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Woman Icon Used for Ceramic Surface

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Woman Icon Used for Ceramic Surface

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Abstract

Soil, which has been used as the basic material to express the sacred that symbolizes fertility, gods, idols, totems etc., has been used as a shelter by mankind to get protected from harsh living conditions since the matriarchal eras. People have produced usage goods to meet their needs, and revolutionized by creating living spaces and architectural structures with settled life. In the process of figurative ceramics production, which has begun with the stylized depictions of the female forms and of the goddesses, visual richness has increased through two-dimensional human, animal and floral decorations applied on the three-dimensional products such as pottery and vases etc. The word Icon (eikon) which originated from Greek and means similarity, image and portrait is used to express many words today (figures, symbols, pictures, idols, statues etc.). It is also frequently used to express symbols in computer technology and any field of popular culture. The purpose of this study is to analyze the development processes and stages of the art of ceramics which has a long history, and also to examine the meanings attributed to the female figures used on surface decoration and ornaments by providing examples of artists producing works in this style nowadays.

Keywords: Ceramic Art, Woman Icon, Surface Decor, Decoration Techniques

Introduction

Ceramics which has been the most produced, used materials since prehistoric times, has been formed and continued its motion in parallel with the improvement of human beings. Primitive pottery which was used to meet basic needs and necessities in different parts of the world has been decorated with ornaments in time to meet aesthetical concerns. When societies adopted sedentary life, rich variety of products appeared with the effects of factors such as geopolitical position, cultural and socio-economical structures of the societies.

Since the early ages, dominant figure of man based on physical power as hunter and collector and his meeting his own needs have led woman to subsidiary, complementary, protective and roles such as daily chores. Woman, together with developing process, has become harmonized with nature, learnt to get benefit from soil, she has started to produce and develop so her importance in the society has increased.

Since the matriarchal times, woman figured ceramics idols and sculptures, which were produced because of the mother goddess belief and to be used in religious rituals, have reflected women as the beings which grant life and nature. With the idea saying that woman has power on nature and with the effects of her biological situations such as giving birth and menstruating which can not be understood or explained by the society, temples and worshiping sites were built by regarding women as blessed. In line with the needs of society and time, altars and offerings decorated with feminine forms and figures were produced for woman, which was accepted as the symbol of fertility and abundance in communal life, in a lot of cultures.

Although the importance of women in the society seemed to decrease with the acceptance of monotheistic religion, the attractive appearance of women continued to be the focus subject through handicraft productions. Woman figure has been commonly reflected with materials such as marble, stone, wood and bone on three dimension ceramics forms and surfaces.

Figure 1. *Upper Paleolithic, Venus von Willendorf, 24000–22000 B.C.*



Figure 2. *Neolithic, Goddess with Leopard, 6000 B.C.*



Right along with the figures and sculptures produced as the objects of worshipping and fertility, anthropomorphic idols and functional offering vessels were also produced. Idols and figures produced for functional purposes were used as the symbols of abundance and as the worshipping objects at homes or in temples. Decorations representing divine, nature, woman and fertility were applied on the figures with primitive paint and primers.

Figure 3. *Anthropomorphic Vessel, 2200-1700 B.C. Troy*



Figure 4. *Anthropomorphic Lid, 2250-2200 B.C. Troy*



In parallel with material variety developed through bronze and iron ages, there was an increase in the shapes of forms, three dimension ceramics with quality decoration and ornamentation examples were produced by applying animal figures, geometrical and herbal images on them. Durability of the product and the visual effect of the surface were tried to be increased by polishing or glazing the outer surface of ceramics. The craftsman who had improved and enriched his abilities during practice period, started to depict scenes reflecting socio-cultural life style of the period on surfaces. The diggings related to these practices which were found in archeological engravings today provide us the widest range of information about ancient times and they are like historical documents in that sense.

The history of art of ceramics in the world differs in terms of the production variety in every part of the world. Production techniques, form and surface decoration practices became common with the effect of trade and they had a quick development process. Some cultures such as Anatolia, Far East, and Ancient Greece had influential productions all over the world and their productions were commonly demanded.

