

**FEMININITY IN POTTERY; RESURRECTING THE FEMININE TOUCH TO  
THE PRACTICE**

By  
KNUST

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## CERTIFICATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the MFA and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains neither materials previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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## ABSTRACT

Ghanaian pottery practices and their modern reintroduction have been rendered masculine. Feminine participation in contemporary Ghanaian pottery/ceramic practices is virtually non-existent. Pottery, the older of the two has always through history and indigenous practices been feminine with women accounting for the entire corpus of practitioners. The study explores means and bases for feminine inclusion, especially in contemporary and academic pottery practices as means of normalising an anomaly engendered by maternity. The study believes women's participation have contributions to make to pottery practices, and hence advocate for the employment of feminine subjectivities and traditional spaces as well as indigenous pottery trade strategies and other feminine idiom within contemporary studio practices as means to rescue the stagnating practices and involve womanhood in the evolution of the art. It concludes that, pottery practices in their modernist sense had been trapped in sculpture representations and it is only through the use of feminine idioms and subjectivities that they ought to be freed to their full meanings as art.

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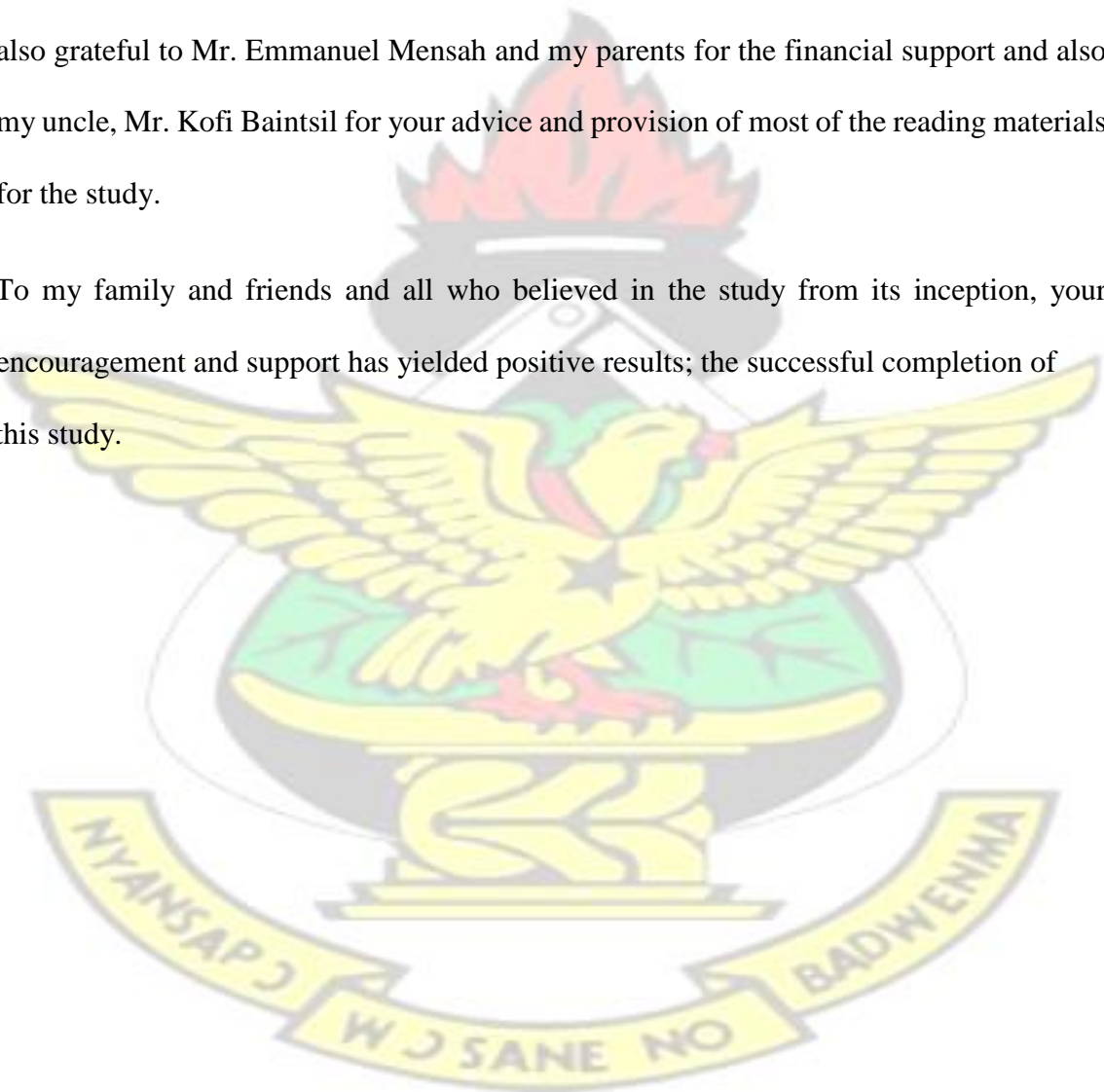
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## DEDICATION

*This project is dedicated to my son, Nathaniel, my mother, Ms Juliana Shebrah and the memory of my late father, Mr J. E. Abaka-Attah. J. E., you goaded me to attain higher academic laurels, though you did not live to witness the completion of this study, your words of encouragement kept me focused; fond memories of you will forever linger in my heart.*



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Pottery is one of the oldest activities of human-kind and the power of fire to transform soft, malleable clay into a robust and durable material was acknowledged about 25,000 years ago (Cooper, 2000). Speight and Toki (1999) have declared that Pottery is a term used to describe earthenware, and it also refers to any type of ceramic ware, as well as to the workshop where it is made. Prehistoric men and women made clay containers by pinching and coiling; and employed baskets as moulds to shape their wares (Chavarria, 1994). Pottery products are unique part of the visual culture of aboriginal people in most parts of the world. Chavarria (1994) further declares that, the craft pottery might have developed instinctively by different cultures when man started using fire in the prehistoric era and that, it is difficult to attribute the technique of modelling, drying and firing a piece of clay and transforming it into ceramics, to just one culture. However, Cooper (2000) has indicated that, the Jomon culture of Japan produced some of the oldest pottery for which there is archaeological and scientific evidence. Indigenous pottery is handmade by shaping plastic clay into objects and firing them to appreciable temperatures in the open fire or in pits to effect a permanent physical and chemical change (Baba, 2009) as cited in (Asante, Adjei and Opoku-Asare 2013).

In traditional Africa, pots are widely used for many purposes and different communities produce different types of pots for household and religious purposes (Asante, Adjei and Opoku-Asare 2013).



Loth (1987) is of the assessment that the ancient men hunted for animals and tilled the land to provide food security for their families whereas the women on the other hand managed the homes by doing all the household chores like cooking, washing, bearing and caring for the children; and this prompted them to make clay replications of the vessels which were used domestically. He has indicated that pottery was largely a female occupation while the men, if they practiced it at all, usually made tobaccopipes. Women possibly dominated the art due to the delicate nature of working with clay and also for the fact that most of the wares produced were mainly for domestic use. A lot of nurturance and endurance are required when making those clay vessels; attributes that are typically feminine. In Ghana, pottery is a major component of the indigenous craft industry and by personal observation, women dominated the craft. In spite of their dominance in the indigenous practice, women engaged in the country's fledging pottery industry in contemporary development scheme is not appreciable compared to men because the style and representation has changed from the normal domestic wares to more sophisticated sculptural pieces. It is fascinating how these indigenous potters conceptualised their shapes and forms to suit what the product was intended for. Most of the wares produced were for domestic use with a few, for religious and magical purposes, thus making them institutional. The spiritual or symbolic significance of the wares they produced is lost in the phase of modernity. The domesticity of indigenous pottery made it more feminine as Hopper (2000) has pointed out that, vessels are generally the universal feminine symbol; the womb of the Great Mother, shelter, protection, preservation, nourishment and fertility. He further stresses that, they represent inwardness and inner values; bowls represent giving or offering and fertility.

From the foregoing, it is evident that perhaps, indigenous pottery developed as a response to the needs of mankind at a particular time and era. Culture is dynamic and so are our basic needs over time, developmentally and technologically. Beyond our natural instincts of enjoying the manipulative quality of clay and the function of the formed object, contemporary pottery has been influenced and altered by many factors and forces, Hopper reiterates. The conception of this study was as a result of the varied indigenous customs and habits that have had influences on the development of form in functional pottery wares. There is therefore the need to incorporate indigenous pottery practice into the contemporary art without compromising on originality. The production of pottery products with an indigenous look and a feminine touch within a contemporary environment requires the search for an idiom that would be most appropriate for the concept. Born and bred along the coast, geographical location played a major role in identifying an appropriate idiom from nature that possesses feminine qualities for the study. One of nature's wonderful creations is the sea which is the home to various fishes and other marine life that have shells as a protective cover against predators. Therefore the artist explores seashells as a metaphor with feminine characteristics, as well as the artist's own expertise in this project. Seashells have been used in their natural state for several functional reasons and embellishments as well as other decorative consideration for private and public places. By observation a seashell can be associated with femininity as Russell (1972) has explicitly stated that the oyster, protected by a shell, is the queen of the coast. Therefore, the seashell becomes the appropriate female idiom adopted for this project work which seeks to highlight the feminine touch in pottery that have been overshadowed by modernist approaches to its practice.

Due to the change in the trend of pottery practices in Ghana, this study seeks to bridge the gap that has been created over the years especially among formally trained women and their male counterparts, in theory and practice. As an artist, it is believed, especially in thoughts held by Catherine Beecher (1843) and Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey (1921) as cited in Popik (2012) that empowerment of women usually accrues to generations, and that, intentions held in this project is for the benefit and variations in ceramic practice in Ghana.

Currently, most artists and a lot of great thinkers in the world are inspired by nature and they always communicate with their audience through their works. Everything with regards to the laws of life can be found in the open book of nature. Quinn (2007) affirms that, ceramic artists and designers have always been inspired by the natural world and that, it is possible they feel so connected to nature because their primary material (clay) is dug straight from the earth.

## **1.2 The Motivation**

The study was motivated by personal experiences and observations of gender inequality in contemporary pottery practice. LaDuke (1991) has revealed that pottery practice has for hundreds of years been sustained by women as in most villages, women collectively contribute to pottery production, ranging from the mining and processing of clay, forming, trimming and firing. However, modernity altered these, converting them into a male dominated area with males dominating the current practice. This study explores approaches to resurrect the pre-colonial women's participation in formally trained pottery.

There are many people especially women who have not had the opportunity to experience traditional lifestyles due to the effects of colonialism hence, the need to advocate for the facilitation of cultural revitalization. This project is not intended to construe those traditional pottery products and practices by women are extinct; it was merely to acknowledge that many post-colonial women experience their lives and livelihoods outside the indigenous paradigm, thus leaving the practice to a few but “uneducated” women. Formally trained women in the art need to be encouraged to participate fully to enhance the image of traditional pottery and their participation must be recognised to motivate them to explore more.

The study also seeks to use seashells as an idiom because of their diverse structural composition, interesting colours and patterns and the fascinating shapes and sizes; attributes which are typically in relation to females. They are such simple but beautiful gift from the ocean that is brought ashore by the waves of the sea. The joy of collecting and combing the beach for these little treasures is addictive since every specimen is so unique in its colour, pattern, shape, size and texture. According to Dance (1992), there are over 500 species of sea shells around the world which are a delight to watch. Sea shells have very curious shapes, bright colours and spectacular patterns which make them one of nature’s most fascinating creations. Their universal appeal is due to their tactile qualities as much as their intrinsic beauty. Some are very fragile and can be broken easily but many others are solid and pleasant to hold. Such characteristic make shells a satisfying subject to explore and creates a fertile ground to bring to bear the feminine side to pottery. The project seeks to offer a new perspective to analyzing a feminine style and skill that takes



into account cultural and ethnic contexts to the discussion of female autonomy in traditional pottery practices.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives will be to:

1. Identify an appropriate feminine idiom as counterpoint to prevailing ceramic practices and exhibition concerns.
2. Evolve exhibition strategies complementary of the course of feminism using pottery presentation and representation.
3. Provoke a discourse through series of exhibitions in indigenous feminine pottery practices.

