

## THE ART OF PETRO PECHORNYI: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON UKRAINIAN CERAMICS

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### Summary

The article is dedicated to the study of the creative work of Petro Pechornyi, one of the prominent figures in Ukrainian ceramic art of the 20th century. The author analyzes the historical context of the development of Ukrainian ceramics, particularly focusing on traditional forms and folk patterns, as well as the transformation of these traditions in the light of modernist explorations. Special attention is given to the characteristics of Pechornyi's artistic practice that combined innovative approaches to techniques and forms with a profound rethinking of national traditions. The key innovations introduced by the artist are examined, particularly in terms of composition, symbolism, and technical execution that allowed him to create a new artistic discourse in ceramics.

The article also examines Petro Pechornyi's pedagogical activity, his contribution to the training of new generations of ceramic artists, as well as his teaching methodology that is based on combining practical skills with a deep theoretical understanding of traditional art. The role of Pechornyi as a mentor is emphasized, highlighting his influence on the development of his students' creative potential and his contribution to the promotion of Ukrainian ceramics in the contemporary artistic world.

The article also assesses the impact of Pechornyi's creative work on the development of contemporary Ukrainian ceramics, as well as its place in the global artistic context, emphasizing the uniqueness of his approach. The aesthetic and cultural features of the artist's work are identified that contribute to its significance and relevance in the art of the 20th and 21st centuries.

**Key words:** ceramic art, innovations, folk art, monumental ceramics, sculpture, artistic experiments, symbolism, technical innovations, Ukrainian culture, interpretation of traditions.

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### 1. Introduction

**The aim and objectives of the article:** To explore Petro Pechornyi's innovative contribution to the development of Ukrainian ceramics, particularly his reinterpretation of traditional approaches, the introduction of innovative forms and themes, as well as the significance of his creative work for contemporary art.

**Methodology of research.** To achieve the goal, a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach was applied that includes the following methods: *Historical and cultural analysis* – to study the context of the development of Ukrainian ceramics in the 20th century, its traditional features, and their influence on the creative work of Petro Pechornyi; *Comparative method* – to compare traditional examples of Ukrainian ceramics with Pechornyi's works that allows tracing the innovative aspects of his creativity; *Stylistic analysis* – to identify the artistic features of forms, compositional techniques, methods and themes in the artist's work; *Visual*

*criticism method* – to interpret the figurative and symbolic elements in Pechornyi's works; *Analytical-synthetic approach* – to systematize the collected data, generalizations and conclusions.

**Logic of the research.** To address the problem, a structure was chosen that allows for a systematic exploration of the topic, based on scientific methods and ensuring a coherent presentation of the material. The article consists of the following parts: 1. Introduction. 2. General context of the development of Ukrainian ceramics in the 20th century. This section describes the traditional features of the art form, remained dominant for a long time, and outlines the need for a renewal of the artistic language. 3. The creative development of Petro Pechornyi: The artist's work is analyzed in chronological order, with a focus on the key stages of his development as an artist. 4. Analysis of artistic innovations: This section is dedicated to a detailed examination of the new forms, techniques, and themes introduced by Pechornyi. His experiments with materials, symbolism, and themes in his works are explored. 5. Influence on contemporary art: This section evaluates Pechornyi's place in contemporary art. His contribution to shaping a new aesthetic of Ukrainian ceramics is studied, along with his influence on contemporary artists through his pedagogical activities. 6. Conclusions: The final part includes a summary of the results obtained, an outline of the significance of Petro Pechornyi's creative work for the development of Ukrainian and global ceramics, and the prospects for further research.

## 2. The General Context of the Development of Ukrainian Ceramics in the 20th Century

Ukrainian ceramics of the 20th century remained within the framework of traditional forms and ornamentation for a long time, drawing on the centuries-old experience of folk art. The elegance of the paintings, the colorful palette, and the deep symbolism of elements, characteristic of different regions of Ukraine created a recognizable cultural code that was preserved and passed down from generation to generation, as noted in his research by Mykhailo Selivachov (*Selivachov, M., 1996*). However, while this approach ensured continuity of traditions, it simultaneously limited the possibilities for innovation and artistic experimentation. At a time when many other fields of visual and decorative applied arts were undergoing active rethinking and the search for new artistic means, ceramics also faced the need for renewal and modernization.

