

The Ceramics within the Sacred-Profane Dual Space – Abstract

Key words: contemporary art ceramics, ceramic vase, The Ceramic School of Cluj, functionality, space of perception, noetic space, personal visual approach.

The PhD thesis consists of 4 chapters having thematic alignments and it is opened by the reason where I presented the premises and objectives generating the study.

I considered that the presence of ceramics as a medium for expression (artistic assertion) within the contemporary art is relatively little studied. I also wanted this work to be a sort of guide for the public in order to understand and perceive the contemporary art of ceramics as a genre of the visual art. For the ceramic art's practitioners, this study can open new horizons of the creative vision by reevaluating the national patrimony of ceramic vases found in the history and ethnographic museums.

The role this work assumes is to remind the contemporary ceramic artists the magical charge embracing these ceramic artifacts. What we want today is to put again into circulation that part of the ceramics invested with spirit in its formal language.

The thesis concentrates on a thematic succession willing to develop from a diachronic perspective the matter of the ceramic as art, starting with the prehistory as a proof of the magical functionality through shape and ornament and continuing with its historical evolution from the Middle Age till today. A special space within the process is given to the tipological approach, to the vase's aesthetics and semiotics and to the way the contemporary artistic ceramics was influenced by the 20th century avant-garde.

The work closes with a chapter that I considered important because it defines the shaping of my personal conception regarding art in general and artistic ceramics as my favourite subject. The chapter is devoted to the evolution of my personal artistic approach within the ceramic school of Cluj-Napoca. I will now present the content of each chapter.

The introduction settles the main coordinates of the study and brings the necessary definitions in order to understand the thesis' title – *The Ceramics within the Sacred-Profane Dual Space*. This has to be understood as a metaphorical enunciation giving the permission to have a large spectrum of observations concerning the field of ceramics. I considered that such a formulation of the title may induce an opening within the recognition of the ceramic art objects' spirituality. In fact, the occult presence of the sacred interferes with the material dimension in the nowadays ceramic object's "reading".

One of the important ideas of the thesis, enunciated in the 1st chapter, is that a work can be a very good ceramic work, but less convincing as a work of art if it lacks the foundation of the

intellectual import. Within this context, the two subchapters of the introduction, *The originating functions of the ceramic vase* and *The origin of the figurative visual art in ceramics – the statuette*, are an introductory passage in the diachronic development of the study, but also the approach of certain aspects connected with the fundamentals art ceramics was built on.

Because the formal elements coming from the sphere of the traditional are, more or less transparent, but constant in nowadays works of ceramics, I considered that a synthesis of the vast repertoire of the ceramic patrimony preserved in the archaeological and ethnographical museums, that gathering the data regarding the formal and ornament typologies may justify and sustain our idea that this patrimony represents an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Also, this investigation wants to justify my own artistic approach explicitly tributary to this patrimony. Within this context the 2nd chapter appear – *A Short History of the Romanian Ceramics from Prehistory to the Middle Age* – having three subchapters: *The Prehistorical Ceramics – a Proof of the Magical Functionality through Shape and Ornament* (II.1.), *The Ceramics in Antiquity – a Typological Approach of the Ceramic Vase’s Evolution in Transylvania* (II.2.), *The Middle Age – an Investigation of the Diverse Typologies of Shapes and Ornaments in Transylvania* (II.3.). Each subchapter undertake the study of the ceramics’ evolution, of the ceramic vases in fact, from the perspective of a typological, aesthetic and semiotic approach. The study area, the selection and treatment of the material regards Transylvania, exception being the 1st subchapter which presents the characteristics of ceramics belonging to different cultures manifesting themselves over the times, since the beginning of Neolithic till the age of bronze – the Petresti culture, Gumelnita, Salcuta, Cucuteni, Cernavoda I, II, III, Horodistea and Foltesti culture, the Cotofeni culture, the Vucedol culture, the culture of spherical amphoras, the Glina Schneckenberg culture, the Tei, Monteoru and Costisa cultures, the Sighisoara-Wietenberg culture, Otomani, Cultura Suciului de Sus, the Periam-Pecica culture, Vatina, Gârla Mare-Cârna, Verbicioara, Zimnicea, the Noua culture, Coslogeni.

The use of ceramics as a mean of artistic expression develops along with the proof of the art of living of the civilizations giving more and more elaborate shapes and ornaments. The ancient ceramics represent a permanent source of inspiration for the contemporary art of ceramics. Traditional works have profound roots, therefore they can be regenerated anytime.