### **1.4 Importance of the study**

Indigenous Ghanaian pottery practices have so much to offer contemporary practices. Unfortunately, much of the experiences from the indigenous practices have not been incorporated into the contemporary pottery. The contemporary Ghanaian ceramic art is dominated by men and its modernist ideologies of art representation. The once female craft or art with its meaning is gradually losing its feminine touch and influence. This study would see a touch of the indigenous pottery practice in propelling contemporary ideas that would allow audience participation in the creation of meanings to the wares. The artistic prowess of females and their role in national development would be harnessed and recognized as well.



## **1.5 Research Methodology**

Seashells with their unique shapes, fascinating colours and features were identified to be the most appropriate female idiom to use in this project to promote female participation in the contemporary pottery practice. The main ceramic materials used in this project were clay, manganese and glaze with acrylic paint and an automotive clear coat finish. The modelled clay seashells with their natural features were fully enhanced. Other domestic products like ceramic crockery, light holders and flower vases were developed from them and produced with clay. Modelling, casting and throwing was the main studio forming techniques employed in the production of the wares. The replica seashells were finished using acrylic paints; others were glazed with the rest finished with engobe. The crockery and other pottery wares that were developed from the seashells were treated with manganese and glaze which gave the wares an antique touch, very typical of the indigenous pottery that this study sought to resurrect.

## **1.6 Organisation of the rest of the Chapters**

Chapter two reviews related literatures which were both empirical and theoretical. Literature used in this review was generally peer reviewed journals from the following databases and resources: African Journals Online (AJOL), Science Direct, and Elsevier, Library materials from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and Takoradi Polytechnic. Extensive literature on pottery, women in pottery, feminism and feminist art, pottery and livelihood, contemporary pottery was thoroughly reviewed. From this review, research gaps pertaining to the pottery industry were identified. Also, from this review, the appropriate research methods were developed to

ensure that standard procedures comparable to similar projects conducted elsewhere is applied.

Chapter three looks at the methodology adopted into the development of concepts and ideas and the making of the works. Identification and selection of appropriate idiom as well as materials, production techniques and finishing was discussed in detail.

Chapter four was a full account of the results of the study. Results of the exhibition strategies and findings were discussed extensively in this chapter.

A summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations are captured in chapter five

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Functional Pottery Concepts and Practices**

One unique characteristic of clay is its ability to be moulded into beautiful objects that become permanent when exposed to heat (Scott, 2007). Clay, which is the chief raw material for pottery abound in almost every part of the world as it constantly developing from the decomposition of certain igneous rock to a depth of about four miles into the earth's crust. One great quality of clay is its ability to become plastic when mixed with water which makes it easy to be worked into varied shapes and forms and put to diverse uses (Anquandah, 2006). Furthermore, Genders, (2002) affirms that since it is a common material on the earth's surface, it is wonderful to make vessels and sculpture so diverse in form and finish that, it is sometimes hard to remember that they were all made from the same material.

Again Hopper (2000) has acknowledged that, looking at pottery in museums or as illustrations in books, one can't help but be amazed by the enormous and delicate diversity of forms that man has moulded clay into, for a wide variety of possible uses. Hopper further reiterates that, beyond the natural instincts of enjoying the manipulative quality of the material, and the function which is required of the formed objects, pottery developed as a response to the needs of mankind with its form been influenced and altered by many factors and forces. Pots became containers and dispensers - pots of purpose. The forms they took developed for a variety of reasons: the use required; religious associations; as a substitute emulating other more precious materials; geographical and climatic considerations; and the many variations in cultural customs, (Hopper, 2000).

Indigenous pottery as a domestic art has for many years been the exclusive preserve of women, especially the elderly (Rattray, 1927). LaDuke (1991) says while some women opt for pottery as a complete occupation, others take it as extensions of domestic activity where money accrued from the proceeds go into the provision of household necessities. An endless variety of vessels have evolved from many cultures with the discovery of pottery and each product serves a special purpose in enhancing the life of man. According to Sandy Brown as cited in Genders (2002), any pot that can hold food or liquid is considered functional in Japan.

According to Barley, (1994), irrespective of who makes pots, they are considered vessels which are used to refer to bodily cavities such as head, womb, belly, rectum, etc. In effect,

a pot is like a womb of a mother who gives birth to a child. It follows therefore that, the womb is a receptacle which holds life. In some parts of India, Hopper (2000), has indicated that everyday pottery was thrown away after use, either as a measure of hygiene or by religious doctrine, or both and bowls represent giving or offering, and fertility. The seven small bowls placed on a Buddhist shrine represent the seven offerings for an honoured guest: flowers, incense, illumination, perfume, food, water for drinking, and water for washing. Lidded forms, covered jars, boxes, urns, or bottles represent the feminine principle of containing, enclosure, or the womb. The chalice, cup, or goblet represents the source of inexhaustible sustenance or abundance, the heart and salvation, plenty, immortality, and receptivity. The ewer is a symbol of purity, and of washing the hands in innocence. Gourd-shaped vessels represent mystery and longevity. The vase, water-pot, and pitcher symbolize the cosmic waters, the Great Mother, fertility, perpetual harmony, and the heart. Additionally Speight and Toki (1999) are of the view that the earliest containers were made by women pinching or coiling the clay into shape and generally, it is assumed that pottery was discovered in the domestic situation by women because pots were usually used to cook and store food. In some oriental cultures, the pot is seen as soul, where volume and form grow from the depths within, and the outside shape is a direct result of the inner form. Loth (1987) said, ancient Africa women undertook a great variety of work in the making of craft, especially pottery and that they are responsible for its development. They made clay imitations of the vessels which were used domestically. He indicated that pottery was largely female occupation while the men; if they practiced it at all, usually made tobacco-pipes.



## **2.2 Gender Role in Indigenous Pottery Practice**

There is no doubt that men are involved in some aspects of pottery in Africa and their valuable contribution to the industry cannot be entirely written off. Perani and Smith (1980) are of the view that though majority of indigenous potters and ceramicists in Africa are women, men occasionally involve themselves; like the Hausas of northern Nigeria. Reif (1992) also maintains that pottery production in Central Africa has always been women's work but men have made strides in the industry for centuries and Rattray (1927) further declares that it will hardly be correct to state that, among the Ashanti of Ghana, pottery lies entirely in the domain of women. Though women appear to be the makers of pottery wares in almost every culture, there is no rule or taboo or written code restraining men from engaging in the activity, especially among the Ashanti. It is obvious that there are differences in the approach to the pottery type to be produced by men and women. Barley (1994) further establishes that, there is common sense in this division since men and women have different needs and so they produce the pottery type that they mostly use. Clearly, pottery in relation to gender depends to a large extent on the needs per sex at any given time. Women naturally would be more comfortable to wares for domestic use whereas men would generally produce for ritual, aesthetic and religious purpose as is the case in some parts of Nigeria, Reif (1992). Though both gender produce pottery, Reif still maintains that the purpose of making pottery depends on who makes it.

## **2.3 Women's Participation in Pottery**

Pottery is among the oldest arts of mankind and according to Perani and Smith (1998), before the twentieth century, Africans of the south Sahara had no knowledge of the potter's



wheel and therefore clay vessels were hand-built. Barley (1994) has also indicated that, hand-built vessels dates back to the early fourth millennium B.C in Nigeria and in the Saharan sites, vessels found have been dated to the eighth millennium B.C. Anquandah (2006) further reveals according to his archaeological account that, literally, every district or region in Ghana provide some evidence of remains of ancient clay hearths, smoking pipes and vessels for cooking or serving food, carrying, storage and serving of water. All the above mentioned vessels are used domestically with some few of them intended and used for religious or magical purpose and since women were and are directly linked to managing the home; it was only prudent for them to produce these items to aid them in executing their homely duties. Rattray (1927) has also established that in the Ashanti traditional setting, it is noted that the first potter was a woman called “OsraAbogyo” who hailed from Tafo village. It is believed that she learnt the art from “*Odomankoma*”, that is God the creator.

Females were engaged in gathering, cultivation of crops, making pots, preparing food and drinks, selling goods in the market and even fishing and weaving just as their male counterparts. Again, Berns (1993) has said that women dominated the production of ritually-destined figurative ceramics in Nigeria. Through such production women play important roles in the construction of social and cultural meanings. Perhaps in other parts of the world, the concern is with appearances than with meaning but the study of the uses and meanings of pots of the past, its understanding and content can be infused into the development of the present day work.

From the above-mentioned, it is evident that women have played a major role in the pottery industry. They have been involved with the sustenance and preservation of this tradition to date notwithstanding the advancement of ceramics with its sculptural touch and masculinity as well as its sophistication in contemporary practice. Women have been making pottery wares in almost every region in Ghana. LaDuke (1991) is of the view that, for centuries, all the processes involved in pottery production are controlled by women, ranging from clay winning and processing, forming and firing. Berns (2007) indicates that other than basic household chores like cleaning, cooking and caring for children, women spent much of the day engaged in pottery making. Berns further indicates that, women to a large extent managed both activities of keeping the home and making pottery so well that both activities did not conflict. It is imperative therefore to try to import some of the indigenous pottery practices into the contemporary ceramic practice since the primary material still remains clay and most of the art works produced are influenced by the emotion and beliefs as well as the cultural practices of the artist. Technologically, the needs of man and his quest for change as well as gender roles have changed; we cannot overlook the fact that basic roles like managing and keeping the home, nurturing and caring for children, cooking and washing and other chores to a large extent, still remain the woman's responsibility.

#### **2.4 Women's Dominance in Pottery Practice**

Women engage in pottery making because they have the skill, the right attitude, the endurance and the patience for it (Asihene, 1978). Traditional pottery is mostly done by hand and this enables the potter to exhibit her individual skill in her approach. Barley

(1994) maintains the production of usable vessels within the framework of a traditional canon of forms demands technical ability. This technical ability cannot be acquired without the expenditure of great time and constant practice. Women are naturally endowed with endurance and patience and these are attributes needed in the production of pottery. Additionally, the fact the pots are hand-made, and women potters have the requisite skills, the time to spend as well as the endurance for the risks associated with pottery, they make forms based on their personal feelings and style. Rattray (1927) adds that, in ancient times, it was women who produced pottery products because invariably, pots were bartered in exchange for food and women were and are in charge of cooking food for the household. Women were often noted for pottery as the hand-building methods used meant that the work cycle was regularly interrupted to allow the part-built vessels time to become leather hard before being completed; and this fitted in well with women's domestic role in such societies, (Cooper, 2000). Pots were never sold for money as is the case now; they were produced for barter and domestic use. Priddy (1972) has established that among the Shai of the Accra plains, it is practically compulsory for every girl to learn the art of pottery in order to be fully accepted as a member of the society. These clearly indicate that women have indeed dominated the art since its genesis. Again women dominate the pottery industry because the art of pottery making requires a great deal of patience and nurturance; attributes that are more feminine. Making pottery also requires abiding by the conservative rules which is time and regular practice and again, women are noted for that which means they have advantage over men in this regard.