By the early 1960's, Soviet culture, including decorative applied arts, operated under conditions of political isolation, strict censorship, and rigid ideological control. These factors significantly limited access to global artistic trends, restraining innovative processes in many creative fields. However, certain shifts in Soviet foreign policy and a partial easing of internal ideological pressure during the Khrushchev Thaw period created the conditions for Soviet artists to become acquainted with the achievements of Western art, particularly in the field of ceramics. The opening of cultural exchange and the possibility of accessing foreign examples became important catalysts for artistic change. Ukrainian artists gained the opportunity not only to assess their craftsmanship in the context of global artistic processes but also to embrace new stylistic directions, innovative techniques, and conceptual approaches that had previously been inaccessible or forbidden to them.

Despite the dominance of the social realism in Ukraine in the mid-20th century with its standardized narratives, restrictions on themes and compositional techniques, and the dominance of prescribed canons of representation, Ukrainian artists sought ways to expand the boundaries of creative freedom. Some turned to the traditions of national art, integrating folk motifs, ornamentation and aesthetics within the allowed themes. Others sought to experiment with forms, materials and color solutions, even if this did not always meet officially approved standards.

These innovative approaches were sometimes disguised as formal conformity but simultaneously opened new ways for the interpretation of familiar subjects (*Chehusova, Z., 2006*).

Contact with Western artistic practices facilitated the integration of progressive ideas into Ukrainian ceramic art. Artists began experimenting with materials, forms, and technologies that significantly expanded the expressive potential of their works. As a result, these innovations not only enriched the artistic tradition but also stimulated the formation of a new aesthetic language that combined national features with contemporary global trends.

The field provided more room for individual exploration due to less ideological control compared to painting or sculpture. Ukrainian ceramic artists sought to synthesize national traditions with modernist trends, which was reflected in the use of experimental forms, textures, and techniques that went beyond the functional and decorative ones. Among Ukrainian ceramic innovators there were Oleksandr Milovzorov, Olga Rapai, Oleksandr Oliynyk, Oksana Hrudzynska, Lyudmila Meshkova, Petro Pechornyi, Halyna Sevryuk and many others.

New trends required not only to master technical techniques but also to deeply theorize the place of ceramics within the system of the arts and its role in the context of global cultural transformations in the second half of the 20th century. Ceramics ceased to be viewed exclusively as decorative applied art and began to be seen as a fully-fledged way of artistic expression capable of reflecting complex ideas, conceptual inquiries, and emotional experiences (*Zhogol, L., 1970*).

As a result of these explorations, new stylistic directions emerged that went beyond the traditional decorative functions of ceramics. Experimental practices included the use of unconventional materials, innovative processing techniques, as well as the creation of objects that combined elements of design, sculpture, and painting. These approaches not only transformed the visual language of ceramics but also laid the foundation for its integration into the discourse of contemporary art.

One of the defining trends of the mid-20th century was the development of monumental ceramics. It gained new significance and functions and began to actively integrate into the architectural context, becoming an important component of urban space.

A change in a way of using materials appeared in the 1970's and 1980's. In addition to porcelain, faience, and pottery clay, chamotte mass gained popularity among ceramicists due to its unique properties. It opened up new possibilities for expanding the boundaries of traditional techniques and forms. This material allowed artists to experiment and create complex, multifunctional compositions that could not be achieved using traditional ceramic materials. As a result, it became possible to transcend classical ceramics, incorporating elements of sculpture into its practice. Textured surfaces and the ability to preserve complex shapes under high temperatures contributed to the emergence of new conceptual approaches in ceramic art (*Chehusova, Z., 2006*).

Monumental ceramic reliefs that were made and used for interiors and facades of public buildings, as well as ceramic sculptures, became not only a means of decorative decoration but also a part of a new aesthetic language. Their placement on facades, in lobbies, halls, and other public spaces contributed to the creation of architectural complexes with a high level of artistic completeness, emotional expressiveness, and monumentality. Due to their scale, texture, and imagery, monumental ceramics not only harmoniously complemented architectural forms but also shaped the identity of public spaces (*Danchenko, O., 1969*). Among the artists who worked in ceramics and created monumental works there were Ivan Marchuk, Volodymyr Pryadka, Anatoliy Haidamaka, Lyudmyla Mishchenko, Roman Petruk, Oksana Hrudzynska, Petro Pechorniy, Oleksandr Milovzorov, Olga Rapai and others.

Against the backdrop the work of Petro Pechorniy emerges as a new phenomenon in Ukrainian art. The artist not only managed to rethink centuries-old traditions but also integrate contemporary trends into his work, combining avant-garde forms and ideas with a deep understanding of folk art. As noted by Prydatko, his creativity united the past with the future, offering a new perspective on ceramics as an art form (*Prydatko, T., 1989: 10*) The introduction of innovative forms, expansion of thematic range, and use of technical experiments allowed Pechorniy to move beyond traditional decorative elements, creating works that evoke both intellectual and emotional resonance.

