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## Op-art and personal practices in contemporary ceramic art

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### Abstract

While working on all experiences related to real life such as wars, riots, happiness and sadness, depressions, births and deaths and presenting art to the audience in this way are artistic manners, idea that it is unnecessary of transferring subject and ideas in an emotional and narrative theme is also an artistic manner. Op Art (1965, America) which results from this idea is response to narrative expressions, emotional manifestations and searching for subject. Trend which has a base in which optical effects, named as visual illusion, form main theme aims to create emotional changes with illusions in well-established works which are formed by striking aesthetic elements, to form illusions in perception, to show non-existing forms as if existing and so to impress audience in terms of vision. The subject of this work is to transfer development process in its relationship with other artistic trends and practicing samples from past to present belonging to Op-Art Trend with theme of visual illusion which emerges in America and Europe in 1960s as being one of forms of expressing emotion and ideas by status of the world and artists at the end of two great world wars in responding to this situation and to present practicing samples with personal ceramic works in contemporary ceramic art.

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### 1. Introduction

History is one of the most important effects which determine the sense of art of the communities in the periods they live in. Experiences, senses, felt for experiences and socio-cultural structure of the communities play a fundamental role in the embodiment of the art. When all stages of history of a community are analyzed to the core, it is inevitable to see the effect of the history on art.

Artists experiencing the Second World War and all the negativeness brought by the war tended to doing different things while expressing their opinions. Expressive and emotional narrations are among these tendencies. Opt-Art is a part of the movements against the emotional art after the war.

Pioneers of the movement which is described as “modern art movement emerging in 1960s; it tries to reflect the optical perceptions of people geometrically and benefits from severe contradictions especially black and white contrast and geometric patterns” (Germaner, 1996) and aim to create visual illusions, targeted to present the two-dimensional image as three dimensional, moving and vibrating. They produced impressive works with visual effects.

“Op-Art includes abstract art works aiming to create sense of depth or three dimensional illusions. West Art has striven to give the effect of three-dimension on two-dimensional images since the Renaissance. Op Art is the

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outcome of this tendency on abstract art. In Op Art pictorial work is abstracted from other characteristics and reduced to only three-dimensionality illusion. In order to obtain this effect, rhythmical arrangement of geometric patterns and modeling on geometric patterns with colors.”(Sözen & Tanyeli, 2003). It is possible to make most of these effects more creative and aesthetic by using ceramic materials. Despite the technical difficulties of ceramic, it presents endless advantages with respect to the created works and their artistic values. Ceramic, gaining plastic and artistic value with the imagination and notion of artist has been used as the sole modern art material in many places of the world with the modern art movements after 1960; and with the creation of first ceramic works it started to secure its existing position in the art field. In this period, aim, interaction, techniques and aesthetic searches of preliminary ceramics underlie the basics of today’s modern ceramic art with the artistic perception.

In the modern ceramic art, as well as the theme which enriches the work, visual, artistic balance and style-content relation are important. Perceptions of the receivers (viewers) are fundamental as well as the expressed thing. When considered from this perspective, the importance of the strong construction function necessary for a work on the success arises. If all these values can be rendered through creative intelligence in a systemized an aesthetic ways, it is possible to mention the artistic value of that work. This general concept has formed the basis of works of the Pioneer artists presented in this paper and individual ceramic works with visual illusions.

## 2. Op-Art and Visual Illusion

Visual illusion, a phenomenon deceiving the viewer visually and perceptively, composes the main aim of Op-Art movement took root in Europe and USA in 1960s and gained popularity within a short time among artists. “Op-Art artists dealing with optical effects of styles and colors especially, want to create an interaction on the canvas with unexpected flashings and dazzling.”(Gombrich, 1992)

Artistic compositions, created by assembling various color and textures, lines and stripes in a planned, calculated and aesthetically coherent way, cause an optical illusion. The viewers perceive the colors and styles differently or are mistaken by being aware of new styles which are not possible in reality because of that illusion. The impression intended to be created through this way underlies Op-Art. Thus the first thing coming to the mind about Op-Art is visual illusion that is optical illusion.

In most of the resources, dictionary meaning of visual illusion also called optical illusion, optical art, illusion, delusion, deception:

“The situation of not seeing the lines and shapes as they are because of their position, illusion.”