The 2nd subchapter realizes a detailed study of the diverse forms and types of vases and their ornaments. In the evolution of the Dacian ceramics I have noticed several phases. In the 1st phase (the Hallstadian ceramics, VI-V BC.), when the evolution of the forms towards the classical one is just beginning and can be traced till the bronze age. The foreign influences did not appear yet in the ceramic forms and these forms will soon be the basis for the different foreign influences. In the old phase (V-IV BC) although the vases still keep some Hallstadian aspects, the specific of the

Dacian ceramics can already be seen, grouped in two categories: the fine ceramics and the usual one, both handmade the traditional way. During the next phase (III-II BC), the technique of the wheel will be used more often conducting to a bigger production. The new technique will be used to make the own forms, but also foreign ones (Greque, Celtic, Tracian, Roman, etc.). Between 100 BC and 106 AC we can notice a more mature periode when ceramics is spread all over the Dacian world. A series of forms are now set forever – mug with handle, one leged fruit vase, conical candle holder, the jar shaped vase, the provision vases, the bowls and pots, etc. This is the time when a luxury ceramics is made painted with vegetal and animal motifs or with geometrical ones (different from the Celtic one made in the same periode), inspired by the Greque world. We can add to this the ceramics having relief models after the model of the Delian cups.

Along with the ceramics made by the help of the wheel, the one handmade will continue to exist. There is a geometry specific to the Dacian ceramics resulted from keeping the proportions of the different tectonic elements of the vases. Both the handmade and the shaped by the wheel Dacian ceramics will continue to exist even after the integration of a part of Dacia in the Roman Empire, suffering now from a serious Roman influence. The same influences will actively manifest themselves within the free territories as well and will still be alive for centuries after the Roman authorities redrawn from the South of the Danube¹.

The 3rd subchapter (II.3.) conducts the reader to the periode of the Middle Age from the same perspective of the inventory subordinated to the approach willing to demonstrate that the tradition of the ceramics is constantly brought by the contemporary artists into the artistic ceramics. They participate more or less to some sort of ritual where the tradition (the old) provides elements that the nowadays artistic ceramics know how to adapt them to its own needs. We can say that a transfer of technological data is made, but also the transmission of the “making” gesture and of the symbols.

The 3rd chapter – *Paradigms of the Contemporary Ceramics* – tries to underline the “road” that ceramics made from a status entirely dedicated to the functional, towards a completely other world, by the conversion of the ceramic objects into art objects.

Therefore I have concentrated my attention on the possibility to extract ceramics from the magical sphere of the arts’ symbolism, detaching from the generic term of ceramics that part which refers to the art ceramic. By doing this I wanted to bring to the surface the details defining it as a medium of the visual arts.

Generally, ceramics is understood by its explicit and tangible characteristics, meaning by the use of identifiable materials, well organized and treated in a certain way which is compatible with

¹ The chronological and cultural interpretations were orientative because the attention was captured by those elements which, from my point of view, can influence contemporary artistic associations.

the tradition. But the contemporary exercise proposes a dialogue between the knowledge of the ceramics field and the interdisciplinarity meant to broaden the possibilities of expression. The complex nature of the practical experience, the way the ceramic artists approach this practice reveals basic concepts which could not be and are not abandoned. The 3rd chapter shows some elements which I considered being definitory for the evolution of the ceramics till today, producing changes in the field of ceramics, both from the practitioners point of view and of the viewer's point of view².

Diverse aspects of the Romanian ceramics are captured in this chapter, especially the manifestations of the Transylvanian ceramic artists, without detaching it from the international context, because the idea is not to present a national specific, but to show that the Romanian ceramists production is perfectly integrated into the patrimony of the international arts of fire.

By the subchapter *The Vas as a Conceptual Vehicle* I intended to draw the attention towards the never ending aesthetic value and semantic of the ceramic vase. This is traditionally known as having practical functions, therefore our mentality finds it difficult to apart from the associations connected with the functional-ornamental aspect. This is why I underlined the existence of numerous manifestations in the field of art ceramics giving to the public eye the ceramic vase freed from his initial functions and having a new perspective of expression. It is also here that I wanted to underline de capacity of ceramics to re-evaluate forms which have already been renowned and its capacity to transform into objects forms which seem to be obsolete. I made an incursion into the field on an international level to underline the Transylvanian artists ceramics' synchronism with the development of the international artistic events. I presented a series of international names of te field, then I approached the area this thesis is concerned about – the ceramics in Transylvania and in Cluj-Napoca, especially. I presented the work of some contemporary ceramists such as - Pippin Drysdale Maria ten Kortenaar, Nicole Cherubini, Noémi Jakab, Lucia Lobont, Doina Stici, Cristina Quai, Ted Adler and Joe Davis.

