Transfer as an Alternative to Direct Drawing in Yoruba Hand Built Pottery

Abiodun Segun Oladapo, Akinde Toyin Emmanuel

Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria

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Abstract

Drawing is a by-product of man's innate curiosity; its evidence is often traced back to the period early Palaeolithic man exhibits their intuitive skills in sketching both domestic and wild creatures on some reserved cave walls. Their effort were further promoted and integrated as direct drawings in later designs of visual arts; a practice that is evident in all its sub-divisions, ceramic arts/wares in particular. In the same vein traditional Yoruba potters of Nigeria also employ direct drawing although through incision and coil method to ornament their hand built wares; a process that has been observed to undermine perfection, uniformity and regularity in design. The need to re-engineer the process among others is generating momentum particularly now. In view of the latter, this paper examine the attendant challenges posed by the aforementioned through field participation and bibliographically with a view of suggesting transfer method as an alternative in improving its viability in contemporary mass production.

Introduction

Mans' emancipation and quest for knowledge is hitherto providential (unconsciously) or necessity (consciously) driven. In the case of pottery; its advent was acclaimed providential; an incident that reveal a transformation of wet clay into an article of permanent use. Its end products, pottery is mainly obtained through high temperature, changing its physical and chemical properties of a clay body into a new hard and durable state. Apparently, the latter process is today broadly acclaimed firing (Peterson, 1992: 205); nonetheless, its product pottery, has contributed to the development of man not only in the Yoruba milieu but in the world at large. However, its practices varied across the globe; presumably as a result of the varying differential climatic condition of the universe with apparent testimonies in cultural, technological and civic dynamics. However, Yoruba pottery products are prominently evident as domestic, ceremonial or religious utilism with divergent shapes and sizes even in recent time (Igwilo, 1983: 35).

In Nigeria and particularly among the Yoruba, as it is common in Africa; pottery is widely practiced among the women, as a lucrative and viable vocation. Ukaegbe (1963: 42-45) further concur, that the women in the Eastern part of Nigeria also predominate the practise like their southern counterparts and had sole proregative to the vocation. His argument however, does not have substantive coverage over the entire nation; as it has been observed, by Adepegba (1995: 65) that pottery vocation is predominantly practised among the men of some Northern Nigeria states; a scenario, he affirmed was a product of their religious indoctrination.

In Yoruba land of Southwestern Nigeria, pottery has being one of the major vocations of the ancient that survived till date; recent archaeological finds has attest pottery practises at Iwo-Eleru dating back to as early as 8000B.C (Drewal and Schildkrout, 2006: 79). Traditionally, pottery is mainly practiced by Yoruba women; their men assist in the mininig of the mineral also reffered to as digging of the clay and gathering of woods for fuel needed during firing (Ibigbami, 1981: 12-19). Yoruba pottery practice is traditionally family or lineage incline; this is a scenario where all information concerning the nitty-gritty of the vocation is consealed or sacredly kept and passed on only to members of the lineage from generation to generations and not by apprenticeship; a system of practise that encouraged training an external body, that is non member of the lineage particularly those from different background to learn vocation outside their family lineage and are required to master materials, tools, techniques, decoration and finesse. Apprenticeship however, is a recent development in Yoruba milieu as it is evident in modern pottery centres. Today, many traditional and modern pottery centres are scattered across Yoruba cities, towns and villages. They include Ibadan, Ilorin, Ipetumodu, Ile Ife, Oyo, Ogbomoso, Abeokuta, Igbara Odo, Erusu Akoko, Isua, Egbado, Ijero Ekiti, Okeho, Saki, Iseyin, Awe, Fiditi, Ilora to mention few (Kalilu, Akintonde and Ayodele 2006; Fajuyigbe and Umoru, 2005).

The major mineral material for pottery/ceramics production is no doubt known to the local potters, particularly has its abundance as a mineral cannot be ignored, mainly for its availability which is as a result of the several million years of breakdown in igneous rock through the process of weathering; its end product is known as clay *(amo)*. Clay, which is a chemical combination of alumina, silica and water, is equally formulated as Al_2O_3-$2SO_3$-$2H_2O$ (Rhodes 1998: 6-7); though, varies in type, colour and plasticity, this largely depend on its formation and location (Peterson 1998: 14).