Figure 5. *Vessel in the Form of a Woman, 6000 B.C. Hacilar*



Figure 6. *Woman Figurines, 8500-5500 B.C. Hacilar*



In Chalcolithic period (5000-3000 B.C.) in Anatolia, weaving and ladder patterns, geometrical shapes, zigzag hatching, dots, wavy lines were the most distinctive decorations on the surfaces of the ceramics forms produced in that period. In Assyria Trade Colonies Period (1950-1750 B.C.) with the development of ceramics wheel, diagonal and smooth sharp lines on the surfaces of forms and glazing method and bright primer started to be used. In Hittite and Phrygian Period, technique, form and shape continued to develop. Black, white and colorful primers and sgraffito technique were used on the surfaces of ceramics produced in this period.

Herbal and geometrical decorations were intensely preferred on the ceramics which started to develop in Anatolia, where many of Goddess sculptures were produced for the first time. Additionally, ceramics with human figures on their surfaces were produced around Mesopotamia.

The reason why ceramics production style and purposes in Far East were different from West was that the high quality and wide range of raw material distribution, cultural daily life and the interaction of relationships between religions. Countries like China, Korea and Japan depicted herbal patterns and animal figures on their quality ceramics and porcelain which they produced with their developed production and decoration techniques as well as with the effect of their culture, philosophy and religion (Cooper, 2002).

Figure 7. *Jomon Figure, 12000-300 B.C. Jomon Period, Japan*



Figure 8. *White Pottery, 1600-1046 B.C. Shang dynasty, Beijing*



After the period when geometrical patterns and motives which characterized basket weave and weaving, figured decoration applications were produced depicting important events such as wars, celebrations or rituals in Greek ceramics. In some sources it is stated that the figure decoration was inspired by the example of East art. Even so, Greek craftsmen skillfully applied stylized black primed mythological animals and human figures on forms such as plates, vases or cubes. It is seen on the depicted scenes that the eloquence is very strong and pattern lines are very sharp and clear.

Figure 9. *Attic Red-Figured Earthenware, 530-520 B.C. Greece*



Figure 10. *Red and White Design Large Bowl, 250 B.C. Greece*



Greek art is divided into periods such as Archaic, Classic, Hellenistic in itself and each period reflects its own artistic properties. In some sources, it is stated that craftsmen are called vase artists because of their quality and aesthetical depictions on ceramics vases. “Apart from a few bowl artists working in Archaic style, we are looking for free, original and elegant dance and drink festivals which were short term popular at the beginning of the century. Although the subjects on these bowls are ordinary, they save the artists from the iconographic tradition of well known mythological scenes, and let them imagine about the attitudes and situations of daily life, even if they are for the elitist decorations” (Boardman, 1996).

Because of the position of woman in the society and her aesthetical body, she has been depicted on the works produced for visual purposes, not as common as male scenes (wars, heroism, and athletics) though. “The male nudity in art symbolizes youth and vigor rather than heroism. On the other hand, female nudity evokes either religious or erotic associations; the woman is

not depicted nude in front of the society. What makes nude goddesses so impressive is that situation” (Boardman, 1996).

An analysis about “Iconology, which is frequently used today: icon [eikono, or icon in Greek, icono : image] + logy (knowledge, science): the analysis, history and dissection of symbolic art (symbolic art as in the medieval church) or symbolism special to art: icons or iconography (eikonographie in Greek: icon + graphein [draw, write]: to depict a subjects with paintings or any other visual means, painting or visual objects that depict a scene)” (Arslan, 2005).

The word ‘icon’ was used as the representative of religious depiction at the beginning period of Christianity, it was also used to express fresco which was produced on wet plaster, mosaic painting, pictures on the books, holy and easily portable paintings produced on wood or different kinds of materials. According to Bedrettin Cömert, icon is artistic studies which convey the facts to be depicted in a natural way (Cömert, 2008).