### 3. The artistic development of Petro Pechorniy

Petro Pechorniy (born in 1932) received a comprehensive art education that became the foundation for his subsequent creative career. His studies began at the Kyiv School of Decorative and Applied Arts, where he studied the basics of craftsmanship and ceramics from 1951 to 1960. This period of education was interrupted by three years of military service in the Caspian Flotilla, but it did not hinder the development of his artistic potential. Pechorniy continued his education after demobilization. He refined his technical and artistic skills under the guidance of prominent teachers and renowned Ukrainian artists, including Yuriy Malyshewskyi, Mykola Rapai, Volodymyr Zhuravel, Yevhen Sviatsky, and Dmytro Holovko. They not only imparted technical knowledge but also shaped his artistic worldview. They introduced him to both traditional and new trends in decorative and applied arts, fostering the development of the future artist's creative individuality. Thanks to their influence, Pechorniy gained a deep understanding of artistic composition, color, form, and texture in ceramics (*Pidhora, V., Khanko, O., 2006*).

As a result of his studies, Pechorniy graduated with a degree in ceramic art, marking the beginning of his creative journey in the arts. He mastered the technical aspects of ceramics as well as laid the foundation for further innovations in his works, particularly in the context of modernizing traditional forms and techniques in Ukrainian decorative and applied arts. This later enabled him to create a unique artistic style, combining elements of folk Ukrainian ceramics with contemporary artistic trends.

From 1960 to 1966, Pechorniy continued his education at the V.I. Mukhina Higher School of Art and Design in Leningrad (now the St. Petersburg State Academy of Art and Industry named after A. L. Stieglit).

Reflecting on his studies in Leningrad, Pechorniy recalls: "What was decisive for our educational institution was that we could create compositions on topics that were close to us, ones we knew best. The head of the department, V. Markov, emphasized: 'Pechorniy knows Ukrainian folk art well, so let him work on compositions related to Ukrainian themes.' So, I worked on 'Ukrainiana' and even created my thesis work in the spirit of Ukrainian folk art" (*Pidhora et al., 2006: 42*).

Upon completing his studies, Pechorniy returned to his homeland. His professional career began at the Horodnytsky Porcelain Factory, located in the Polissia region. Thanks to his experience and acquired knowledge, Pechorniy quickly took on an important position as the chief artist and head of the factory's creative laboratory, where he was actively involved in developing samples for mass production. This role required combining high artistic skills with the demands of the production processes. Pechorniy was one of those artists capable of synthesizing innovative artistic ideas with the realities of serial production, creating items that met both the aesthetic demands and the technical standards of mass production: "One piece

after another appeared: bottles, decanters, wine sets, mugs, plates, vases, and many other items with underglaze and overglaze decorations in paints, salts, and gold." (*Pidhora et al., 2006: 44*).

Thanks to Pechorniy, the Horodnytsky Porcelain Factory became one of the centers of creative activity, where artists and craftsmen worked on improving porcelain products, integrating new techniques and concepts into traditional craftsmanship. As an artist, Pechorniy combined not only his knowledge of ceramics but also closely followed the development of global artistic trends. It allowed him to create items that reflected the spirit of the time. His work in the factory's artistic laboratory focused on finding new forms and stylistic solutions. It had a significant impact on the development of Ukrainian porcelain and ceramics. He developed forms and designs for porcelain items for the enterprise (such as decanters: "The Cossack Went Beyond the Danube," "Forest Song," "Nature," "Taras Bulba," and others; plates: "Cossack Mamai," "Deacon and Solokha," "Rooster"; decanters: "Cossack Holota," "Cossack," "Polissian Fairy Tale"; vases, pitchers, tableware sets with decorations) and much more during 1970. In the next two years, the enterprise created about twenty original works. This not only contributed to the rise in the aesthetic level of mass production but also established new standards in artistic practice at enterprises of such scale (*Lashchuk, Y., 1975*).

In 1973, Petro Pechorniy moved to Kyiv, marking a new stage in his creative journey, where the artist's talent revealed itself with renewed strength. He actively experimented with new artistic concepts, focusing on larger scales and monumentality. He was simultaneously working on a series of projects that combined aesthetic and conceptual innovations that significantly differed from the previous period of his work. The first monumental works of the artist in the technique of faience and majolica appeared in the early 1980s. These were large ceramic panels "Autumn" and "Summer" (faience, overglaze painting, 115x118), created by the artist in 1983.