## **2.5 Evolution of Contemporary Pottery**

Pottery has played a very important role in man's life. It has been used by almost every culture as a medium of expression. In Ghana and other cultures, pottery products have been used for both functional and utilitarian purposes. Pottery is practiced by almost all ethnic groups in Ghana and women have dominated the industry, (Anquandah, 2006). This perhaps explains why pots, bowls, plates and cups were the main pottery products that dominated the market. The basic principles in the production of pottery are coiling, throwing and slab building methods but contemporary approaches have resulted in changing the conventional results of these techniques.

According to Chavarria (1994), Ceramic wares in the prehistoric era were mainly for magical and religious purposes. But one cannot deny its aesthetic appeal was superb and contemporary ceramic artists have drawn inspiration from them. According to Quinn (2004), there has been a new era of pottery from the mid-century decade, marrying craft skills to modern design practice as aesthetic features were balanced against functionality. This he said has made the contemporary ceramic artist more versatile with the subject matter; 'ceramic art'. Pottery making followed a certain principle or technique and women were best at it. With modernisation, however, the contemporary artist has been able to manipulate the conventional way of production by making pottery products more sculptural to make the wares aesthetically appealing. Vecchio (2001) discovered that one of the main goals of modernism was to brush off the dust of the past and to create something entirely new. He further revealed that as modernism progressed, however, it was clear that no artist worked without connecting his or her past, nor without inspiration



from the history of art; this he felt finally brought about some newness which in itself was a myth.

For several decades, Wilhem Kage who was regarded as one of Sweden's leading ceramic artist shook off his insightful sense of economy and created pieces with sculptural silhouettes, even conceiving hybrid forms and organic shapes that appeared to fuse art and nature (Quinn 2004). Drawing inspiration from natural objects and forms and adopting the various studio forming techniques, interesting ceramic sculptural products can be made for functional and decorative purposes within the confines of contemporary lifestyle. Tourtillott (2009) reaffirms that contemporary ceramic sculpture is widely in its form and approach, and there is little the field seems incapable of embracing. The contemporary pottery practices which is male dominated has created a lag in recognising the woman's contribution to growth and development in the practice and academia. This rather long lag in the recognition of women's contribution to growth and economic development, particularly in academia, is largely driven by statistical artefacts, most notably the non-inclusion of home production in the estimation of gross domestic products and more generally the challenges related to estimation of home-produced and consumed goods (Deaton 2001) and (Stiglitzatal 2011). The question now is; do women have aesthetic appeal to be able to resurrect the feminine touch to contemporary pottery practice and gain autonomy once again?



## **2.6 Feminism; Women's standpoint in Contemporary era**

Johnson (1997) argues that men equate normal heterosexuality with men having access to women's bodies for sex. He further argues that: such a system encourages men to value women primarily in terms of their ability to meet men's needs and desires and to support men's self-image as potent and in control. But Butler (1998) has indicated that feminist theory has often been critical of naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality that assume that the meaning of women's social existence can be derived from some fact of their physiology. In distinguishing sex from gender, feminist theorists have disputed causal explanations that assume that sex dictates certain social meanings for women's experience.

But given equal opportunities to both men and women in terms of education and job offer, it is evident that women have proven to be up to the task. As part of the National gender and children policy, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs have put in place strategic measures to promote gender equity in the area of recruitment, training and promotion and also to monitor the contribution of women in the relevant sector to reflect their actual contribution to national development.

Freedman (2002) suggests that women's movements have evolved throughout history, and feminism offers women a political position that will enhance their selfdetermination. She indicates feminism was a reaction toward unequal distribution of individual wealth. Feminism offers women a point of reference in making sense of their life experiences. Traditionally, a woman's office is the kitchen, thus, it was prudent for the woman to provide tools to enhance her office. This probably could be the reason for women's

dominance in the art of pottery since most of the wares produced were for domestic consumption. However, the trend has changed, and now wares produced are more sculptural than pottery. Drawing inference from the traditional pottery practices before colonization, one can say that our women were inspired by their domestic tools and it was evident in their wares. Women have excelled in so many endeavours which hitherto were men preserves. Accordingly, the post-colonial feminist dialogue recommends that gender concepts should also be examined in relation to additional categories such as ethnicity, status, race and culture (Alexander and Talpade-Mohanty, 1995; Oplatka, Hertz-Law and Glover, 2000). Cultural and traditional beliefs also play a major role and in as much as we wish to advance technologically, some traditional practices and beliefs associated with indigenous pottery practices in Ghana cannot be abolished completely but rather be embellished to suit the taste of modern consumers. Equally important, the absence of a historical understanding of the processes by which women's economic contribution became subsumed under the category of household production and their labour formally accounted for the undermining policies that seek to strengthen women's economic roles.

## **2.7 Feminism and aesthetics**

The feminist art movement was not just about challenging the way women were viewed as artists and subjects in works of art, but it was about women confronting their subordinate roles in society. It has taken time for philosophers to see themselves as having a role to play in clarifying and evaluating ideas advanced by feminists, Shaw (2005). According to him, Women often have been denied the same artistic training and opportunities as men, and the only avenue of artistic expression available to them often

has been craft items, whose use-value makes it difficult to recognize them *as art* given a formalist theory. His assertion is true to some extent in indigenous Ghana and is applicable to pottery practices traditionally. What was seen as a woman's craft has now been taken over by men, thus leaving our women potters with little or no recognition for their artistic prowess.

The challenge feminist face is respect for the full diversity of women's life experiences, while identifying conclusions of broad significance to feminists trying to oppose masculinist biases. Shaw (2005), in his article; "Why Does Feminism Matter To Aesthetics?" stresses on the fact that feminism is a trend in aesthetics. He refers to artists and critics such as Judy Chicago, Nancy Spero, Lucy Lippard, and Linda Nochlin that have been reflecting on them since the rise of the women's art movement in the late sixties and early seventies. Feminist artists appropriated familiar images of women and used them as a means to propel their agenda. When depicted by women, the female body became a powerful weapon against the social constructs of gender.

Bee (1999) was identified and she admitted to be a "feminist assemblage" artist in 1998. Reviewers wrote that her paintings represent a kind of "Beat Feminism" because her artworks, both paintings and books examine gender roles and female images in the larger context of American history and iconography.





Figure 2- 1: *Tightrope*. 82 x 58 (208.3 x 147.3). Acrylic on linen can-vas, African fabric borders. Schor, Amos, et al. (1994).

Furthermore, she maintains that women artists were not taken seriously until they took the initiative and brought themselves forward into the public sphere in the 1970's. Feminist theory and practice carried her through her glowing experience at the all-male art faculty of Hunter College graduate school.

Women artists and for that matter potters must therefore see the importance of making inroads into the mainstream by establishing our own networks to give us alternatives and strength in the male dominated practice. Feminism is not about becoming aggressively plain, alienating men and giving up on romance and humour. "In Feminist art practice, gender identity becomes a political position within patriarchal structures of power, whereas the concept of being a woman artist, gender has a determining role" (Drucker



1999).

## 2.8 Feminist art

According to Harper (1985), several values underlay the formation of feminist art and both Chicago and Schapiro held that women in our culture have not been able to express their creativity through arts in the same degree as men have; their potential and achievements have not been given same interest as men. Judy Chicago once said that Feminist Art is all the stages of a woman giving birth to herself. It is art that reach out and affirms women and validates their experience as artists. Feminist art also teaches the basis of our culture which is grounded in a fallacy; a fallacy which causes us to believe that alienation is the human condition and real human contact is unattainable. She further reiterated that this fallacy has divided our feelings from our thoughts and has caused the planet to be divided as are the sexes. Judy Chicago further set out to construct a Feminist art practice and pioneered first Feminist art program at California State University, Fresno, and a yearlong programme from fall 1970 to spring 1971.



Figure 2- 2: *The Cunt Cheerleaders, 1970-71, students of the Feminist art programme (left); Boxing Ring Ad, Announcement in Art forum for Jack Glenn Gallery, 1971. Photo by Jerry McMillan (right)*

(Source) <http://www.judychicago.com/about/career-history.php>

In 1971, as shown in figure 2-2, she decided to legally change her name in an effort to liberate herself from male-dominated stereotypes and also as a way of announcing a radical change in her art making, a change that would lead her to create a feminist art practice. Quote from Judy Chicago's Journal dated March 8, 1971: *"I am beginning this journal now, because the work with which I am involved has developed faster than I had ever imagined...and before the moment is gone and forgotten, I want to (document)...the growth of the first Feminist art ever attempted."*

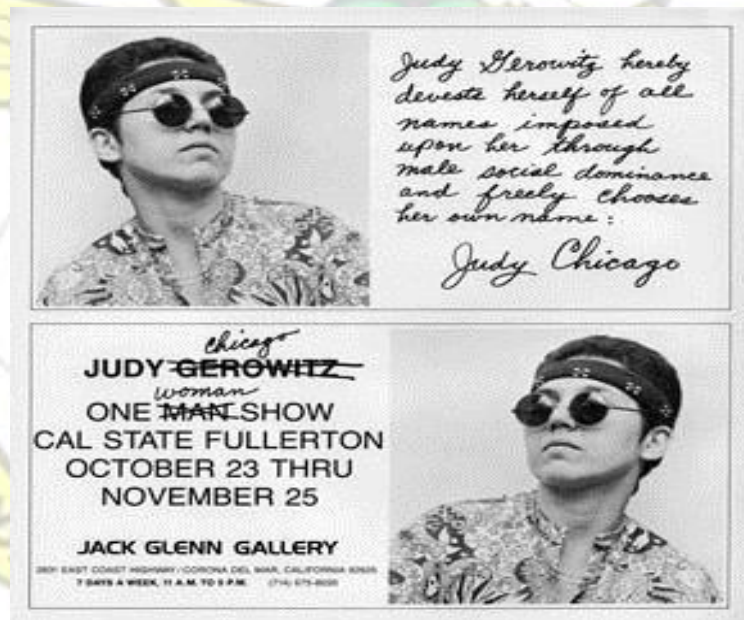


Figure 2- 3: *Name Change Ad, Artforum, Oct., 1970.*

Source <http://www.judychicago.com/about/career-history.php>



Figure 2- 4: *Judy Chicago at work on The Dinner Party alone in her china painting studio.* Source <http://www.judychicago.com/about/career-history.php>

Returning from the United States in the 1990's, Yan Ming-Huy became the first open advocate artist of a feminist movement in the Taiwan art scene. She publicly admitted mishaps in marriage and used her own marriage as the content of her work. She used the connotations in her work to awaken a female or feminist consciousness, which created mixed feelings among her audiences; a wave of interest and controversies in Taiwan art circles, (Lu 2002).