Clay however, is basically classified into primary and secondary type. Primary or residual clay is found at its point of formation otherwise known as mother rock; kaolin is the most prominent in this category, with little or no impurities. While, secondary clay is referred to as a result of its movement from the mother rock; this encourage impurities and inevitably made plasticity in such class imminent as exemplified in Ball clay (Rothenberg, 1972: 264).

Of the two classes of clays discussed above; the secondary clay type happens to be the most prevalently used by the Yoruba potters. This however, may not necessarily be as a result of it readily availability but for the supposed indigenous ignorance of the scientific exploration and exploitation of the primary clay type. And as such, her indigenous potters had to do with the readily available secondary clay; often cultured around the streams, river banks and valley. They also make use of clay dug from wells and during construction. Today, with the urbanization of more rural localities particularly in the area of road construction which often revealed new clay sites; such sites also availed the local potters arrayed opportunities from which they prospect from. Also worthy of note, is the fact that, many of this available clays are often in their raw state either as wet or dry and subsequently kneaded so as to expel air bubbles in the clay mass and make the mass homogeneous. The theory of clay body is not totally alien to the Yoruba people although, not in the Western sense of the word; Yoruba potters usually combine two or more secondary clay types particularly in terms of colour and plasticity before use.

It is no longer news, that hand built technique is the sole method of producing indigenous wares in Yoruba land; its end product is often achieved through mould, coil and pinch or the combination of the three. The implication of the latter is that throwing technique which is on potter's wheel as an alternative practise is foreign to the people. To make a successful hand built pottery however, three major steps or stages must be considerably explored; they are widely and generally considered as base forming, body building and rim forming (Fatunsin, 1992:23-33).

Base forming is the first and foremost; according to the Yoruba, its equivalence is *tite* which literarily means to spread; a process that is similar to the Western press cast. To achieve this locally, potters often start the process by sparingly sprinkling wood ash on the bottom of an already fired pot which doubles as a mould *(osunwon)* and subsequently laid lump of clay on it until a desirable size and thickness is achieved. The essence of the sprinkled wood ash is to prevent clay from sticking to mould. After gotten a desirable cast base; a damp corn cub is rolled over the cast base in order to create an aesthetic design, allowing for good frictional grip and further create a harmonious and compact union in the cast. The cast base will then be left on the mould for some minutes in order for it to become leather hard (plate 1).

Mimo is the second stage which literarily means to building the body wall; it is the continuation of the base forming. To move on in this stage, the cast base will be turned upright or inversely and placed on a shallow calabash or pot at a convenient height for the potter (Price, 1976: 55-59). The potter damped the rim of the leather hard base and then trimmed it with a snail shell or knife in order to allow the next stage to have a good grip. The potter builds the wall of the pot by rolling several lumps of clay into coils between her palms and then adding them one after the other to the base. These coils will be blend together and pinched by both hands to maintain

even thickness of the wall as the potter moving round the pot until the desired height is achieved (plate 2). The body will then be scrapped and smoothened with snail shell or plastic scrapper other wise termed kidney.

Rim forming (*igbati*) which is the third and the stage is the next after the forming the wall body of the pot has been completed. Rim because of its placement at the edge of the pot is often treated carefully by potters so as to achieve a desired beauty for the pot. Traditional potters often make the neck of the pot by joining big coils of clay at the apex of the pot depending on the circumference and the height of the rim. The coils will then be smoothened and polished with damped rag or boiled leaf as the potter move round the pot. At this stage, the inner part of the pot is scrapped and polished with smooth plastic and stone before proceeding to decorate the pot (plate 3).