The next subchapter – *The Art Ceramics as Aesthetic and Semiotic Process* – sustains the idea according to which the understanding of the art ceramics cannot be complete unless analyzed also from the point of view of the significance. Beyond amusement, art is also significance and, implicitly, communication.

A series of processes such as the expression's manipulation, the re-setting of the content, the change of the code and a new type of consciousness lead towards the contemporary vision of the ceramic art object.

²Source: <http://www.dacii.ro/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=380>

In order to underline the evolution of the phenomenon changing the sphere of ceramics from its interior and also the way it is perceived by the public, I presented some international moments by pointing out artists which I considered representative to illustrate the phenomenon through which a different approach of ceramics appeared, an approach that managed to open the vision and the conception about the ceramic object - Jim Leedy, Peter Voukos, Jim Melchert. Also in the direction of the changing inside the field of ceramics and most of all of the contemporary ceramic art's evolution I showed some phenomenon regarding the independent ceramic artists' relation with the industry. I presented a phenomenon from England which can be understood as an extension of a general phenomenon. Talking about the group called Troika, I pointed out some topics regarding the ceramics' interdisciplinarity, its liberation from the pressure of the functional, the change of the vision within the field. This subchapter concentrated on the facts demonstrating that sphere of ceramics implies also technology, aesthetic and meaning and communication and the process of ceramics' significance implies shape and colour. The chromatic intervention on the form opens even more the possibility of the ceramic objects' significance. Therefore we can say that ceramics has, since Neolithic, a special relation with painting. I mentioned here such a relation in the case of a renowned painter which transferred specific elements of his works to ceramic objects. I talked about Picasso's ceramic objects because I felt they were the right thing to talk about and as an argument to underline both the opening and the magnetism of the field of ceramics, and also the benefit of such an intersection between medias. The ceramic objects made by Picasso are valuable most of all because their significance within the period they were created. They stood beyond the time's tradition and opened new perspectives to appreciate the ceramic object.

I also intended to underline that there is a diversity of directions and stylistic visions, specific to the ceramic expression, covering the tendencies and the evolution of the modern art's ceramics and I also wanted to show that the contemporary art ceramics' exercise was influenced by the historic avant-garde of the 20th century. The subchapter – *The Influence of the Artistic Avant-Garde Doctrines on the Art of Ceramics* is situated within this pleading for the understanding of the contemporary art ceramics.

Trying to talk about the nowadays art ceramics we face terms which marked art in general. Because of this modern art, modernity, avant-garde, postmodernism, minimalism, neo-pop art, abstract expressionism are collocations which we used in our approach. The field of ceramics has an opening towards different currents and the works of Li Xiaofeng and Brendan Lee Satish Tang explicitly illustrate the chapter discovering the ceramics' capacity to coherently express itself through different doctrines and ideologies of the art. The constitutive elements of the works are pieces of traditional ceramics belonging to renowned dynasties which the artists reconstitute. This is

why the two artists belong to the theme of re-evaluating the archaic patrimony which the thesis sustain. The interdisciplinarity of the field, as well as the artists' connection with the tradition generated by the postmodernism, makes possible the simultaneous existence within the contemporary artistic ceramics of elements belonging to the archaic arts and also elements of the most developed conquests of the contemporary art.

The last chapter of the thesis – *The Evolution of the Personal Artistic Approach within the Formative Context of the Ceramic School of Cluj* – illustrates the shaping of the own artistic personality and the shaping of the own vision over art and especially over the ceramic art. Within this chapter there are presented from the perspective of the own creation the stages of formation of the ceramic school of Cluj-Napoca and there are also detected the specific elements of the promotion I was part of (1996-2001) in order to outline the specific of a generation with echo in the field of art on a long-term. The subchapter - Diplomas of the 1996-2001 promotion presents the works of the colleagues I grew up with as an artist. The diploma works are a sort of messengers of those participating in their creation and more they can be the image of the institution where they have been created. The diploma works are also “recommandation letters” to the big, international ceramic events.

