

Art Deco of Blue-and-White Porcelain

ART DECO DE LA PORCELAINE BLEUE -BLANCHE

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Abstract: Blue-and-White Porcelains were once the mainstream art in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, which were profuse in decoration themes and adept in decoration techniques, thus, being the perfect integration of sculpture, color, technique and artistic conception.

Keywords: Blue-and-White Porcelain, Art Deco

Résumé: La porcelaine bleue –blanche était une fois l’art traditionnel dans la province de Yunan. Les dynasties des Ming et des Qing, qui étaient abondantes en thèmes de décoration et adeptes en les techniques de décoration, sot donc l’intégration parfaite de sculpture, de couleurs, des techniques et de conceptions artistiques.

Mots-clés: la porcelaine bleue –blanche, Art Déco

Blue-and-White Porcelain is a once-fired underglaze porcelain at a high temperature of about 1300°C after the porcelain body is colored with cobalt and painted with clear ceramic glaze. Underglaze cobalt will take on blue when it is fired at high temperature, and thus, being called “Blue-and-White” (Gao Yingzi, 2000). Since Blue-and-White Porcelain was created in Tang Dynasty, it became the mainstream porcelain in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, and even the carrier of oriental civilization for CHINA – “A Country Famed for Her Porcelain”.

1. THE DECORATION THEMES OF BLUE-AND-WHITE PORCELAIN

The decoration themes of Blue-and-White Porcelain covers a wide range, including daily life, historical myth, legend, nature creature, tree, flower and fruit, garden, mountain and river, dragon and phoenix, cloud and water, character pattern and religious pattern, etc.

1.1 TREE, FLOWER & FRUIT: this group of designs are usually loquat, litchi, grape, guava, cucurbit, lotus, flat peach, peony, lotus flower, chrysanthemum,

plum blossom, banana, bamboo, leading an ox, lily, camellia, China rose, glossy ganoderma, etc., all of which are endowed with auspicious moral, for example, lily symbolizes “Love For All Seasons”, twin lotus represents “Love Between Two” and so on.

1.2 DAILY LIFE: such as netting, farming, herding, swinging lady, frolic children, etc., which were mainly created during Jiajing Reign and Wanli (Shen Zong's reign) in Ming Dynasty by folk kilns. The scenes of people’s daily lives, such as “Chanting and Appreciating the Spring Scenery in Countryside”, “Sitting Alone to Sense the Wind Through the Pines”, “Urging the Guest to Stay in a Rainy Day” and so on, are vividly reproduced in these peaceful, beautiful and elegant pictures, which reflect people’s rich imagination and expectation for happiness,

1.3 NATURE CREATURES: This group of designs include wild goose, crane, goose, rooster, mandarin duck, magpie and peacock; and quadrupeds like tiger, deer, elephant and rabbit; insects like bee, butterfly, dragonfly and rearhorse; fish like carp, shrimp and crab, as well as some imaginative animals such as kylin and hippocampus, and dynamic dragon and phoenix and different patterns of dragons, phoenixes, clouds, water and so on.

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1.4 RELIGIOUS CHARACTER PATTERNS: In these patterns, age-old branches are twisted into different Chinese characters that have auspicious meanings, some of which are quoted from sutra, sanscrit, Tibetan or palindrome. The decoration themes that are related to religious doxy are usually some symbolic patterns, such as “Seven Treasures”, “Eight Treasures”, “Flaming Pearl”, etc.

2. THE ART DECO TECHNIQUES OF BLUE-AND-WHITE PORCELAIN

The blue patterns on porcelain body are drawn with cobalt and are once-fired designs after coated by glaze. This technique has broken through the traditional decoration methods like carving, lining, printing, embossed sculpture, etc., and absorbed other crafts in cloth and gold plate decorations, which has achieved a clean and elegant decoration effect (Liang Rensheng, 1991). The decorations in Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties are mainly patterns, which are to achieve an ornamental purpose. But in Qing Dynasty, most of them are brushworks, many of which may be imitating works.

2.1 Line Drawing: It is similar to the outline drawing of Chinese ink painting, emphasizing that lines should be well spaced and be of proper density to achieve a balanced and rich artistic effect.

2.2 Exquisite “Fenshui” Technique: Just like the traditional Chinese painting, in which different objects are distinguished from each other only by different shades of the ink. That is so called “Chinese ink can be divided into five different shades”. This technique of traditional Chinese painting is used in the decoration of Blue-and-White Porcelain, which becomes a unique tactic of decoration and embodies the Chinese style.

2.3 The Combination of Outline Drawing and “water division”: It is to draw the outline with pigments in dark and light colors. Due to the fact that the materials adopted for the body of the porcelain wares and its base, the ingredients and color shades of the pigments as well as the styles of the painters are various, the decorative pictures on blue and white porcelains can be divided into a bright and smooth “wet painting” style and a powerful and unsophisticated “withered painting” style.