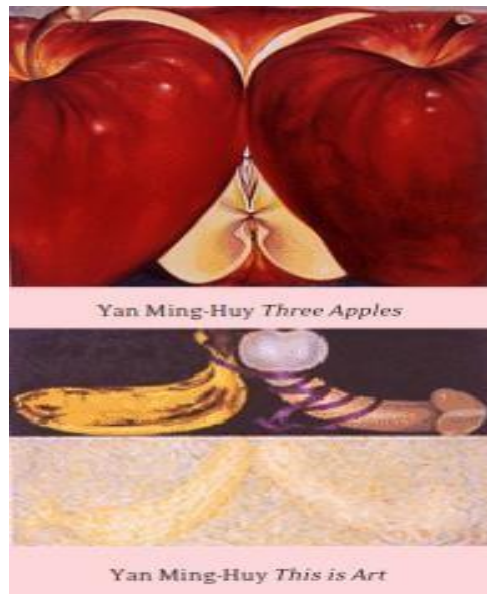


Figure 2- 5: A painting by Yan Minh-Huy. (Source: [www.ktpress.co.uk](http://www.ktpress.co.uk))

In response to comments that she uses sex as her subject, she explains her paintings are influenced by human nature and sex as a subject is part of human nature. She stood for an expansion in feminist understanding, creating paintings, drawings and writing scripts which agitated for a female self-consciousness and self-encouragement, (Lu, 2002). The goals of the feminist artists were to reclaim the female form as a symbol of power and present it as opposed to the conventional ideal. Our traditional society has constructed ideas and ideals of how a woman should look and what her roles should be. The Ghanaian women potters who were working during the time of the feminist art movement may not have considered themselves to be feminists, but their works had a considerable impact on women's role in the home. By challenging tradition, women artists, whether or not they had feminist agendas, played an important role in reshaping contemporary women's art by transforming how women were represented as subjects as well as how they would be recognized as artists, (Harper, 1985). Feminist art, therefore is art that leads women to a



future where they can be reconciled to the world so that they, as well as their counterparts, would thereby be made whole.

## **2.9 Femininity, Feminist Art and Pottery**

Femininity is the quality of looking and behaving in ways usually or generally associated with girls and women, (Microsoft Encarta 2009). Femininity is socially constructed, but made up of both socially-defined and biologically-created factors. Both men and women can exhibit feminine traits so femininity becomes distinct from the definition of the biological female gender. By observation, “Women are generally gentle, empathic, sensitive, caring and emotional. These are some of the traits that are associated with feminine art and may vary depending on location and context, and can also be influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors”. The counterpart to femininity is masculinity. While the defining characteristics of femininity are not universally identical, some patterns exist: compassion, sweetness, tolerance and nurturance are traits that can be cited as traditionally feminine, (Osho News, online magazine, 2013). These traits are nonetheless needed in pottery due to the delicate nature of the primary material, clay. This can be contrasted with traditional sculpture making techniques and contemporary pottery practice where men dominate. In many traditional cultures, men are thought to be more superior to women, and feminism contests these practices for equal opportunities and worth for both genders.



Figure 2- 6: *The Birth of Venus (Botticelli) is a classic representation of femininity.*  
*Hopper, R. 2000).*

According to McKay (2005), Feminism is a response to male dominance. Not all women's movements have been called feminist movements; however, they are all considered movements based on responding to issues of male dominance (and these include right wing and conservative movements meant to reassert the belief that men are naturally dominant to women). Butler (1999) suggests that the presumed universality of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. Feminism can therefore be a source of enlightenment and empowerment for the contemporary female potter because it speaks to the gender relations in indigenous pottery communities and it also adds to our current understanding of the evolution of the practice. Deveau (1994) is of the view that, the beginning of an internal empowerment involves the recognition of certain experiences as ongoing expressions of

resistance of power; “the power to give voice to one’s aspiration to be heard is not so much the removal of an external impediment.

A cursory look at the number of students who opt to specialize in pottery at the tertiary level of education clearly reveals that, females are under-represented. McKay (2005) further evokes that when gender inequality is recognized, feminist theory can be a valuable tool for indigenous women to understand the complexities of their oppression. With Europeans introducing ceramics to Ghana, the phase of pottery practice was changed in the name of colonization. The change in role was very sudden and the phase of the once female craft was no longer for domestic purposes. Both genders could have been engaged in executing the art by not concentrating on modern practices only but incorporating both traditional and modern approaches of production to enhance the finishing and functionality of the pieces produced.

A typical example is stressed by Chiefcalf (2002) that, Victorian ideals of gender roles were used in the education of “Indian” students. Victorian ideals of gender roles were patriarchal and Indian students learned this kind of social behaviour and it has been carried forward in time. Hooks, (2004) asserts that Women’s sexuality and domestic labour has been owned by husbands and or fathers. Women have been treated as objects and have been seen as sexual badges for men.

## **2.10 Summary**

Reviewing related literature on pottery and its practitioners and the evolution of the craft from prehistoric era to the contemporary era, facts have been established that women were

the main creators of the craft because of its domesticity. The trend, however, changed when the presentation and representation of pottery products gradually changed to become more sculptural and sophisticated making the men dominate in the current practice. The main concept for this project therefore is to employ seashells as an appropriate feminine idiom to produce artefacts which would employ both indigenous and contemporary studio forming techniques. The products would have an indigenous feel as well as a contemporary touch with emphasis on the dual purpose of their use. The intention, nonetheless, is to resurrect the femininity that once dominated the craft.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### **3.1 Conceptualising Femininity in Pottery**

In the making of any pottery work, the potter could have his or her basic forms in the mind; therefore, the formation of the work starts from the mind. Others prefer to sketch their ideas on paper to serve as a guide and to enable them get every detail captured in the final three dimensional pieces. The former was adopted and employed in this project with the quest to feminize the current order of the practice. The idea of bringing back the feminine touch to the modern practice could be achieved by incorporating indigenous pottery practice into the contemporary art without compromising on



originality.

The indigenous potters conceptualised their shapes and forms to suit what the product was intended for. Most of the wares produced were for domestic use with a few, for religious and magical purposes, thus making them ceremonial. Their wares had meanings but currently the spiritual or symbolic significance of the wares they produced is lost in the phase of modernity. The domesticity of indigenous pottery made it more feminine as Hopper (2000) has indicated that, vessels are generally the universal feminine symbol; the womb of the Great Mother, shelter, protection, preservation, nourishment and fertility. He further stresses that, they represent inwardness and inner values; bowls represent giving or offering and fertility.

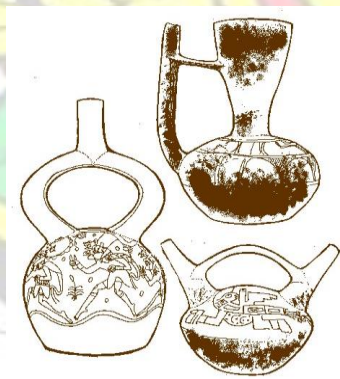


Figure 3- 1: *Pre-Columbian vessels from Peru.*

*Designed for easy carrying and to prevent insects from entering. Hopper (2000)*



Figure 3- 2: *Indian and African water jars.* Hopper (2000)

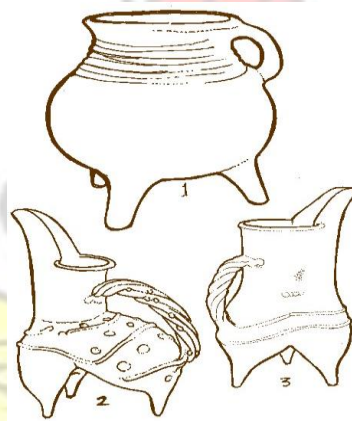


Figure 3- 3: *Tripod vessels: 1) Cooking pot, 13th - 14th century A.D., North Germany; 2) and 3), spouted vessels, 2000 -3000 B.C., China.* Hopper (2000)

Culture is dynamic and so are our basic needs over time, developmentally and technologically. Beyond our natural instincts of enjoying the manipulative quality of clay and the function of the formed object, contemporary pottery has been influenced and altered by many factors and forces, Hopper reiterates. The conception of this project was as a result of the varied cultural customs and habits that have had influences on the development of form in functional pottery wares. From the foregoing, it is evident that perhaps, indigenous pottery developed as a response to the needs of mankind at a particular time and era.

A walk along the coast, revealed one of nature's most fascinating creatures which possesses feminine qualities for this course. The sea shells serve as a protective cover to the many molluscs that they carry against predators. By observing the shapes, varying sizes, the texture, and the captivating colours and how delicate yet beautiful the shells looked, it was realized that the shell possesses qualities similar to a female which could be used to propagate the agenda of feminine touch to contemporary pottery. The physical qualities of the seashell make it very appropriate for any project that seeks to promote femininity.

### **3.2 Nature and Arts (Inspiration-Selection of Seashell Species)**

Forms in nature are said to be similar to pottery forms, for instance, there are seed pods that look like vessels. Lines and textures seen in plants and trees are reminiscent of the forms reproduced over the centuries in clay (Peterson, 2003). Taking inspiration from nature has bred artistic prowess in many artists. Tourtillott (2009) is of the view that contemporary pottery has become more sculptural and this is widely in its form and approach, with little the field seems incapable of embracing. These have been made possible because the makers have been inspired by abstraction and nature. The same cannot be said of our indigenous potters because pottery forms before the introduction of pottery did not see much abstraction as it is the order of the day now. Our women drew inspiration from their natural environment and their domestic needs and so produced wares for utilitarian purpose. Lately, pottery wares have become aesthetically appealing objects other than functional. Drawing inspiration from nature to create an artwork that serves a dual purpose requires high intellectual prowess. An artist is able to develop concepts either

from natural or manmade source. Natural objects, especially seashells are generally endowed with unique and fascinating forms, shapes, colours, textures and they serve the purpose of aiding an artist in developing and pursuing his passion. This, however, makes it possible for an artist to creatively produce pieces to serve both decorative and utilitarian purposes.

Inspiration was drawn from seashells with diverse shapes, sizes, patterns and colours from the five classes. Some interesting seashells out of the lot were finally selected and that provided adequate ground which broadened the scope for the concept. According to Quinn (2007), design development describes a number of activities that help to develop the concept and ideas to their fullest potential. This can involve sketching, brainstorming and prototypes. It should be a rigorous and rewarding process, a thorough investigation of an artist's ideas. This project seeks to use seashells to portray the beauty of femininity associated with indigenous pottery forms and practices as well as how they have been used in the past.

### **3.3 Conceptual Representation**

A concept can be defined generally as an idea or mental image which corresponds to some distinct entity or class of entities. According to the classical view, concepts are defined logically by a set of elementary features that are singularly necessary and jointly sufficient, (Waxman 1991). A concept can be simple or complex and an artist, through his concepts is able to describe the ideas that tend to give his works a context. Quinn (2007) affirms that developing a concept for one's work is very important and useful. The concept is the guiding principle or philosophy behind the work, allowing the artist to base



all decisions on a single, coherent rationale. Conceptual representation may just be such a phenomenon and in order to observe this, one must introduce a perturbation (in the form of a psychological task) and then observe its relevance. Waxman (1991) further states that concepts and mental representations are intangible products of the human mind and they cannot be measured directly or observed spontaneously.

This statement is true in the sense that from concept to reality requires the use of art tools and materials to produce a tangible representation of what is on the mind. Natural objects, especially seashells are generally endowed with unique and fascinating shapes and they serve the purpose of aiding an artist in developing and pursuing his passion. This, however, made it possible for the artist to creatively produce pieces and by way of exhibition, lay emphasis on the underlying philosophy or concept. Seashells, especially cowries, were used as currency in Ghana and some parts of Africa. Some people used seashells for ritual purposes while others used them as jewellery. Seashells were used in this project to portray techniques in indigenous pottery practices, products and exhibition strategies because of their feminine qualities and characteristics.

### **3.4 Idea Development**

Thorough study of the various seashells was done and that gave a broader view of the kinds of wares that could be produced based on indigenous pottery practices. No sketches were used to record the series of ideas which were developed from studying the seashells. By observation, most of the seashells could be used in their natural state as kitchen wares

because of their shapes and colours; an example is the Trophon shell from the Muricidae family of seashells as shown in figure 3-4.