Plate 1
A potter forming the base of a pot on already fired pot *(osunwon)* in Ilorin, Nigeria
Photograph: Abiodun, SO, 2005

Plate 2
Woman potter blending the attached coils on the base cast to form the body in Ilorin.
Photograph: Abiodun, SO, 2005

Plate 3
A potter shaping the rim *(igbati)* of a pot
Photograph: Abiodun, SO, 2005

The Yoruba like her other counterparts around the globe; often base her pottery decoration on its functionality which may be utilitarian, domestic, ceremonial or religious. Pots or pottery decorations are traditionally done through direct drawing either in low or high reliefs with samples in impressed drawing (roulette), incised drawing (engraving), coiled drawing, sculptural drawing (moulding), polished drawing (burnish) and pigmental drawing (painting). The latter however, are usually done on wet or leather hard ware with the aim of ornamenting, embellishing and adding aesthetic value to wares; see plates 4 to 8 for details.

Impressed drawing (roulette pattern) is usually done by rolling maize cob, wool cord as well as carved wood round the pot to impressed decorative motif on wet pot. It is used on the base of the pot and sometimes on the body of the ware particularly among Ilorin, Saki, Ogbomoso and Okeho potters (plate 4).

Incised drawing (engraved pattern) is another decorative technique that is commonly achieved by using wooden stick, broomstick and any other sharp object to incise, engrave and texture the surface of the wares. The potters usually adapt this approach to draw lines and geometric shapes as well as write names directly on the pots (plate 5). These incised or engraved patterns of decoration usually lack regularity and

uniformity when they are repeated on many pots mainly as a result of the medium which is coupled with the potters' unplanned design.

Relief drawing is traditionally achieved by using coil or pinching patterns directly on pottery as well as the combination of the two. This kind of decoration usually creates raised embossed patterns on the ware. The coil is often used to design creative geometric lines and shapes while pinching is used to sculpt or make figural, aquatic or zoomorphic motif on the wares. This type of decoration is seldomly used to design wares because it takes a lot of time to produce and also requires expertise skills (plate 6)

Polished drawing (burnish) is usually done by using smooth pebble of stone or string of baobab seed *(arin)* to draw lines and geometric shapes on a pot or vessel that is about to dry. The burnished designs will appear faintly before firing while its full effects come out vividly, only when the burnished wares are fired to maturity after which it is buried in heap of wet leaves or sawdust, creating a black shining effect on the pots. The pot will then be dipped into concoction made from boiled locust bean pods which seals carbon into the pores of the pot surface. The burnished surface however, shine brighter than the other part of the pot (plate 7).

Pigmental drawing other wise called painting is often done on pots and other fired vessels using reddish brown dye obtained from haemilite stone by grinding it on a rocky surface, producing powdery substance which when mixed with water, forms slip, locally termed *iroo* (Fatunsin 1992: 33). The slip is then made ready for use; wet grasses or rag are often used to apply this slip on the base and some other parts of the pot as lines and geometric patterns; these patterns also serve as individual sign of identification in a communal pottery exercise (plate 8).

Plate 4
Impressed design done on a pot with corn cob and carved stick
(Courtesy: Price, 1976: 57)

Plate 5
Incised drawing of lines and geometric pattern on wet water pot *(amu)* in Ilorin

Plate 6
Relief drawing of text on Osun ritual pot (*otu olomu meji*) from Ifo, Ogun State

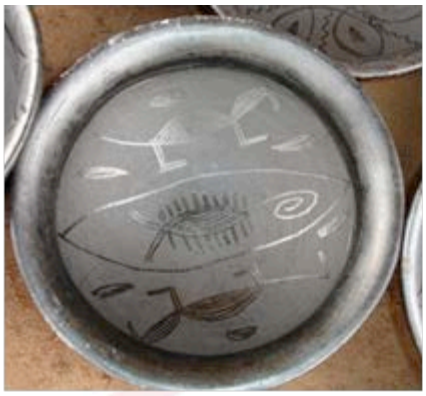

Plate 7
Polished drawing of lizards and a scorpion on a basted (black) pot
Photograph: Akinde, TE, 2011

Plate 8
Pigmental drawing of lines and geometric shapes on water pots *(amu)*
Photograph: Abiodun, SO, 2005