In order to better underline my artistic evolution I closed the thesis with the subchapter –*The MA Program 2001-2003, Diploma* – where I present my personal research project which at that time I considered extremely important, my artistic personality being, if not totally shaped, but at least very well outlined. „The Adventure of the Dream Catcher” is a work done as the result of a research connected, on one hand, with complexity of the perception mechanism and, on the other hand, with the probation of the latent side, behind the 1st perceptive impact. The attempt to specialize the mechanism of perception to the critical reception of the formal stimulus was also a challenge, a sort of visual training which the author undertook. The associative relations of the research lead towards the configuration of ceramic objects (chamotte or clay) symbolically bearing the name of the book.

This subchapter closes the 4 chapter structure of the thesis framed by the Argument and the Conclusions.

It is necessary to add that the thesis is sustained by images which are the result of the documentation within the field and bring a series of relevant information in addition to the one presented in the chapters. The reproductions after the author's works are also present both in the chapter dedicated to the personal artistic approach and in other chapters.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: QUAI married METEA

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Studies:

- 2004-present – PhD student, The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca
- 2001-2003 – MA, The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca
- 1996-2001 – BA, ceramic-glass-metal department, The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca
- 1992- 1996 – Music and visual arts high-school, Oradea

Professional background:

- 10.2008-present – The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca, the department of art education, associated professor
- 2005 – member of the Romanian Union of Visual Artists (UAP), Cluj-Napoca branch
- 01.2004-06.2004 – decorative arts and crafts – marketing, design and advertisement counselor
- 1997-2003 – ECOTOP Oradea – ceramics, painting, drawing, creativity workshops' coordinator
- 1992-2002 – Don Orione Congregation Oradea - children and youth camps and activities' organizer/coordinator/ animator

Experience accumulated within national/international programs:

- 2003 – scholarship - cultural management / media- Fachhochschule Schwäbisch Hall, Germany
- 2003 – scholarship owner of the Hungarian National Culture Organization, Kecskemét, Hungary
- 2000 – The International Summer School “Castelul Corvineștilor”, Petroșani, Romania
- 1997 – The international camp of Pacsa, Hungary

Languages:

- English, French, Hungarian, Italian, German

Published work:

- 2011 – „Arbori venerabili”– symposium USAMV Cluj-Napoca
- 2010-2011 – Visual education project – In the Museum and through the Museum – The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca, the department of art education in collaboration with the Art Museum Cluj-Napoca.
- 2009-2010 – Museum education, the exhibition „Lumina pentru toți” made with blind people

- 2002 – "Együttműködés" symposium, Kecsemét, Hungary
- 2002 – The national ceramics symposium, Baia Mare, Romania
- 2000 – Cultural exchange - Nantes (France) - Cluj - Workshop – member of the Cluj-Napoca "Ioan Andreescu" Visual Arts Academy's delegation
- 1999 – The Meeting of the Young European – "Folk Rhythm and Dance" – Workshop, Luxembourg
- 1999 – "Rendez vous '99" – Cultural exchange - Nantes (France) – Cluj-Napoca, workshop

Exhibition:

- 2001 – solo exhibition, "Tibor Ernő" Gallery, Oradea, Romania
- 2007, 2010 – The UAP Cluj annual visual and decorative arts district salon
- 2008 – UAP decorative arts moving exhibition
- 2006 – The UAP Cluj graphic and decorative arts salon
 - "Fiecare copil si mama contează", group exhibition, UAP Gallery, Oradea, Romania
- 2004 – "Țărâna creponată", group exhibition, Posticum Association, Movimentum Iuventutis Christianae, Oradea, Romania
- 2003 – 2003 Arts' Annual Exhibition, Baia Mare, Romania
- 2003 – group exhibition, The Museum of the International Ceramics Workshop, Kecskemét, Ungaria
- 2002 – 2002 Arts' Annual Exhibition, The exhibition complex "The Painters' Colony, "Baia Mare, Romania
- 2002 – "Dialog între Generații", group exhibition, International Ceramics Workshop, Kecsemét, Hungary
- 2001 – 2001 National Arts Salon, Romexpo, Bucharest, Romania
- 2001 – The graduate's exhibition, UAP Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- 2001 – The diploma works' exhibition, Casa Matei, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- 1999, 2000 – The exhibition of the participants to "Castelul Corvinestilor" international summer school, Petrosani, Romania
- 1996 – Exhibition, Țării Crisurilor Museum, Oradea, Romania
- 1995 – "Salvați Nufărul" contest, Țării Crisurilor Museum, Oradea, Romania
- 1994 – Honorable mention, The National Ceramics Olympics, Cluj- Napoca, Romania
- 1994 – Group exhibition, Spitalul de copii, Oradea, Romania
- 1993 – Group exhibition, The National Theatre, Oradea, Romania