversity in Dimensions, Colors, and Spaces:** Contemporary ceramic art often goes beyond conventional stylistic contexts. This uniqueness in composition, along with its diverse dimensions, colors, and spatial arrangements, enriches the artistic and expressive value of the ceramic work.
- **Harmony Between Design Concept and Material:** Achieving harmony between the design concept, materials, and compositional units is crucial. This is done through a structural

system that imparts a functional visual form, aiming to create a visual composition with artistic and aesthetic qualities.

- Interrelation Between Formative Structure and Artistic Elements: The aesthetic properties of the ceramic composition are realized through the interconnected relationship between the structural formation and the elements of the artwork.
- Subjective Nature of Beauty: The concept of beauty is subjective and variable, closely related to the artist's consciousness and accumulated experiences, as well as the viewer's response in the process of appreciation.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Procedures

1. Research Community: The research community consists of ceramic artworks produced by the artist Ngozi Omeje. The researchers conducted a survey study and collected information to identify and list all her ceramic creations, resulting in a community of 40 ceramic works.
2. Research Sample: The research sample comprises four selected ceramic artworks intentionally chosen to represent diversity in technical and artistic aspects. These selections align with the research objectives and the characteristics of the original research community.
3. Research Methodology: The researchers adopted a descriptive-analytical methodology due to its suitability for the research path and objectives.
4. Research Instrument: The researchers relied on indicators from the theoretical framework and previous studies as their research instrument.
5. Analysis of Research Sample: The ceramic artworks selected for the research sample were subjected to detailed analysis.



(Sample 1)

(Ngozi Omeje) presented a significant challenge to the structural composition of forms, resulting in a profound transformation of the established concepts that place ceramics within the utilitarian context. She introduced innovations in the visual composition by distinctively using paper as a visual element rich in emotional connotations, drawing from her personal experiences as a starting point. Her work addresses issues related to identity, family, and the feminine body, inspired by the forms and materials of the natural environment.

The technique of ceramics dominated the visual aspect of her artwork, necessitating the formulation of an aesthetic centered around the visual elements of lines and circles, realized

within the artwork's core. This established a focal point for visual attraction and emphasized the sovereignty of ceramics within the exhibition space. Through the compositions on its surface, angles, and size, ceramic art took on an expressive and visually captivating form.

The artist employed the material properties of paper as formal and narrative handles to address issues related to femininity. The paper shape symbolized a state of existence and materialized from rites of passage and associated constraints. The paper also alluded to the enduring struggles women face in their relationships, as seen through the lens described by the ceramist.



(Sample 2)

This ceramic composition is based on two similar material units that differ in their structural configuration, with one having a distinct difference in height compared to the other. The shape on the right side visually represents a teapot, while the shape on the left side takes the form of a vessel. In general, the composition signifies a collaborative partnership between two different shapes, following an interconnected structural framework with variations in height and size. There is harmony through linear curves, creating a coherence that expresses the essence of the work and the texture technique that mediates between smoothness and roughness found in the inner and outer lines.

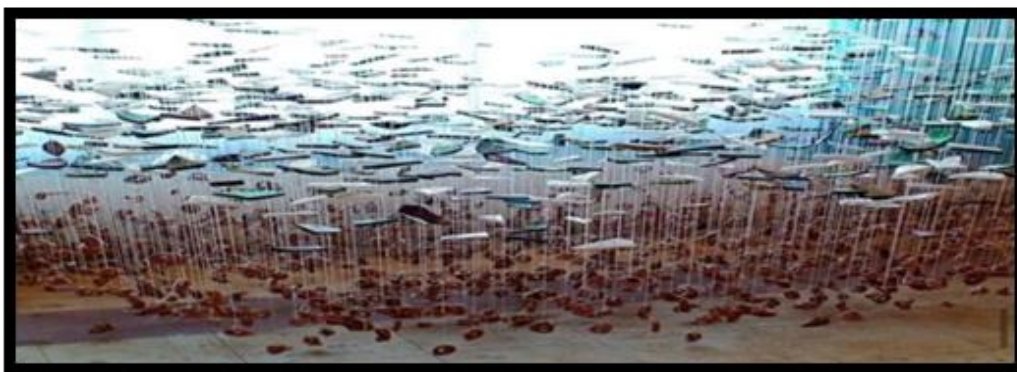
This achieved a unified expressive structural unit, representing the interplay of inner and outer lines between the two shapes in balance. The artist thus possesses the ability to showcase the aesthetic quality through a simplified and reductionist style, and in how she handles the material used (dry paper), molding it in terms of texture, color, and dynamic space. This emphasizes the fluidity in the paper's sway, establishing a common language between the two shapes.