Figure 3- 4: *Trophon shell*

It is evident in the pictures in figure 3-4 that ideas could be developed from these shells to produce unique wares not only in clay but in other mediums as well. It was upon this premise that the idea of kitchen wares having the shapes and decorations as the seashell were developed. Again, the study was also inspired by some seashell arts like the shell clock by Bill Jordan as shown in figures 3-5 and 3-6. Looking at how the shells have been arranged to form the clock in their natural form is very intriguing and this inspired the production of replica shells which could be arranged or used as single units to decorate a given space. They could be arranged on any surface to form a piece.

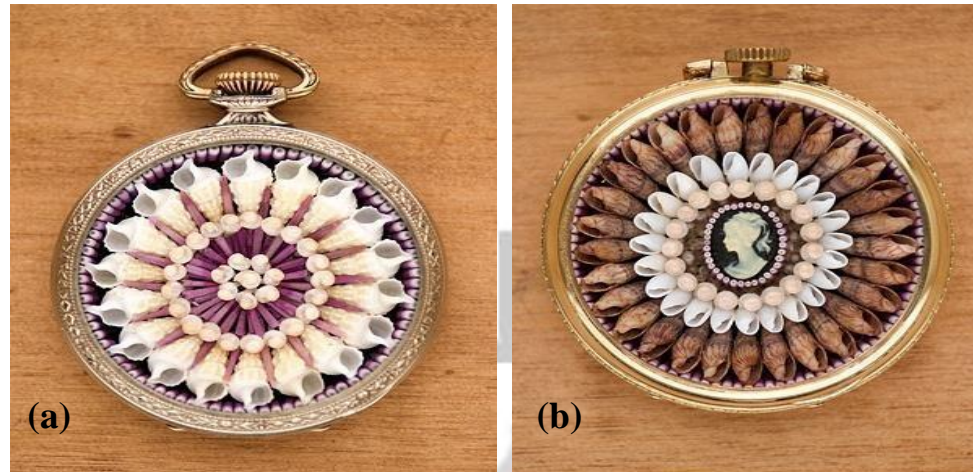


Figure 3- 5: *Seashell pocket watches*  
 (Source) [www.sailors-valentine.com](http://www.sailors-valentine.com)

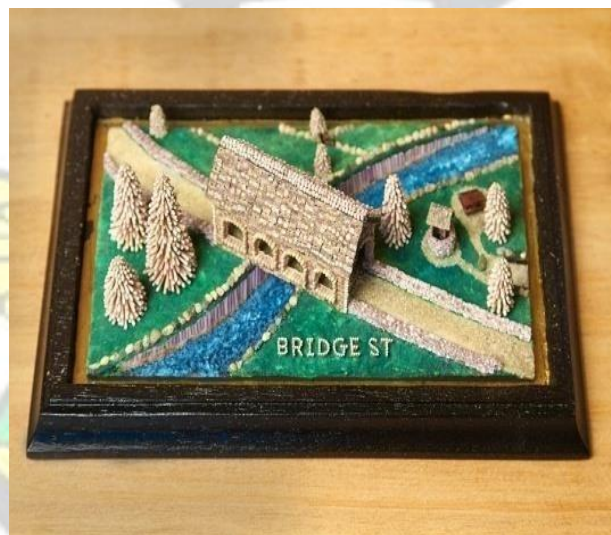


Figure 3- 6: *A seashell collage of a bridge*  
 (Source) [www.sailors-valentine.com/bridge street.html](http://www.sailors-valentine.com/bridge%20street.html)

The picture in figure 3-6 is a piece of art done by arranging variety of seashells in three dimensional forms by Bill Jordan. He calls this the bridge street which has played a significant role in his life. He states, “In my past, I have travelled underneath this very street, by boat many times and I wanted to pay homage by recreating that serene place through this very piece of art”. He further states that “everything you see in this creation



came from my fond memories and the use of recycled sea urchin shells. Add to its natural splendour, the trees, the bridge roof and walls, the trim around the open windows, the wishing well, and the lettering have been created with the sea shells”.



Figure 3- 7: *Pictures showing some seashell arts* (Source)

[www.fineshellart.blogspot.com](http://www.fineshellart.blogspot.com)

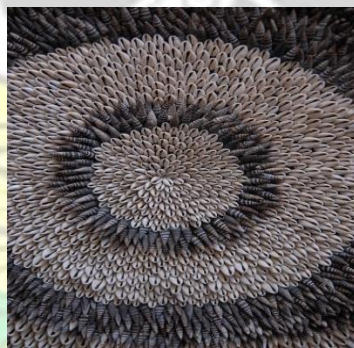


Figure 3- 8: *Seashell mural*



Figure 3- 9: *Seashell collage* Source: ([www.blottshellhouses.com](http://www.blottshellhouses.com))

The pictures in figures 3-7, 3-8 and 3-9 also show how natural seashells have been arranged as decoration to enhance the beauty of a building. Blott Kerr-Wilson mounted a



wall mural by arranging two species of seashells that is the cowry and the telescope snail in the picture in figure 3-8 to give a nice finish to the surface area. He also arranged variety of the clam shells like the Californian Lyonsia, Downy Thracia and Duck Lantern in the form of a collage and hanged it on a wall as shown in the picture in figure 3-9.



Figure 3- 10: *Natural seashells arranged on a canvas, by Alla Basanskaya*

Alla Baksanskaya is an award winning artist who works with natural seashells. She uses colourful seashells and acrylic paint to create her unique three dimensional works of art like mosaic, collages, figurines and other decorative items. Her works are unique and her style is modern. According to her, rubbing each shell after totally drying it with Johnson's baby oil or satin varnish helps to preserve the shell's natural colour.

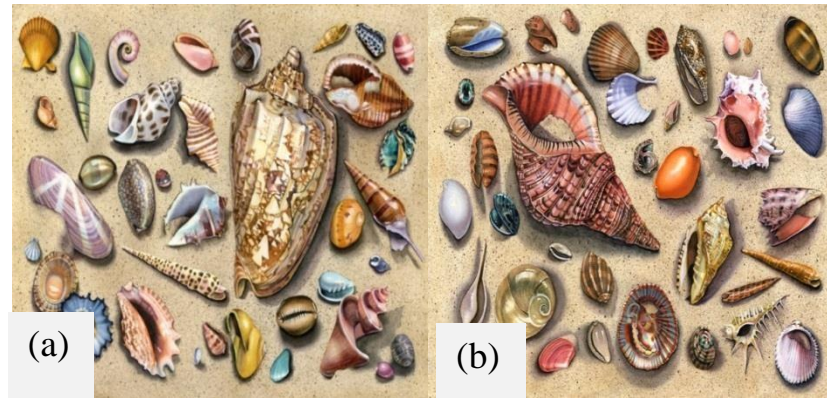


Figure 3- 11: *Paintings of seashells in water colour, created by Judy Unger*

The two paintings above were from a series of seashell paintings which began Judy Unger's career as a painter who works with water colours. She says "my food paintings were my strongest and I began to create portfolio pieces that were of food images". Drawing inference from the shell arts above, some interesting seashells were selected to be replicated in clay. Ceramic crockery and other artefacts were developed later from the shells in terms of shapes and forms which were produced in clay.

### 3.5 Materials

Materials used in the study included Abonko and Mfensi clays, manganese, glaze and acrylic paints. The clays were obtained from Abonko in the Central Region and Mfensi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana respectively.

### 3.6 Forming Methods

Modelling, pressing, pinching and throwing was the main studio forming methods employed in producing the replica seashells in clay.

### 3.6.1 Modelling Process

A lump of clay was kneaded to expel trapped air and shaped to replicate the required shell desired. With the aid of a marking tool shapes were cut on the kneaded clay as shown in plate 3-1(a). Modelling tools of various shapes and sizes were employed to bring out the details of the shell from the lump of clay as shown in plate 3-1 (b and c)

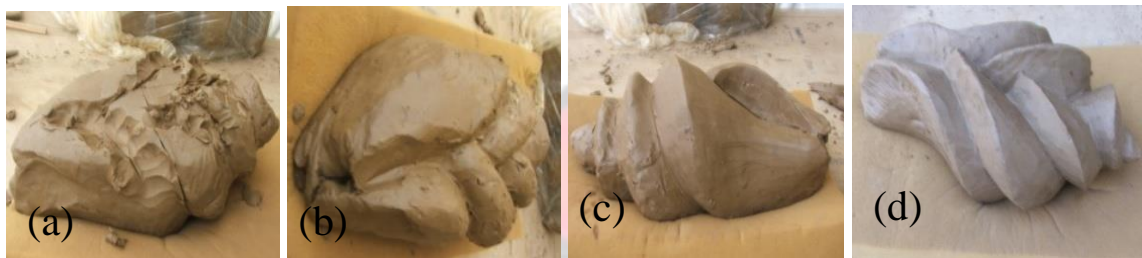


Plate 3- 1: *Pictures showing the various modelling stages of a seashell* The process of bringing out the details of the shell was best achieved when the clay was in the leather hard state. When the desired details had been achieved, the replica seashell in clay was cleaned with soft sponge as shown in 3-1 (d). Scooping was carried out as the next. This involved cutting the replica clay shell into manageable sizes with the help of a cutting wire and a knife after which the excess clay was scooped out as shown in plate 3-2 (a and b).



Plate 3- 2: *Pictures showing the scooping process; s(a) ceramic shell divided into two (b) one half of a clay shell (c) removing excess clay form one half of the shell.*



Scooping was done with simple turning and modelling tools to reduce the weight of the modelled piece as shown in plate 2 (c) and also to achieve a uniform wall thickness.

When the excess clay was scooped and the desired wall thickness of the seashell had been achieved, clay slip was applied to the surfaces to aid in joining the walls neatly together to form one piece.



Plate 3- 3: *Pictures showing the scooped clay shells*



Plate 3- 4: *Joined halves of ceramic seashell after scooping to form one piece*

Later the fettles on the ridges of the shells were neatly removed and cleaned with modelling tools, plastic kidney and a soft sponge or foam.



The same procedure was adopted in replicating all the other seashells. In all about twenty five (25) interesting seashells were replicated in clay. Some of the shells were repeated with varying sizes to make each piece exciting. After finishing the replica shells in clay were air dried in the open for three days and then later fired. The modelling process made each of the replica seashells unique and had a sense of individuality. Later, pressing method of production was adopted so that most of the seashells could be mass produced since the idea was to have a collection of seashells of various sizes. After replicating enough shells, some of the shells were developed and manipulated into flower vases and other household wares like fruit bowls, salad bowls, tea set, serving bowls, light holders, etc.

### 3.7.2 Pressing Process

The various seashells to be reproduced were first modelled in clay but were left solid without scooping. Plaster of Paris (P.O.P) moulds were constructed with these seashell models in clay, to facilitate the mass production of the shells.