(Eroğlu, 2006)

“Eye deception resulting in misconception of objects under certain conditions”

(Turkish Language Foundation Glossary of Cinema and Television (Electronic Version, Access: 27.03.2010)

Artists wanted to express this wording in various ways in the periods they live in. Contrast, vibration, swirling, warping, contradiction and stretching moves have added the works characteristics having optical effects. Another definition of illusion in art is that:

“Illusion which is an art term means recognition of the figures in an artistic work as objects and facts in the real world. Figures are artistic elements referring to the facts; it is only possible in the existence of illusions to receive them as the facts they are referring to. So, illusion means «reproduction» of reality in an art work and it usually enables description of three-dimensional real objects on a two-dimensional surface. With this purpose, illusion techniques such as light-shadow and model are used. It is not possible to mention illusion in the arts of communities which does not or very rarely use these techniques and thus not going beyond the fact that art surface is two-dimensional.” (Sözen & Tanyeli, 2003)

“Optical art which is arranged by composing recession and ridges and which gives different images when looked from different perspectives became more common with the usage of Optic Art in sculpture, ceramic, architecture and graphic arts” (Turani, 1968)

### 2.1. Relation between Visual Illusion and Perception and Other Art Movements

Visual illusion is interrelated with perception and psychology. Vision and perception compose the basics of visual perception. The definition of the perception underlying the illusion is that;

“Perception means receiving, interpreting, choosing and arranging the sensual information in psychology and cognitive sciences” (Büyükcelen, C. 2007) Seen geometric units are perceived, interpreted and arranged in

geometric illusion. The relationship between visual illusion and perception arises from the geometric illusion of perception.

The name of Optical Art was firstly used in “The Responsive Eye” exhibition in Museum of Modern Art in New York City (Moma) for the works composed of geometric compositions enabling perceptual duality. However, Optical Art started to come forward in 1960 when Josef Albers first produced his theories and works based upon important resources. In this period while many artists of the movement created works focusing on moving, waving and vibration feeling and eye movement, they were largely affected by Kinetic Art movement.

Kinetic Art created with the description of the movement notion is one of the most important movements of 1950s. Effects of the movements’ works arise from not because they are moving but they give the impression of movement. “Op-Art includes structures effect of who depend on light or movement, and this shows it has the same notion with Kinetic Art” (Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art, 1999)

Op-Art is also interrelated with Constructivist geometric figuration methods and widely utilized them. Movement having works based on optical illusions represented by Josef Albers and Vasarely (Figure 1, Figure 2), brought a new optical image to Constructivism and a new optical image which does not respect for scientific perspective. Illusion artists have the coherent eye phenomenon like constructivists being aware of the constructivist notion and importance of coherency and balance. Because of this, they aimed to create images causing physical effect in brain or eye and leading the receiver to amazement and deception.

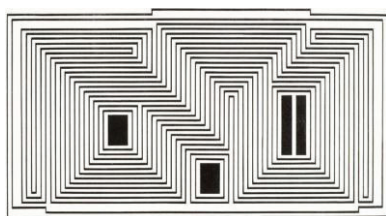


Figure 1: Josef Albers (1888 – 1976) “Sanctuary”,  
Lithography, 22 x 40.1 cm, 1942,  
[www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org) - Modern Museum of Arts New York  
(30.06.2009)



Figure 2: Victor Vasarely (1908-1997), “Torony II”,  
Acrylic Painted Wood Sculpture, 1964,  
62.23 x 45.72 x 6.35 cm,  
[www.masterworksfineart.com](http://www.masterworksfineart.com) (11.12.2009)

“With the domination of abstract art, classical arts have been reduced; expression and perception gained importance. Abstract Art defined as “not being objective and figurative” includes arrangements created with geometric or morph images composed as a result of usage of style elements such as color, line, body, tone in a way which is not similar to known objects.”(Eczacıbaşı Encyclopedia of Art, 1997) The most general usage of abstract art visually is among decoration examples. The movement being on the same line with Op Art with this respect and it improved in 20th century.

Op-Art caused many art movements containing geometric abstractions to arise and also it gave birth to movements such as Expressionism, Minimal Art. Arts, sculptures and spatial works aiming perceptual content such as space, movement, vibration with the relationship of style elements considering optic operation are created. Intertwined link between Op-Art and Abstract Art arises from this.

The movement arose from the effects of abstract art and it is again interrelated indirectly with the Orphism movement which is again an abstract art product. Orphism, aiming to examine the color and light effects without dependence to a natural object, is the representation of a new structure composed of artist’s imagination.

Op-Art is in harmony with Cubism movement which is based on comparting the objects by analyzing and assembling these parts with a geometric interpretation, with respect to visual coherency, geometric plan and move phenomenon. And again Futurism has been affected from Cubism, because they have a common geometric coherency, and composes a new comparted visual phenomenon. It aims to assemble the different simultaneous images of the expressed moves.