2.4 Emphasis on the composition of the picture and the art of composition: Since blue and white porcelains are varied in modeling, the decorative framing thus shall be flexible, which can position with flowers or fill in the space with leaves in order to achieve in a desired decorative picture; or to draw the top of the flowers for positioning, connect it with the stems and then add leaves to decorate some required space. A decorative frame integrated with bending, winding and connecting becomes a type style of blue and white porcelains in terms of mode of composition, which emphasizes exaggerated changes in images and alterative

composition of twig and leaf, for instance, the picture decoration of “A Bundle of Lotus” which is a blue and white porcelain ware of Xuande times, and the decorative pattern of winding lotus around the plate as illustrated on the “Blue and white Plate with Mandarin Ducks and Lotus”. It skillfully adopts a composition principle of “leaving no room for wind whilst saving great space for riding a horse” that is typical in traditional Chinese paintings, and it puts weight on the combination of being open and subtle while real and imaginary, which can achieve the structured beauty with rhythms.

3. DECORATIVE AESTHETICS FEATURES OF BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAINS

3.1 Beauty in shapes

Blue and white porcelains generally can be classified into two main categories, namely funerary wares and utility wares such as cups, pots, kettles, plates, holders, bowls, vases, which mainly adopt a bionic way of modeling.

It can be modeled on the basis of flowers, fruits and animals, such as the cup with a design of chickens or cup with a design of grapes, etc. The blue and white porcelain blow with a design of crab apples is a very example. A pattern of crab apples actually means “full of wealth and fame” and “treasures filling the home”. The blow edges are open; along the edges it is plum, solid and light in colors. The blow slight shrinks inward, with petal patterns on the body of the bowl. By pressing convex curves which can divide the bowl into four equal parts, the bowl wall appears to be convex, and the whole bowl is so curved, vivid and cute, just like the crab apple flowers.

It can be modeled according to the images of the fabled figures bionically, either as a whole or in parts. The curves will be abundant and fluently when taking a female as the prototype, the body will be plum and slippery and the modeling will be saturated, beautiful, quiet and gentle. However, when taking a male as the prototype, it then will be strong and straight-forward. For the blue-and-white prunus vase of the Ming dynasty instance, according to the records in Comments of Yinliu House on Porcelains: “The bottle-neck of the vase is narrow while the neck is short, the shoulders are broad and gradually narrowed to the legs, it reaches the feet above just above ...” the outline of broad shoulders, the curves from the bottle-neck to the shoulders is shrank greatly, and even the curves from the shoulder to the lower part is also a narrow-down arc curve that is saturated. The whole vase make people feel great, stable and solid, as if it were a general that is accustomed to

battles and can get everything under his control, which is rich in beauty of strength.

The beauty in shapes of the blue and white porcelains can be demonstrated fully: porcelains of the Tang dynasty are magnificent, splendid, saturated and fruitful, porcelains of the Song dynasty are beautiful, elegant, subtle and flexible(Zhang Piyu, 1997.(5)), porcelains of the Yuan dynasty are great, solid, clumsy and condensed, porcelains of the Ming dynasty are of great momentum and graceful, and porcelains of the Qing dynasty are severe, fine, prudent and skillful, with its remarkable features of times only for the sake of a pursuit of aesthetics.

3.2 Beauty in colors

The major tone of blue and white porcelains is blue. A clear and quiet blue color stands for vastness, endlessness, remoteness, deepness, with a sense of calmness, sensibility and mystery. It represents the Oriental, benevolence and sacred immortal (Huang Guosong, 2001). A fresh, bright, simple and graceful blue color is in chorded into a forever theme of blue and white porcelains. When decorated in the white ceramics, it can be brighter, beautiful and clean, which is beautiful but elegant, bright but mature, sunny but stable, which can be appreciated both closely and from far, reflecting a public aesthetic interest in colors that are pure, beautiful and simple.

The colors of the blue and white porcelains of the Song dynasty is peculiar in artistic style for its tranquility, mystery and solemnity, which is apparently influenced by the fashionable aesthetic ideology at that time, such an ideology can just cater to the aesthetic concept of “integrated with nature while affected by human ideas” which is feature with naturalness, subtleness and plainness. A contrast of the blue and white colors in the blue and white porcelains of the Yuan dynasty, which is in blue background and with white patterns, can form a strong beauty of color decoration. The cold blue color is clear but stable while the white color is lively and extended. The contract of these two colors is not only obvious, pure, energetic and spirited, but also magnificent and exquisite. Taking the blue and white vase with a peony pattern that is made in Jinde Town for instance, the vase gives a sense of weight and thickness in terms of its shape, on its shoulders are decorated with a pattern of summer lotus and eight treasures, there are five groups of patterns on the whole vase, the beautiful blue pattern in white appears to be fairly bright and fast in a background of transparent glaze. The exported cobalt materials introduced in the Ming dynasty—Suniboqing, while deep and elegant in color, is pure and graceful. Such a material is low in manganese content but high in ferro content, in its dark blue part there are some black spots and some are even black points, which makes it much lovely due to the changes in its light and dark colors.