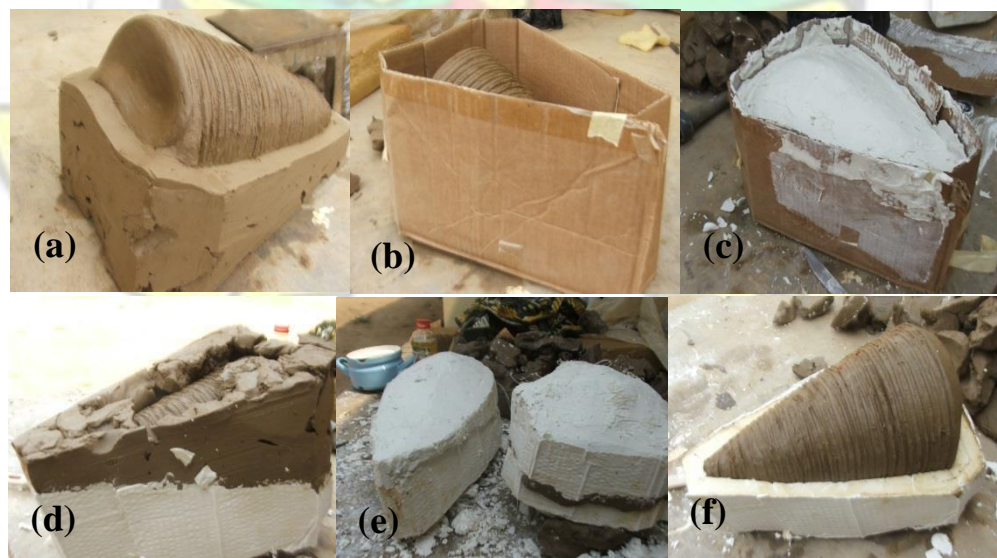


Plate 3- 5: *pictures showing the construction of the P.O.P moulds for the seashells*  
*(a) Modeled seashell burried halfway in a lump of clay (b) Hard paper used in place of a*  
*casting box (c) P.O.P mixture poured on the model (d) The other half of the model yet*  
*to be cast (e) Both halves of the model cast in P.O.P and (f) Model burried halfway in*  
*P.O.P*

After producing the moulds, they were dried in the sun for two days before pressing of the shells in clay commenced. A lump of clay was kneaded to expel any air trapped in it before rolling it into a slab form as shown in plate 3-6 (a) below. The moulds were assembled and dry cleaned with a soft sponge before using them for pressing. The slab of clay was cut into reasonable sizes that could easily fit into each of the mould so as to aid the pressing process and also to make the process easy and fast. The clay slab was gently pressed into each mould as shown in plates 3-6 (b and c) below to be able to get all the details that are registered in the mould to appear on the cast piece upon removal from the mould.



Plate 3- 6: *(a) Clay slab (b) P.O.P moulds (c) Pressing clay slab into the mould*

Each piece was removed from the mould after three hours when the piece was almost at leather hard state for the two halves to be joined to form a complete shell as shown in plate 3-7.



Plate 3- 7: *Pressed pieces of seashells removed from the moulds*

Since the seashells were pressed in halves, after removing the fettles from the ridges, the clay slip was applied to the ridges for joining in order to get a full shell. The seams of the various halves of the seashells were gently pressed together to get complete shells. After joining two halves together to form a shell, the fettles that appeared at the ridges were cleaned with a modelling tool and soft sponge as shown in plate 3-8 (c).



Plate 3- 8: *Cleaning of fettles (a) Applying clay slip to the seams of the shells (b) Joining two halves to get a full shell (c) Removing fettles at the ridges.*

The same procedure was employed and applied to all the other halves that were pressed with the P.O.P mould and joined.





Plate 3- 9: *Decorating the sea shells*

After cleaning the ridges off of all fittles, the various seashells were decorated by using simple tools like the modelling tool, turning tool, cutter etc. As shown in plate 3-10, the decorations were made on the shells to make them look natural. Incisions were made on them to depict their looks and feel in nature.



Plate 3- 10: *The application of clay slips onto the seashells*

Others were decorated with clay slip of different colours whereas others saw just a simple distortion in their natural look by hitting one side slightly to break the natural flow and make them exciting to behold. The seashells that were treated with special slips of different colours saw further enhancement of their beauty and uniqueness by coating them with colours out of the context of their natural look. With painting brushes, the slips were



applied onto the shells bearing in mind the shapes and sizes of the pieces as these little details could enhance or distort the beauty of the shell.

### **3.7.3. Combination of Throwing, Modelling and Pinching (The making of the pottery wares )**

Ideas were developed from some selected seashells into ceramic crockery and other domestic wares. After selecting the best ones, throwing and modelling were the main studio forming techniques that were employed in the making of the wares.



Plate 3- 11: *A replica of Mawe's Laxiasis (clay and painted with acrylic paint)*

The shell in plate 3-11 was modelled and later scooped after bringing out all the details neatly on it, just like it appears in nature. Looking at the features of the shell, the best domestic ware that could best fit its features was a flower vase. Later a flower vase was developed and produced from it which was meant to serve both functional and decorative purposes. The flower vase was done by throwing a cylinder and manipulating it slightly

to get the shape of the shell. Later the details on it were worked out with simple studio modelling tools and this made the vase very interesting.

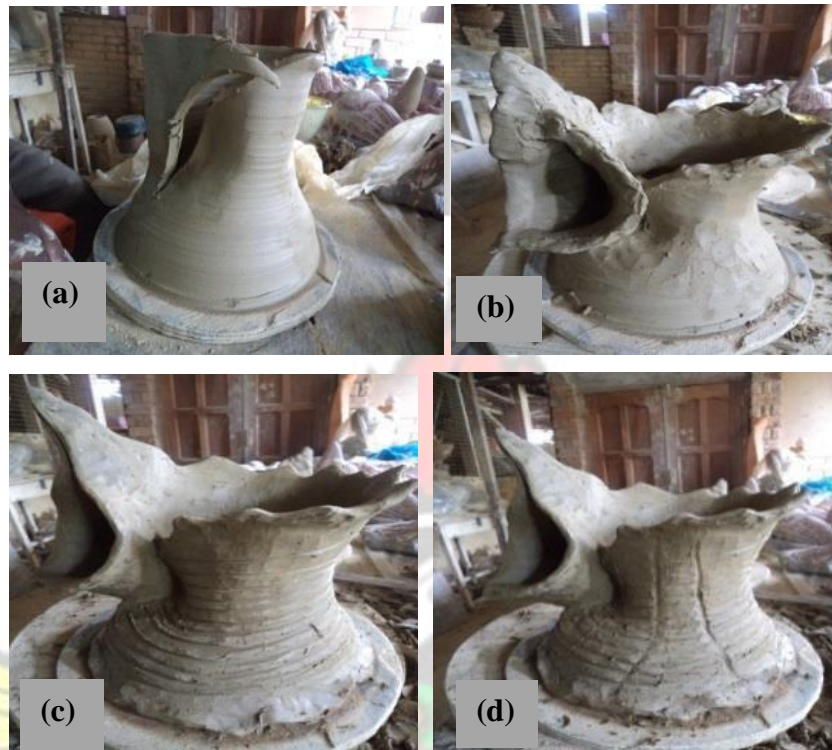


Plate 3- 12: *The development of flower vase from Mawe's Latiaxis*

*(a) a thrown piece with a demarcated line (b) manipulated piece*

*(c) Depicting the features of Mawe's Latiaxis (d) flower vase with seashell features*

Other shells were also manipulated into other functional pieces like fruit bowls, plates, teapots, tea cups and saucers, serving bowls, etc. as shown in plates 13 and 14. The fruit and salad bowls were thrown and allowed to dry to a workable state before the manipulation process began. The bowls went through various stages of handling until the required features of the seashell was achieved.

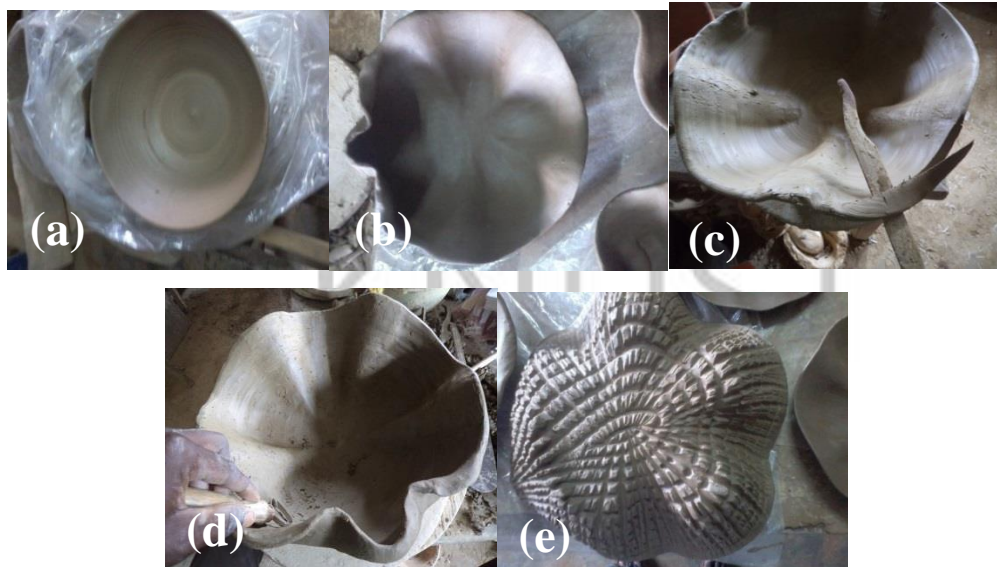


Plate 3- 13: *Pictures showing the stages of the making of fruit and salad bowls from seashell concept in clay. (a) a thrown bowl (b) manipulating to get the shape of a seashell (c) reshaping the bowl (d) cleaning the bowl (e) outer decoration of the fruit bowl*

Similarly, the serving plates, salad bowls, teapots, flower vases were also worked out from thrown pieces following the same procedure that was adopted in the making of the fruit bowls as described initially. The other domestic wares that were produced were the bowls with lids and open bowls. These wares came in sets of three and five; the same procedure was used in making all of them. With the making of the tea set, throwing and modelling were the main forming techniques employed as every piece was thrown and the tea pots were manipulated to possess features of the seashell. The cups and saucers were only decorated to possess some textures of the seashell but did not see any manipulation in their forms. Pictures showing the processes in the making of the bowls with lids are shown in plate 3-14.





Plate 3- 14: Pictures showing the making of the serving bowls (a) thrown bowl and lid (b) demarcated lines for the foot and handle (c) demarcated lines for foot and handle (d) fixing of foot (e) fixed handles on the bowl (f) fixed handle on the lid (g) decorating with a knife (h) finished bowl with lid (i) cleaning with a foam.





Plate 3- 15: *Picture showing bowls and teapots with seashell features*

### **3.8. Drying, Firing and Finishing**

After creating all the various forms, some were decorated by incising lines and creating textures on them. Others were also coated with clay slip of different colours to break the monotony and create variety and harmony in the pieces. After decorating them, pieces were allowed to dry in the shade to control rapid drying which could cause the wares to either warp or crack. At the bone dry state, some of the wares were fired using the gas kiln whereas others were fired in an electric kiln. Both kilns were used to observe the outcome of the effects of reduced and oxidized firing methods for further recommendations. It was observed that in the event of light out or no source of electricity, gas kiln could be used and almost the same result would be achieved; as that was clearly evident in the wares fired with either kilns.



Plate 3- 16: *The ceramic seashells (a) and (b) Shells in bone dry state and (c) and ( d) Shells in bisque state using the gas kiln*

The bisque fired wares were later segregated for the applicaiton of finishes in glaze, manganese washing and acrylic painting. To create an antique finish for the manipulated shell pottery wares and other replica seashells, the outer sections were coated with manganese and later washed to leave graded tones of black and buff. The inner area of the pottery wares, were however glazed. This was done to put the wares in a condition where they could be used domestically in the homes apart from the aesthetic value that they possessed; having a bearing on indigenous pottery type.





Plate 3- 17: *The application of manganese outside and glaze inside the pottery wares*

Most of the replica shells were painted with acrylic paint to depict the shells in their natural colours. Other shells were painted in bright and beautiful acrylic colours other than their natural colours with painting brushes and foams. After painting, an auto clear coat finish was also applied to make the shells look glossy and give it a hard surface.



Plate 3- 18: *Showing replica seashells coated with acrylic paints*

### 3.9. Gloss Firing

This is the second and final firing of ceramic wares. The table wares and other replica shells which were treated in manganese and glaze were carefully arranged in an

electric kiln and fired at a temperature of 1180°C. The firing lasted for about 10 hours after which the kiln was switched off and allowed to cool for 24 hours before it was opened for the wares to be removed.