Figure 11. *Holy Virgin Mary 13th C*



Figure 12. *The Birth of Venus, 1486, S.Botticelli*



“Icons, whose first examples were not believed to be man – made, are the reflections of exalter, blessing, purifying and enlightening divine life through religious depictions. They are also reflections of the love, life, the divine light in us, the wholeness of human and God, and the symbols of hope. Icons try to show the mystical side of belief, they are in a harmony with the eschatological

reality in the holiness and victory of God and they reflect ultimate meaning and reality” (Atar, 1996).

The word icon, which has reflected the figures and depictions it expresses, has included various differences in its context since the time when it first started to be used, has started to be related with many other imageries and symbols.

Early period Christian artist that is to say icon artist introduces the concepts of proof tradition and history. This helped the balance of human’s ideas, future and way of faith. Christian artist used paintings, emotions belonging to humans except from the history, signs that contain memories, symbols and mystical colors (Atar, 1996).

As Dücan Cündioğlu stated in his lecture notes in Philosophy and Art Lessons; ‘Materials of iconographic analysis are images, stories and allegories; the materials of iconographic interpretation are symbols’. From this perspective on, one should have enough background information to describe, analyze and interpret the depictions on a work of art (Cündioğlu, 2010).

To understand and interpret the icons on the ceramics surfaces correctly, it is necessary to analyze beyond the form by entering into the spirit from the whole to the part in a systematic way. It is necessary to analyze the light, color, volume of images or symbols correctly by trying to reach the factual and expressional meaning of form or shape in pre-iconographic analysis.

Figure 13. *Large Vase with Veiled Women, 1950, Pablo Picasso*



Figure 14. *Vase, 1941-1944, Joan Miro*



Along with the technological developments and important processes like industrial revolution in 20th century, the number of artists, who reflect their ideas by using figurative expressions on ceramics surface, has increased. Artists such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Andre Derain, Kees van Dongen, Georges Rouault, Joan Miro, who were the pioneers of modern art of painting, produces stylized woman figures by using ceramics surface and they drew attention to the art of ceramics which was developing at that time.

Figure 15. *Luna Lake, 1987, Rudy Autio*



Figure 16. *Contemplation of Chaos, 2011, Julia Feld*



Hundreds of artists such as Rudy Autio, Kurt Weiser, Julia Feld, Aiko Takamori, Viola Frey, Elya Yalonetski, Tonja Sell, Annie Peaker, Elizabeth Price, Michael Kay, Sarah Saunders, Woodrow Nash, Rene Murray, Christy

Keeney choose ceramics to reflect their desires, aesthetic concerns, their inner worlds and produced so successful works of art. Some of these artists produced realist or stylized woman icons on the surfaces of forms such as classical vases, plates or bowls; some of them tried to reach the aesthetical body of woman through clay and they completed these bodies with vivid colors.

Figure 17. *Women Keys, 2011, Hasan İN*



From the point where woman figures unite with works from traditional production or contemporary production in the art of ceramics; iconographic, stylized and symbolic woman figures were applied on ceramics surfaces. Oppression of women has tried to be depicted through forms which combine past and present images identified with the domesticity of women who are one of the most important indicators of the development of the society; by this way people try to draw attention to the oppression of women. Motion was added to classic forms and the power of expression was tried to be increased through ceramics forms produced. Keys that are designed by combining symbols identified with women or to express women make a reference to the doors of the future. Figures emerging as a result of dense color bursts on the plates reflect the depths of woman spirit.

Figure 18. *Don't Touch, Hasan İN, 2016.*



Woman figure which has been a source of inspiration for many artists, started to be used with religious themed depictions, it has reflected the scenes from daily social life, has been one of the most preferred icons of sociological and artistic expressions. Woman symbols which have produced on any ceramics sculptures or traditional potteries with different styles and techniques strengthen the contemporary aesthetical perception and present the social value

of woman which is not clear enough. Considering this idea, woman icons, which have been one of the main purposes and means of art for centuries, are interpreted and they are applied on ceramics surfaces with different production and decoration techniques. Through these stylized forms, socio-cultural interaction deficiencies of the society were referred and being objectified of body in consumption societies was criticized.

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