The blue and white porcelains in Chenghua times are light in color, with those in Hongzhi and Zhengde times are dark in colors whilst red and blue in colors in Wanli times (Tian Zi Bing, 1989). Taking the seawater and dragon patterns of the blue and white porcelains in Xuande times of the Ming dynasty for instance, the blue color is strong, which makes the waves more vivid, with the white dragon decorated with dark patterns that is struggling to fly up into the sky, which makes it more robust in the blue sea, the whole picture has been demonstrated explicitly by modeling with colors. The blue and white porcelains that King Kangxi of the Qing dynasty used for appreciation is fine in glaze which is just like a jade and butter, the materials for the blue patterns are pure and clear, from which we can infer that the maker has a good control of the colors adopted. The porcelains used in Yongzheng times are fine and sparkling while in Qianlong times plain but slight blue.

The color beauty of blue and white porcelains creates a joy for beauty, which just appeal to the tradition Chinese customer of “beautiful ceramic wares are better than delicacies”.

3.3 Beauty in Technologies

As for blue and white porcelains, its beauty in shapes and colors are predominantly based on the exquisite porcelain fabrication technologies.

The formation of billet clay has been improved in the Yuan dynasty, a “secondary formation” of adopting both porcelain stone and Gaolin clay when baking can increase the content of Al_2O_3 , which then reduce the deformation rate and fabricate porcelains of all kinds at will, realizing a mature beauty in technologies. Since the Ming dynasty, the work-split of porcelain fabrication becomes more and more specific. The book *Exploitation of The Work of Nature* has listed procedures such as clay pounding, mud jacking, billet fabrication, water dropping, enclosure making, writing and painting, water spraying, box enclosing, chamber filling and baking, etc. 72 procedures have to been taken in order to complete the fabrication of blue and white porcelain, starting from the exploration of raw materials and baking. The protracting technology of blue and white porcelains has also been improved. Firstly people protract all the patterns of the blue and white porcelains on the billet, after baking it at a high temperature with glaze, people will decorate it on the glazed surface, realizing the interlacing use of colors, which makes the fabrication technologies more mature. The fabrication of blue and white porcelains in the Qing dynasty not only has a good command of clay treatment and formation technologies that are appealing to various modeling requirements, but also grasp a more abundant and exquisite confectioning technology, which is capable of confectioning for complicated structures and fine shapes. Furthermore, the skillful baking temperature and atmosphere control technologies in

terms of baking, can also realize the designed patterns and specific shapes and structures to its full(Qiu Shan,1997,(5)). Some porcelain adopts a bionics technology, some then adopt a heart-transfer or neck-transfer technology, and some even integrate multiple technologies, which are known as "Mother of Porcelain". During Kangxi and Qianlong times, the fabrication craftsmanship of blue and white porcelain has made unprecedented achievements.

The technological beauty of blue and white porcelains lies in the epoch-making development of new technologies, materials and craftsmanship for china clay, modeling, protracting, glazing and baking, etc., which is the subjectizing of "truth" and objectizing of "goodwill".

3.4 Beauty in Artistic Concepts

The greatest contribution that blue and white porcelains have made to aesthetics is its extension in artistic concepts.

The official blue and white porcelains have been fabricated with a fine and prudent technical process, which are careful, quiet, sparkling, elegant and skillful, chasing after an expression of style and interest. Although affected by the aesthetics of the royal family, but it still demonstrates its extension in the artistic

concept of blue and white porcelains, which is unprecedented. The base and glaze colors of the blue and white porcelains fabricated in a civil kiln are simple and plain, the cyan glaze is deep and subtle, and the fabrication process is flexible, which is adopted according to the materials. It can be fabricated at will, with on concern about the cliché, energetic, healthy, enthusiastic, simple and wile, such as vivid civil sense of life gives its pure essence to its full, making all the people moved.

The elegant and wild concept creation of the official and civil kilns is an important reason for the peculiar aesthetic values and fascination of blue and white porcelains. It is a reflection of the Chinese people pursuing forever the artistic concept in life to some extent, which extend a new area for the aesthetics of Chinese porcelains, making it more valuable deeply, independently and fully. Such a never-ending sense of artistic beauty makes a full sense of the traditional Chinese culture.

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