**Plate 3- 19: Packed kiln with pottery wares and seashells for gloss firing**



**Plate 3- 20: Table wares finished in manganese and glaze**



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Analysis

Indigenous pottery had some domesticity about them and many scholars have affirmed the fact that women dominated the craft. Nonetheless, the effects of modernity on the practice have affected female participation and the craft has become more sculptural, thus making indigenous pottery products insignificant in the phase of modern appeal and consumption. The motivation for this project was to explore strategies to bring back the female craft and thus, make contemporary pottery take the meaning of the indigenous context.

The objectives of the study were to identify an appropriate female idiom that could contest the prevailing ceramic practices and exhibition concerns as Johnson (2005) has established that, every struggle to change our world needs a way to make sense of where we are, how we got here, and where to go; and the women's movement is no exception. The seashell was selected and used as a female idiom to project the feminine stance in pottery practice that the study sought to project. The second objective was to evolve exhibition strategies complementary of the course of feminism using pottery presentation and representation. This, the study sought to offer a general account of how a range of facts about indigenous pottery practices are observed and how they are systematically connected with contemporary practices. An exhibition strategy complimentary of the course of feminism using indigenous pottery presentation and representation that connects with contemporary practices was also developed.

Modelling, pressing, pinching and throwing was the main studio forming methods employed in producing the replica seashells in clay modelling themselves on the indigenous practices. Ideas were developed and ceramic crockery forms which had seashell features were produced. Clay slips of different colours were used to decorate some of the clay seashells and others were incised with lines and forms to insinuate the natural feel of some of the shells. Glaze was applied to the inner surface of the crockery and some of the shells that fused with the body and formed an intimate association that affected the finished surface. Manganese was applied to the outer surface which gave the crockery an antique look and touch.

The use of seashells and application of contemporary production methods, for indigenous effects, is to be seen as a model to illustrate that, the development and sustenance of pottery as a craft depends on the potential contribution of women. Finally, the study has hyped the effective understanding of indigenous pottery as philosophy has focused on the means of merging both indigenous and contemporary ideas, as well as forming and finishing techniques as a redirection for Ghanaian ceramic and pottery practices.

#### **4.2 The Feminine Touch to Pottery**

Hopper, (2000) has already indicated that, vessels are the universal feminine symbol; the womb of the Great Mother, shelter, protection, preservation, nourishment and fertility and that, they represent inwardness and inner values; bowls represent giving or offering and fertility.

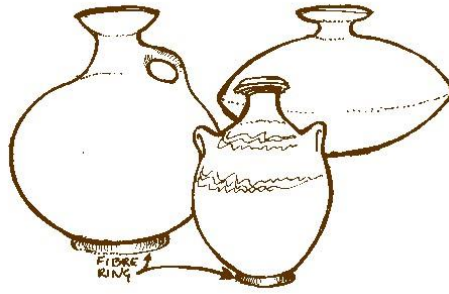


Figure 4- 1: *Indian and African water jars.* Hopper (2000)

Indigenous pottery, the once universal symbol of femininity which was often endowed with spiritual or symbolic significance gradually lost its essence in modernist representations and has now become masculine and more sculptural. Their individual beauty and values also got lost with technological advancement and modernist ideologies in contemporary practice. One belief about pottery-making is that the experience can be likened to creating life; in effect, a pot can be likened to the womb of a mother who gives birth to a child. It follows therefore that, the womb is a receptacle which holds life (Weida, 2011 and Barley, 1994).



Plate 4- 1: *Table wares finished in manganese and glaze*

The crockery as seen in plate 4-1 is a representation of Hopper's assertion that maybe by contemplation and study of the uses and meanings of pots of the past, we can infuse a greater understanding and content into our own developing works.

If facilities available make it almost impossible to compete with imported white wares and plastic products, we can enhance or improve upon our indigenous techniques with available local raw materials to produce highly competitive products for local consumption. The loss of the feminine principle of containing, enclosure or the womb coupled with the quest to respond to the needs of mankind on the proliferation of plastic products formed part of the basis of this study.

Clay vessels were made for a variety of reasons and purposes. Our varied cultural values, habits and geographical locations greatly influence the kinds of objects to make; thus whether functional or decorative or to serve both purposes. Each piece that was produced was very useful in essence because of its shape, form and function.

***Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub; It is the centre hole that makes it useful.***

***Shape clay into a vessel; It is the space within that makes it useful.***

***Cut doors and windows for a room; It is the holes that make it useful.***

***Therefore profit comes from what is there; Usefulness from what is not there.***

*(From Tao-TeChing by Lao Tsu. New Translation by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English. New York: Vintage Books.)*

Relating the poem to the idiom used for this project; the seashells, it is true that the holes in them make them useful because the hole is the abode for the molluscs that the shells hold. The molluscs in turn serve as food and a source of protein to humans and other animals. The crockery was produced to hold food and water which are very essential basic needs of every living thing. Women generally are responsible for the preparation of food in every family setting and thus, the crockery becomes one of the tools needed to enhance



the cooking and serving of food. Without the spaces in these clay vessels, their meaning and usefulness would be thwarted. The usage of the sea shells as research idiom brings on board a viable source of inspiration in nature that can spur up women's productivity in contemporary pottery. With sea shells as the main object of inspiration, women could produce variety of domestic wares ranging from bowls, cups, plates, cooking pots, lamp shades, light holders and flower vases that meets the aesthetic demands of contemporary pottery. This hunch is established in the manner the sea shells have been manipulated into tea sets, bowls, fruit bowls, light holders and flower vases. Though the wares are functional, their attractive features derived from the sea shells give them other aesthetic qualities that promote feminine participation in contemporary pottery production.

#### **4.3 Ladylike Aesthetic: Gazes on Sea Shells**

Throughout history many who played key role in the feminist art movement have shown generosity in their assessment of exploring how feminist artist devised representational strategies that counter the dominance of male standpoints, (Schor, Amos, Bee, Drucker, Fernández, Jones, Kaneda, Molesworth, Pindell, Schor and Wilding; 1999). Lu, (2001) shares in her opinion that, the ever innovative nature of feminist ideas in art brightens female sexuality and critique the visual symbols that limits women to heterosexual and maternal identities. It does this by giving continuous and serious attention to the distinctions of feminist art. Particularly, feminist art critics often relate feminist artworks to the transformative goals of feminism. Feminist artists, curators, critics, and art historians after shaping art practice and writing in 1975 paved the way for their innovative ideas to gain grounds in contemporary perspectives (Brodsky and Olin,

2008). Mermann-Jozwiak, (1993) argues that a sincerely female aesthetic will come into being once women have become reliable selves. She defines female aesthetics as subject to changes in women's historical situation.

The feminist view about aesthetics is now a contemporary practice engaged by feminist activist in all spears of life. Third wave thinkers have been comfortable with the redefinition of feminism to include any woman, who believes that gender inequality exists and affects their lives, and acts toward bridging the gap and as well balance the scales (Buszek, 1999). Shaw (2005) and Shusterman, (1992) have expressed their view that, generally, those who work in aesthetics often inquire into the ways that gender impacts the formation of artistic ideas and aesthetics. He further stress that feminist viewpoints in aesthetics are also adjusted to the cultural influences that exert power over subjectivity: thus the way art replicates and extends social formation of sexuality and identity and how all those features are framed by factors such as race, national origin, social position, and historical situation (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

According to Jones (1996), Judy Chicago's 1979 "Dinner Party" was termed controversial when it made its first appearance in Los Angeles and signalled a renewed interest in a cultural monument that has vexed historians and critics of contemporary art.

The "Dinner Party" was a monumental table in the form of a triangle which honours 1,038 women in western history, 39 of whom were represented at the table itself by elaborate needlepoint runners and ceramic plates decorated with motifs.

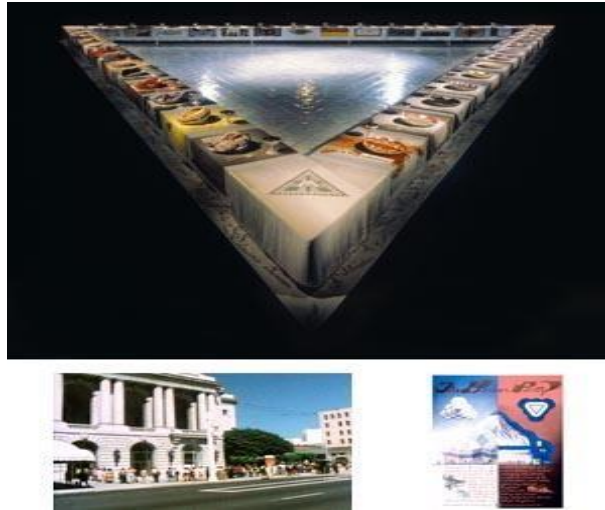


Figure 4- 2: *The Dinner Part.*(Top) Overview, (from bottom left) Long line to view *The Dinner Party* at San Francisco Museum of Art, 1979.

Seashells were used as the female idiom to intervene male dominance in contemporary Ghanaian pottery practices and some of its unique features that tend to project feminist ideologies that would revive female participation in contemporary pottery production were dwelled on. The clay sea shells look very natural, beautiful, and colourful and they were handmade. The study explored the various ways of insinuating the sea shell idea to meet some contemporary demands of pottery art.



Plate 4- 2: *Beautifully handmade shells from clay*



Viewing the shells in plate 4-2 through the feminine lenses is relevant to assessing the qualities of the shells in relation to female participation in families, communities and nations as a whole because seashells are mostly collected by women and children, (Tiraa-Passfield, 1996). Seashells are a delight to watch because their intrinsic beauty can be likened to the inherent beauty of a woman that makes her adorable. The compositional qualities of women are made up of forms and features that are harmoniously and symmetrically placed to reveal both their inner and outer beauty. This gives the shells a captivating aesthetic impact upon looking at them. Most sea shells are the hard protective coverings of marine animals, and a critical look at the forms and features of these shells make them highly protective shields for the molluscs, (Parras, 2001).

At least, 25 named handicrafts that utilise seashells are made by women though some are very delicate; they are occasionally used, (Tiraa-Passfield, 1996). The fragility of a seashell can therefore be linked to the delicateness of a woman within the context of this study. Though they look fragile, some are very solid and pleasant to hold. The shells we find at the beaches are mostly wrecked by the waves and before they arrive at the beach, they hit against the rocks with some cracking and others losing some parts. A woman may look delicate, but one can be sure that she can stand against any storm in her life once she makes up her mind to succeed just like her male counterparts. During those moments of her life, she becomes the pillar upon which her child(ren) lean(s) and the perfect role model to imitate. The delicate nature of women and seashells also have a reflection in clay products. The products of clay look durable but very fragile, and should be handled with care.



Plate 4- 3: *Seashells displayed at the beach*

The arrangement of the shells in their own habitat as shown in plate 4-3 seeks to reintroduce certain forms of artificiality to natural environment for aesthetic considerations. It is symbolically, a representation of ancestral/descendant's relationship through artistic manipulations and their derivation. It explores exhibition strategies that evoke the indigenous presentation and representation in the contemporary practice. Indigenous potters mostly displayed their wares with no hard and fast exhibition rules as it is the case in today's practice where the wares must be displayed on plinths in a gallery. In relating this exhibition to the roles that the original makers played in the lives of their families; the protective role of the mothers can be likened to how shells protect the molluscs from predators. Almost all shells have peculiar forms that allow safe and comfortable hiding for the molluscs. Likewise, a mother will protect her child at all times irrespective of the child's age and position in life. Elder Ballard (2013) says. "A mother's nurturing love arouses in children, from their earliest days on earth, an awakening of the memories of love and goodness they experienced in their pre-mortal existence." He

declares, “Because our mothers love us, we learn, or more accurately remember, that God also loves us.” The protection that mothers offer possesses great warmth, strength and passion, and naturally women are stronger vessels in their protective roles than men within this context. The serenity of the shore that these shells have been displayed buttress the key roles that mothers play in the development of the society.