Over time, he abandoned traditional techniques, including porcelain, faience, and majolica, in favor of more complex and experimental directions. He left behind attempts to perceive ceramics as purely decorative art and gradually shifted towards developing new forms that went beyond functional use. In 1985, he created monumental ceramic works: the panels "Tree of Life" (chamotte mass, salts, glaze, 170x180), "Music" (chamotte mass, salts, glaze, 100x100), the plaque "Ship of Happiness" (chamotte mass, salts, glaze, 75x80), the plaque "Fish" (chamotte mass, salts, glaze, 90x70), and the sculptural fountains "Fish" and "Fantasy" (both made in chamotte mass, salts, and glaze).

#### 4. Analysis of Artistic Innovations in Pechorniy's Works

In the 1980's and 1990's, Pechorniy created sculptures in chamotte, constantly experimenting with materials such as chamotte clay, engobes, metal oxides, and glazes. Among the works from this period are the sculptures "Goddess Berehynia," "Spring," "Belfry," "Tree of Life," "Morning," "Samson," "Trinity" (all 1994), "Saint George," and "Revival of Ukraine" (both 1999), and others. Pechorniy was the first among Ukrainian ceramic artists to combine materials such as ceramics and metal in the creation of monumental panels (*Pidhora, V., 2003: 124*) (Fig. 1).

His works demonstrate a unique ability to combine a deep respect for cultural heritage with contemporary artistic trends, making them relevant (*Pidhora, V., 2001*). It is expressed not only through constant experimentation with materials such as clay, glaze and pigments but also in his desire to transcend traditional forms. Petro Pechorniy actively explores new plastic possibilities, reinterpreting classical motifs and embodying them in different innovative artistic



**Fig. 1. Sketch for a ceramic panel with elements of forged metal, 1983**

forms. "The composition, based on traditions of Ukrainian folk art, simultaneously features an innovative approach skillfully used by the artist" (*Holovko, T., 1996: 185*).



**Fig. 2. The Power of Life. 1980. Shaped clay, salts**

The bionic motifs in Pechorniy's work appear especially organic. His ceramic compositions seem to recreate the lifecycles of nature. Some elements appear firmly rooted in the earth, while others burst into a bloom, evoking associations with floral forms, or symbolize the stage of the bud formation, the initial phase of new life (Fig. 2). The outlines of the created forms are characterized by clarity and simplicity. Pechorniy skillfully balance between organic complexity and the restraint of lines.



The treatment of surface textures takes on particular significance. Through meticulous material processing, the artist achieves an effect of natural roughness, reminding of tree bark, soil surfaces, or other natural materials, making the compositions more vibrant and emotionally expressive (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3. Blooming Tree. Ceramic Sculpture. 1981. Shaped clay, salts**

Traditional colors of engobe used for Ukrainian ceramics (a paint based on finely ground liquid clay) were usually quite vibrant. Pechorniy extensively experimented with colored glazes and succeeded in achieving particularly refined silver-green, gray, and blue-silver shades that significantly enriched the palette of his works.

Pechorniy's ceramic compositions are distinguished by exceptional integrity and structural completeness, creating an impression of harmonious wholeness. At the same time, his works never look static.



**Fig. 4. Tree of Life. Sketch for Ceramics, 1995. Pencil**

The sketches for Pechorniy's ceramic works highlight his talent as a graphic artist. They not only serve as preparatory drawings but also stand as independent works of art (Fig. 4, 5). The forms and compositions are imbued with an internal dynamism that creates a

sense of continuous movement or transformation. The balance between enclosure and dynamism is achieved through the masterful use of such elements as lines, volumes, and proportions in his works. They are meticulously adjusted, ensuring compositional integrity. At the same time, they retain a certain fluidity and organic quality characteristic of natural forms. This organic quality imparts a sense of vitality to the works, evoking the illusion of ongoing development and reminding viewers of nature's cyclical and ever-changing essence.



**Fig. 5. Sea Birds. Sketches for Ceramics, 1980. Colored Pencil**

The dynamism of the compositions is emphasized by the play of light and shadow, textural contrasts of surfaces, and the artist's skill in using materials in a way that conveys a sense of movement. This allows his works to remain aesthetically appealing and conceptually profound, evoking associations with constant evolution and renewal, an integral part of the world (sculptures: "Berehynya," "Spring," "Morning," "Tree of Life" – all 1994; "Revival of Ukraine," 1999).

Step by step, Pechorny transitioned to ceramic sculpture, particularly monumental ceramics. They became one of the central themes of his work in the 1990's. This new passion was characterized by great technical complexity and pushed the artist to move beyond the traditional approach (sculptures: "Bell Tower," "Lel," "Rozhanytsia," "Samson," "Trinity" – 1994; "Saint George," 1999).