Although, the Yoruba are known for creative pottery with diverse mastery (Price 1976: 54-63); further advancement became apparent during her contact with Western expert-rates and educationists with centers in Ilorin, Abuja, Ibadan and later Ife. The Ife experiment popularly known as Ori- Olokun further metamorphosised to an Art school (Ademuleya and Folaranmi, 2006: 21), with Ibigbami at the frontier of the school pottery exploration. In Agberia's (1998: 66) view, contemporary Yoruba pottery was as a result of Roberts, Murray and Cardew's initiatives. He however, noted that Cardew in the 1950s introduced throwing wheel, kilns and glazes as against hand built and open firing techniques to the local potters. Cardew's effort was not only evident in the successful establishment of the Abuja Pottery Centre; he was also material to the introduction of pottery into Visual art education in Nigerian school curriculum. His concerted efforts further, brought about growth in Nigerian and Yoruba traditional pottery in particular (Chukueggu, 1998: 188-193).

Ibigbami however, was at the pinnacle of advancing traditional Yoruba pottery, his efforts resonate around many Nigerian art schools particularly those in the Southwest. In the early 1980s, Ibigbami began the injection and incoperation of the formal and traditional pottery appoaches in his teachings at the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University (O.A.U). According to LaDuke's (1991: 17-20) account, Ibigbami was able to achieve the latter, courtesy of his persistent and unrelented effort in organising brainstorming forums, symposiums, seminars and workshops for both informal and formal potters. His findings however, brought about the emergence of highly decorated assemblage pillar pots otherwise called "Ife wares" which are either whole or assembled (Fajuyigbe and Umoru 2005:27-32). Among the schools where Ibigbami's experiment is still sustained were institutions where his products have taught and are still teaching; they include Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Ogbomoso, University of Lagos (UNILAG), Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED) Oyo formerly Saint Andrews College and Osun State College of Education (OSCOED) Ila Orangun.

The highly decorated pottery of Ife as mentioned earlier is often done through direct drawing and so are many of the pottery centres across Yorubaland. Although, the latter approach has aesthetic merits; it lacks precission and perfection. These limitations were some of the problems Ibigbami's experiment proferred solution to,

introducing tracing and sculptural drawing as evident in some of his prodigies' works (plates 9, 10 and 11). His conserted effort then became the most prevalently adopted approach among formal trained potters with infinitesimal adaptation among Yoruba traditional potters.

Plate 9
Akintonde Moses A,
A o merin joba,
Terracotta, 1983
Photograph: Akintonde, MO, 1984

Plate 10
Akinde Toyin E.,
Ori inu, ori ode,
Terracotta, 217cm ht., 2007
Photograph: Akinde TE, 2010

Plate 11
Abiodun Segun O.,
A o merin joba,
Terracotta, 228cm ht.,2009
Photograph: Abiodun, SO, 2012

Traced drawing also known as tracing is a process of transferring images from paper to the pottery surface, solving the problems of irregularity and inconsistency in decorative wares. Traced drawing is done by merging carbonnated sheet with a diagrammatic paper before tracing. To trace, masking tape is usually used to hold the carbonnated diagram sheet on the surface area of the bisque ware; taping and carbonnation however, may not be necessary in the case of leather hard surface because the paper often sticked to the receipient surface, allowing for easy and fainty rendation using any blur but pointed object like pencil after which the traced paper is removed.

Sculptural drawing, other wise called mould casting is useful in transferring relief motifs in the round (three dimensional form). Patterns, texts or images, drawn or moulded with clay; its end product is casted with Plaster of Paris or cement to produce a mould. Sculptural drawing or cast is often done by using slip or lump press to reproduced moulded image which can be transferred on many pottery surfaces as possible.

Consequent upon the former argument and its attendant challenges; it became apparent that injecting a more proactive and advanced approach which is not only nascent but state of the art is the only way forward in advancing pottery practises in the Southwest particularly in contemporary time. And as such, transfer technology whose primary jurisdiction is in graphic design and not technological transfer, comes handy as a good hypothetical alternative; serving a supposed replacement for direct drawing in traditional pottery, therefore encouraging accurate photographic imagery, pattern and text on two or three-dimensional ceramic surface.