(Sample 3)

This ceramic composition is a structural formation representing an abstract animal concept (the elephant). The ceramist attempted to blend two non-contrasting colors in her work, striving for harmonious coordination. Additionally, she activated the reflective surface through its visual texture. In this piece, the ceramist partially departed from the nature of traditional forms, opting to integrate the formation within the internal space, represented by the structural curves. This gave the ceramic structure an integrated coherence with the visual image of the external structural mass on one side and its surroundings on the other.

Here, it becomes evident that the structural relationships and their aesthetic qualities within this ceramic composition are based on a standing structure made up of a group of building units as a fundamental concept (abstract vital forms). This allowed the ceramist to achieve an artistic formation that is closer to architectural composition in its overall structure within its internal space, in accordance with contemporary conceptual abstractions.



(Sample 4)

This ceramic work involves hanging clay pieces with vertical wires, providing a sense of hierarchical implications stretching between the ground and space. It prompts the recipient to ponder conceptual questions about the significance of understanding through the contrast of abstract forms. Simultaneously, it retains aesthetic characteristics that are enhanced by the formation's uniqueness.

The relationship between color and texture had a significant impact on enriching the artistic aspect of the ceramic work. The technique played a significant role in the structural composition of the textural shape, distinguished by its aesthetic uniqueness through the incorporation of varied and harmonious terracotta pieces. This resulted in contrasting rhythms that carried color values between light and dark. The ceramist relied on the structural formation technique of shapes, giving the composition an aesthetic visual image that suited the display space within the ceramic structural presentation. This presentation had its aesthetic distinctiveness and clear conceptual dimensions.

Chapter Four - Research Results

- The compositional processes to achieve aesthetic characteristics in contemporary ceramics were closely associated with the experiments of ceramist Ngozi Omeje. She significantly introduced diversity and uniqueness in her choice of materials along with visible formal composition, deviating from the conventional context of ceramic production, as seen in the first and second samples.

- Aesthetic stimulation primarily formed the basis for her formal compositional work in contemporary Iraqi ceramics within a social context. This became notably evident in the second, third, and fourth samples, conveying a social message with an aesthetic inclination.
- The aesthetic qualities of contemporary ceramic composition in Ngozi Omeje's experiments were well aligned with the psychological context. They effectively touched the emotions of the recipient through the formal composition of ceramic creations (such as the pitcher and vessel), granting them an aesthetic quality beyond their compositional boundaries, as observed in the second and third samples.
- The aesthetic characteristics of formal composition in contemporary Iraqi ceramics, as demonstrated in Ngozi Omeje's experiments, largely adhered to a harmonious and linear movement context, as seen in the first, second, third, and fourth samples.

Conclusions

- Coordination, harmony, color gradients, divergence, and artistic uniqueness are among the most delicate aesthetic features in a contemporary context.
- The interplay between the internal space of the work and its surrounding environment in the structural presentation is an aesthetic property with dynamic movement.
- Material and presentation techniques in (Ngozi Omeje's) experiments played a vital role in the structural composition of contemporary ceramic art, shaping the ceramic work in an aesthetic manner.
- (Ngozi Omeje's) experiments were characterized by deviating from the conventional in their structural and stylistic connections and working methods. This undermined all boundaries, specialties, and conventional classifications, instead forging aesthetic compositional relationships within the ceramic shape's structure.

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