The ceramic artist experimented extensively with forms. Bionic shapes unexpectedly took on characteristics of mechanisms while anthropomorphic forms transformed into bionic ones. Pechorny's "Comical Fish" (1991) stands as timeless example of his innovative approach to ceramic art. In these decorative sculptures, Pechorny creates a multi-layered artistic language that encourages reflection both on form and content (Fig.6).



**Fig. 6. Diptych "Cosmic Fish", 1991. Chamotte**



His interpretation of symbols serves as a metaphor for the interaction between humanity, nature, and technology, embedding a profound philosophical subtext. Although these motifs are originated from different realms, they are unified in his vision nonetheless. They create a shared space where antiquity and modernity, organic forms and technological elements are merged (Davydenko, V., 1992).

### 5. The Influence of Pechorniy's Work on Contemporary Art

The significance of Petro Pechorniy's work lies in its ability to create a multifaceted dialogue between cultural heritage and modernity. This is achieved through the harmonious integration of elements from ancient traditions, reinterpreted through the lens of contemporary aesthetics. According to N. Krutenko, Pechorniy's art serves as a unique "bridge" between different historical periods, offering viewers not only the pleasure of aesthetic refinement but also an opportunity to reflect on timeless themes, transcending eras and cultural boundaries (Krutenko N., 1989: 207).

In 2000, Petro Pechorniy was appointed as a Head of the Department of Ceramics at the Kyiv State Institute of Decorative and Applied Arts and Design named after Mykhailo Boichuk (currently Academy). His appointment marked a significant milestone in the development of the educational process at the institution. Under his leadership, a comprehensive modernization of teaching methods was implemented, focusing on the integration of traditional and contemporary approaches to ceramic art. Special emphasis was placed on the practical training of students that involved completing complex creative and technical tasks aimed at fostering individual style and professional skills (Yakovlev, M., 2006).

Pechorniy introduced innovative teaching methods, including interdisciplinary projects that combined elements of design, sculpture and applied arts. This approach fostered a comprehensive understanding of the process of creating artistic objects among students, as well as the ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with the practical implementation. Thanks to this methodology, graduates of the department stood out for their high level of professionalism, creative thinking, and competitiveness in the contemporary art market. Overall, Pechorniy's work as a Head of the Department made a significant contribution to the development of the national school of ceramic art. He helped nurturing a new generation of artists who keep preserving and developing Ukrainian cultural traditions while integrating them with modern trends in design and art (Tat'yivskyi, P., 2003: 11).

His influence on contemporary art can be assessed through his participation in numerous exhibitions, scientific research, work in creative laboratories, and how his works reflect the evolution of Ukrainian ceramics. The artist actively introduces new aesthetic and conceptual approaches into art, integrating them into a broader cultural context. He demonstrates the way traditional art can be preserved and reinterpreted in new conditions, maintaining its relevance and impact in a constantly changing world.

Pechorniy's works are characterized by intense experimentation with materials, techniques, and forms, allowing us to view him not only as a master of ceramics but also as an innovator who expands the boundaries of artistic expression. He demonstrates the ability to renew the history of Ukrainian art, incorporating symbolic elements through his creativity. In his works, there is often an interaction between ancient traditions and modern cultural and technological realities, making his art both relevant and timeless.

Despite his age, Petro Pechorniy takes an active part in educational and creative processes, inspiring students to achieve new heights and maintaining high standards. His experience,

gained throughout his professional development, and his vision for the evolution of ceramic art are invaluable to contemporary art education. It contributes to the preservation and development of traditions in conjunction with innovations in the modern artistic context.

## 6. Conclusions

The work of Petro Pechorny represents an important stage in the development of Ukrainian ceramic art in the 20th and 21st centuries. His artistic journey demonstrates a profound rethinking of traditional forms and techniques, allowing his works to be seen as a bridge between the past and the present, traditions and innovative approaches. Pechorny not only preserved the artistic heritage but also actively introduced new conceptual and aesthetic elements, expanding the boundaries of what is possible in ceramics. His ability to combine a deep respect for cultural traditions with contemporary artistic trends makes his work relevant and significant in the context of global artistic movements.

Further research of Petro Pechorny creative work could help uncover the artistic techniques and symbolism he employed, including their roots in folk art and modernist movements, as well as the influences of Ukrainian folklore, traditional symbolism, and European artistic trends. It is important not only to identify and describe less known or unpublished works of the artist but also to apply Pechorny's creative ideas in contemporary art, design, and education. It will contribute to popularizing his contributions among new generations.

Thus Petro Pechorny's artworks hold artistic, cultural and educational significance, serving as an important link in the development of Ukrainian art and its integration into the international context.

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