Suprematism focused on assembling the basic geometric forms with a constructive method, has a very interrelated notion with Optical Art. In Suprematism which is an abstract art movement and philosophy developed by Soviet artist Malevic, the first examples were produced with composition formed with geometric shapes such as square, rectangular and circular, like Op-Art. In later development periods, various color and cut geometric shapes assemble and overlapped reproduced and thus structures gained three-dimensionality

### 3. From Past to Present Visual Illusion Work Examples

#### Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1971)

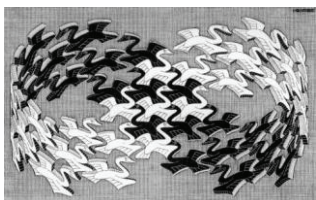


Figure 3: "Swans", 1956, (www.mcescher.com/) (30.06.2009)

#### Bridget Riley (1931- )

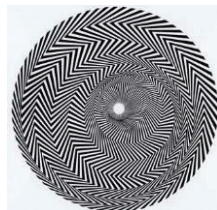


Figure 4: "Untitled", Screen Printing, 1964, www.karstenschubert.com(29.09.2009)

#### Jesus Raphael Soto (1923 – 2005 Fransa)

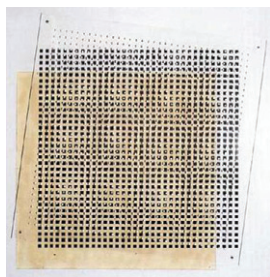


Figure 5: "Metamorphosis", 100 x 100 cm, 1954, www.jr-soto.com (30.06.2009)

#### Renate Buser (1961, Barmelweid)



Figure 6: "Tower Piece", Print on Branda, 17,5x18,5 m, 2006-2007, www.renatebuser.ch (18.05.2011)

### 3.1. Work Examples Have Visual Illusion from Ceramic Art

#### Elizabeth Fritsch ( 1940, İngiltere )



Figure 7: "Optical Pot", Stoneware, 23 x 32 cm, 1980 www.elizabethfritsch.com (21.09.2008)

#### Beate Andersen ( 1942, Danimarka )



Figure 8: "Thrown Bowl", Stoneware, 11 cm, 1994, www.beate-andersen.dk (30.09.2008)

#### Jonathan Middlemiss ( 1949, İngiltere )



#### Robert Dawson ( 1953, İngiltere )





Figure 9: “Illusion Vessel 13”, 2002,  
www.middlemissart.com (12.07.2008)

Figure 10: “Tiled Room”, 360 x 270 x 270 cm, 1999,  
www.thebesttimeoftheday.blogspot.com (12.07.2008)

### Greg Payce (1956, Alberta)



Figure 11: “Untitled”, 91 cm, 1999, Kanada. (Postmodern Ceramics, p.43)

### 3.2. Personal Practices



Figure 12 ( Personal Photo Archive)



Figure 13 ( Personal Photo Archive))



Figure 14 ( Personal Photo Archive)



Figure 15 ( Personal Photo Archive)

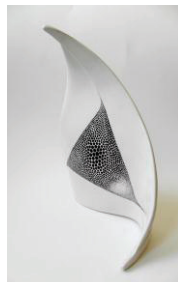


Figure 16 ( Personal Photo Archive)



Figure 17( Personal Photo Archive)



Figure 18 ( Personal Photo Archive)



Figure 19 ( Personal Photo Archive)



Figure 20 ( Personal Photo Archive)

#### 4. Conclusion

Transfer of feelings and opinions, concerns, wishes and emotions for life through art and presenting these with the works created by attributing a meaning are among the reasons for why art exists. However, it is a fact that the concern to transfer a message through art does sometimes limit the artists. This limitation results in creating not original works.

In this work through which original and personal examples of Op-Art movement, formed in order to show that it is possible to produce aesthetically and artistically valuable works without being concerned about transferring social or communal message, in ceramic art are analyzed, I wanted to reflect and prove the notion that effective and artistic works can be produced without any emotional expression. Op-Art, in contradistinction to the movements arose in parallel with the worlds existing situation in 1960s, is formed as a reaction to the expressionist movements of the period and it aimed to show that works can be produced without any concern as to give an emotional message. With this respect, the movement hides that it is also expressionism to react a notion and produce works with this reaction. This movement has been mostly used in painting and graphic arts since the period it arose; works produced in ceramic field is rare. In this work formed on a deficiency from this aspect, it is believed that original applications are important in that they set a precedent to visual illusional works in ceramics field.

Personal Practices in this work which aims to show the energetic and stunning characteristics of Op Art in three-dimensional ceramic forms and surfaces, and object come into prominence in pictorial notion. When we look at ceramics history, it is seen that optical works are mostly used in glazed image tiles among decoration notion. In glazed tiles, the aim is not to process Op-Art. However, the most prominent features of this movement are provided on glazed tiles with the repetition of the shapes and it gave the impression of illusional moving by covering the atmosphere. These artistic features used even in past are exhibited among modern approaches of the world with applications presented in this work and in a way old and new are harmonized and presented in a modern approach. Different from the works produced in old times, many innovations may be brought with sufficient technological qualities and contribution can be made to the works.

In Personal Ceramic Practices presented through this work, new visual illusion patterns, many elements exist together and compose an order, are used in shapes and voluminous forms having a plastic value and visual illusion is processed with various ceramics techniques.

Surface-form relationship is evaluated with many respects, unit usage and level areas are tried to be transferred voluminous. Elements strengthening the visual illusion are added to individual works and tested illusion can be created under these circumstances or not.

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