Nonetheless, printing readily comes to mind, its integration into ceramic product has been on for some time now; it emergency was primal in England in the mid-eighteen century in response to consumers demands for less expensive pottery produce that will compete favourably with the then painted wares in terms of finesse. This approach started as a 'low tech' as observed in the then monochrome blue; a good example is the antique Chinese blue wares which were the
favourites of its era. The humble begining of the latter approach was through etching and engraving patterns or designs on copper sheets; its surface will then be inked with glaze slip which will also be transfered to bisque for final fire of permanence. This technology today has being advanced to further accommodate sophisticated varities as will be discussed in stamping, stencil, ink and decal transfer below (Wikipedia 2012a and Wiggins 2012).

Stamping is a printmaking technique that is usually done on wooden, plate or lino by cutting or etching away unwanted area of the design. The latter however, defers from the Yoruba traditional stamping technique which impress natural objects such as barks and seeds of plants, finger nails, sea snails and cowry shells on pottery wares to create decorative motifs. Nonetheless, stamping process is similar to the primordal etching transfer; it can be explore on leather hard clay surface, bisque and glazed wares using low-glaze which vitrify at 700^{o}c-800^{o}c in the kiln with articles such as plates, cups, mugs among others.

Stencil is the art of printing text, pattern and image from any flexible surface. There are different ways of making stencil; but for this study simple stencil and silk screen are examined. Simple stencil can be made from a well taped paper or any flexible water resistant materials. Today stencil texts, patterns or images are often perfected on computer before they are printed out; their outlines were then cut out using razor blade or knife leaving only the negative area. The stencil is then placed on the ware. Transfer of colours of the design, is either done using foam on colour to dab or by spraying colour on the surface. Although, simple stencil is not suitable for mass duplication of design; it nonetheless, encourage multi colours which inturn requires multiple stencil and a good example is the bottle in (plate 12).

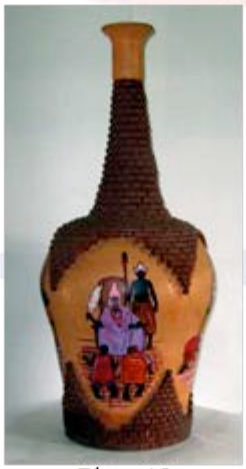

Plate 12
Akano Benjamin, *Royalty,*
Acrylic on terracotta, 2010
Photograph: Akinde TE, 2012

Screen printing is an advancement of the simple technique which encourages mass duplication on wares that can transfer mono or multi-colour finer and accurate registered image on the paper and ware than printmaking, direct drawing and painting. To explore the latter, a mesh is stretched over a frame, then coated with a light-sensitive emulsion in a cool dark area, there after it is allowed to dry before imposing on it the design with a stainless glass, it is then burn or exposed to a source containing ultraviolet light of between 350-420 nanometre spectrums or inside the sun for about 30-40 seconds or more depending on the intensity of the sun. The screen is then carefully and thoroughly washed; the areas of emulsion that were not exposed to light dissolve and wash away, leaving a negative stencil of the image on the mesh. (Wikipedia 2012b and Wikipedia 2013).

Decal transfer is an effective, accurate and provides ample creative opportunity for potters. Decal is a technology that has now become accepted as a viable replacement to screen printing. Decal is similar to stickers but it is made from either enamel or Laser ink that is printed on special decal paper which is later transfer to permanency on wares through firing or heating. Decal application is possible on irregular surfaces such as concave or convex pieces; solving the various difficulties associated with imaging, text, patterning and colour separation. However, water-slide and heat-release are the two categories of decal transfer (Caro and Strevey 2012) and they are discussed below.