#### **4.4 The Domestic Pottery**

Vicchio, (2001) has stated that, the potter is fascinated by the style and social context of earlier work, but is also challenged by trying to re-create the processes that brought that work to life- the clays, glazes and firing techniques. For some potters, manipulating the clay, reacting to the material and how it is handled is the entire motivation they need; others find inspiration in a diverse array of sources, he further stresses. Pottery became a true art form, clays became more refined, new glazes, decorative techniques and firing methods were discovered in China, Japan and Classical Greece, of which many are still in use today (Scott, 2007).

According to Weida, literature from archaeology, art history, and cultural/gender studies suggests that women were the first makers of clay objects and that females are often associated with nature, earth, and domesticity or the home (features commonly linked with clay as a material). One can then say that women have done well on work of art and the focus of some females on gender issues have often been on their bodies that are portrayed in the works they make. This buttress Hopper’s assertion that the vessel is the universal symbol of fertility. Whilst women produced pottery for domestic use, the men produced wares mainly for religious and magical proposes. Domestic wares such as bowls, plates,



cups, grinding bowls, cooking pots etc have been taken over by plastics and water coolers are no longer attractive to the contemporary man due to technological advancement which has led to the manufacture of refrigerators and water dispensers. This situation has caused female participation and general consumption of pottery products to dwindle in this modern era. Though plastics products dominate today's domestic wares because of its durability, light weight and low cost, it has a negative effect on humans and the environment. Serving hot foods in plastics can increase the risk of kidney stones and also serving acidic foods in plastic can cause melamine products in plastics to contaminate the food, Hodgekiss (2013).

In 2013, a lead researcher, Chia-Fang Wu of Kaohsiung Medical University in Taiwan said that plastic table ware may release large amounts of melamine when used to serve high temperature foods; he advised that it is safer to serve hot foods with ceramic crockery like the ones displayed in plate 4-4.



Plate 4- 4: *Table wares made by manipulating seashells, finished in manganese and glaze.*

In order for domestic pottery products to fit into contemporary era of products, domestic pottery products were developed and produced from sea shells in this project. The essence

was to make them more stylish and to serve both utilitarian and decorative purposes. This project work also serve as a basis for formally trained women in the art to engage in different styles of productions that fits into contemporary line of products and still maintain the content of domesticity in their wares.

#### **4.5 Finishes**

The choice of finishes for pottery could be influenced by the purpose the product is intended for as well as what the artist wishes to portray in his pieces and as an artist, the ability to make good use of available raw materials to produce a work of art provides a unique style that distinguishes the artist to that finish. Both indigenous and contemporary pottery practices have experimented and acquired different means of finishing pottery wares. Garth Clark as cited in Vicchio (2001) suggests that a new way of appreciating pottery wares or clay vessels is to treat the entire pot as an image. Firing pottery products to relatively low temperatures in bonfire-firing; which are still in use in some parts of the world today made the pots porous but the pots were reasonably efficient, (Cooper, 2000). Cooper further states that the porosity was a desirable feature for pots intended to hold water in a hot climate as the constant evaporation from the outside helps keep the content cool. As the needs of man kept changing, finishes like burnishing was devised to render the pottery wares impervious, increase its strength and make the surface smoother while other pots had the surface painted with vegetable ‘glaze’, especially in Africa to achieve same results. The styles of finishes applied to clay products keeps widening as modern applications give room to explore multiple materials in order to acquire the most appropriate finish for a particular pottery product. In the

traditional way of improving the aesthetic of pots, potters in the region solely depend on incision and smoking as finishing for their pieces. In this project glazes, manganese, coloured slips and acrylic paints were used to finish the pieces.

The crockery produced by manipulating sea shells were finished in both glazes and manganese. The choice of manganese for the outside and glaze for the inside was for the wares to have an antique touch and at the same time be useful. The idea was to depict the look and touch of indigenous pottery in contemporary practice. Indigenous pottery was blackened with ebony seed in some local pottery communities whereas others used sawdust and green leaves and grass during firing to achieve the same finish. These finishes were possible because they used the open firing technique but in this case, because an electric kiln was used for the firing, it would be impossible to throw in any combustible material to blacken the wares.



Plate 4- 5: *Clay seashells and tableware finished in glaze, manganese and acrylic paints*

There was a sense of uniqueness and individuality with indigenous pottery types because the firing temperature were not controlled like how the contemporary type is been controlled. But the use of manganese also offers potters the freedom to wipe and deepen application of manganese to give unique finishes.



The replica sea shells were painted in beautiful bright colours using acrylic paints. Some of the sea shells were painted in their natural colours. Other shells were painted in bright colours create varieties. A significant number of the shells were also finished in coloured slips. The slips appeared dull after firing but they also had a unique appeal. The shells in arrangement showed various species of shells, showing variety of finishes. The finished pieces were catchy because of the bright colours. Naturally, females are noted for bright and warm colours, and these were meant to further espouse the feminist ideologies using the sea shells as an idiom.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

Pottery making probably originated because clay is a common material over most of the earth's surface. Throughout the development of man, after the gradual change from nomadic hunting and farming, clay has probably been the most consistently used material for improving the quality of life, thus, pottery developed as a response to the needs of mankind. There was some domesticity about the products by the indigenous potters and many scholars have affirmed the fact that women dominated the craft (Berns, 1993). Nonetheless, the effects of modernity on the practice have affected female participation and the craft has become more masculine, thus making indigenous pottery products lose its meaning in the phase of modernity, in appeal and consumption. The motivation for this project was to explore strategies to bring back the female participation in the craft to make contemporary pottery meaningful. It is not that women have not been economically active or productive; it is rather that they have often not been able to claim their autonomy in the pottery practice in the phase of modernism.

Over the last few decades, the participation and contribution of women to the growth and development of pottery as a craft has lost its recognition in both practice and theory with the transformation of pottery to ceramics. These transformations and lack of recognition reflects the partial participation of women in various aspects of its growth, both through formal and informal production in recent years. Recently, a number of researchers and gender activists as well as feminist artists have drawn on models to show that the

development and sustenance of pottery as a craft depends on the potential contribution of women (Acheampong and Fofack 2012 and Lu, 2002).

Reviewing related literature on feminism, feminism and aesthetics as well as feminist art, it was noted that feminism is a response to male dominance and a source of enlightenment and empowerment for the female potter in the contemporary practice. Feminism has been a trend in aesthetics and feminist artists appropriated images of women and used them as a means to propel their agenda which is to confront their subordination in society. Feminist art was found out to be an art that reach out and affirms women and validates their experience as artists and teach the basis of their values (Mckay, 2005).

Women have played a major role in the making of pottery because they have the skill, right attitude and patience for it. They have been involved with the sustenance and preservation of this tradition to date despite the imposition of pottery with its sculptural touch and masculinity in contemporary practice. Though men were involved in some aspects of pottery, women are naturally endowed with endurance and patience which are attributes needed in the practice. Various studio forming techniques employed in the execution of the works were pinching, modelling, pressing and throwing and they were finished in acrylic paints, manganese and glaze to depict aspects of femininity in pottery production in antiquity. This project work therefore becomes the basis for which women would be encouraged to engage in different style of participation that fits into contemporary practice and still maintain the domesticity of indigenous practice in their



art.

## 5.2 Conclusions

Berns (1993) affirms that a closer look at contemporary pottery exposes the gender biases that honour men's "high" over women's "low" craft, making men the presumed creators of these works. This is as a result of the introduction of ceramics by the Europeans through colonization which changed the style and approach of pottery from the usual domestic wares to more sophisticated sculptural pieces. The change in presentation and the representation of the practice have, however, been modelled in this process and caused women to be further marginalized. The educational upbringing and work makes us look for female mentors and so we struggle with our artistic ideas and even our identity as women (Weida, 2011). In trying to connect with others who had feelings of doubts of being female ceramic artists and educators, the motivation was to explore exhibition strategies that would amend the current trend to resurrect women's participation in formally trained pottery. Cheryl Buckley (2001) as cited in Weida (2011) is right in her assessment that "The relationships between ceramics and feminism are fruitful avenues for further investigation . . . because of the longevity, pervasiveness and complexity of women's engagement with this area of cultural activity."

These situations called for the search for an appropriate feminine idiom as a counterpoint to the prevailing ceramic practices and its representation. Studying both indigenous and contemporary ceramic productions reveals similarities in techniques employed. The series of exhibitions displayed in this project creates a pattern and meaning that women have invented and learn from it. Women were the first makers of clay objects and that females are often associated with nature, earth and domesticity since they double as both the bread

makers and home managers. Weida has specified that as potters, we speak in physical references to the body and the pot (“lip”, “foot”, “belly”, and “shoulder” of the vessel). This reference of pottery to the body informed the development of ceramic crockery from the seashell which was identified as the appropriate feminine idiom for the project.

So much experience has been gained with this project; owing to the fact that women ceramists (both potters and ceramic sculptors) are faced with a unique history and heritage. Being interested in feminism does not mean women feel troubled by men we are different in form, beliefs and reasoning. If pots are about our bodies and women make pots, then the pots communicate some meaning to its audience. The shape and function of pottery can lead to mixed feelings in female potters who embrace bodily meanings of pottery and may avoid ideas of stereotypical femininity.

One may also wonder what possibilities are left for female artists if they choose to engage in pottery production once again. How can the female potter reclaim her own thought, autonomy, and originality in the making and use of her pottery products? Both genders have had some western associations with pottery practices but there is a feminine touch missing in the contemporary pottery practice which could be the underlying cause of less female participation in the current trend. In this project work, an attempt has been made to map out roles of physicality and femininity within the many relationships between gender and pottery. This project has touched on space in terms of domestic area and work spaces as they impact, define and are defined by women’s artistic processes and prowess which means that an emphasis on women is currently important in this field.

### 5.3 Recommendations

From the research findings and conclusions drawn, it is recommended that:

There are concerns that gender identity and gender specific behaviour could be attributed to instinctive influences. This factor plays a role and its relative importance may possibly be investigated to create an opportunity that would rejuvenate complementary gender roles in the practice where practitioners, especially students would be given the chance to develop concepts that would depict their inner values and beliefs in their wares; this could be dependent on the person's gender. Simple studio forming techniques such as modelling, throwing and pressing could be used to make wonderful pieces in isolation or by blending two or more. Both the indigenous and contemporary ceramic practices can use available simple finishes to enhance the aesthetic value of the wares.

Additionally, there could be an education which enlightens and gives a sense of freedom in understanding the history of pottery and its makers. In understanding the history of the practice and the effects of colonialism, feminism can serve as a source of validation and empowerment to female students and practitioners. This education can focus on the difference between pottery and ceramic sculpture to help students and potters carve a niche for themselves in designing and producing outstanding forms for their pieces. Finally, the original feminine principle of containing and enclosure associated with pottery could as well be altered when a clay vessel develops cracks or completely shatters during firing or handling. Instead of discarding these rubbles, a thorough research could be carried out into other uses for these and artists could create exhibition strategies to showcase them while keeping some as archaeological findings which would be another way of preserving the heritage and traditions of the practice for future studies.



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