Water-slide decal is best suited for small and medium runs, since the transfer is done manually. The ink used to make water-slide decal is called enamel which is made of coloured mineral pigments or precious metals. In transferring decal through water-slide, a piece of enamel print will be soaked for about 30-60 seconds in the water to allow the colour print to slide from the paper surface to the pottery wares. The print will be dragged from the decal paper then to the pottery surface. Apply and adjust the enamel colour print, remove any excess any water and air bubbles by rubbing the squeegee from the centre of the print to the outer corners. Then allow it to dry at room temperature for one day. The dried decorated pieces will be fired between 570°C - 1400°C depending on the body composition of the ware and the enamel in order to make the colour print vitrified and fused onto the piece permanently (Caro and Strevey 2012).

Heat release (transfer) is the latest decal transfer printing technology that encourages mass production of drawing and other design on the pottery wares. It is used in producing fine, accurate and highly detailed images. The drawings, texts, patterns and images are executed using computer multi-colour print from a high-resolution ceramic toner-printer with CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) colours onto heat transfer film. The printed design will be placed on the pottery ware and transferred with sophisticated equipment such as 4-in-1 heat press machine; this machine can also print on flat, cylinder and conical product such as cups, beer stain, ruler etcetera (plate 13). However, decal particularly heat release gives photographic quality with smooth and vibrant ceramic colours (plate 14).

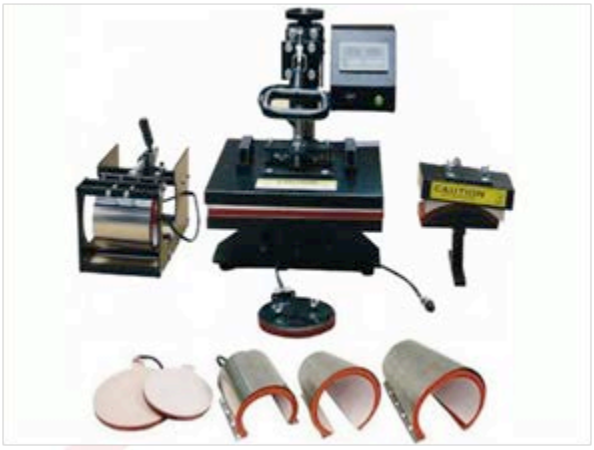

Plate 13
Multifunction Combo 4 in1
Heat Transfer Machine
Courtesy: dg-shenghua.en.made-in-china.com

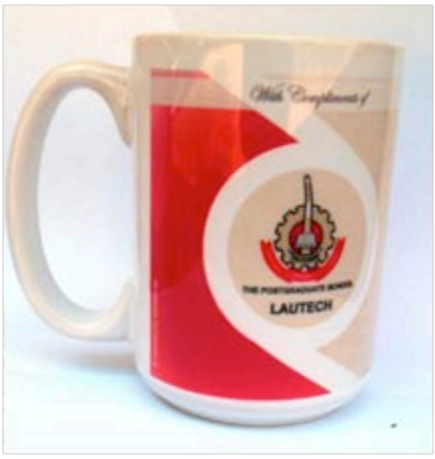

Plate 14
Heat-release drawing on a mug
Photograph: Akinde TE, 2012

Conclusion

The global stage is ever advancing and wait for no race to catch up to it and as such individual race is expected to tap into the network of acculturating modern civilization. In the case of pottery ornamentation or decoration of the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria; the contributions of foreign and indigenous innovators such as Cardew and Ibigbami were well commended. Consequent modern demands further make advocacy for adaptation of transfer techniques on Yoruba pottery decoration inevitable. According to this maxim;

A kii leni
Nii mosan
Kamu ai'pan

One cannot have somebody
In orange plantation
And still consume the unripe

The connotative implication of the above lines is that one cannot have contact with information and remain ignorant. It is in view of the latter that this research proposes the introduction of transfer particularly heat release as an alternative to direct drawing in Yoruba hand built pottery. In summary, this finding is just additional to the existing Yoruba pottery decoration canon; highlighting the need to upgrade direct drawing by integrating photo-emulsion technique using any of the decal principles in Yoruba hand built pottery. It is also hoped that this finding will go a long way in stimulating further researches in the area of traditional pottery and ceramics in general.

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