

DIGITAL PRINTING AS A CREATIVE, USER-ORIENTED TOOL

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2000 the company KERAJET, together with the company Ferro Enamel, presented the first inkjet decorating machine for ceramic decoration, which led to the Alfa de Oro award at the CEVISAMA 2000 trade fair.

Digital printing provides numerous, well-known benefits: industrial agility, lower ink consumption and pre-printing systems, versatility in graphics and aesthetics. On the other hand, digital printing has led to a closer relationship with the end-user, which has attracted the attention of creative spirits, enhancing the urban environment and acting as a tool for promoting ceramics in different professional contexts, as set out below.

2. CUSTOMISATION

The turn of the century shaped up as the start of customisation. In 2002, the trends study published by ALICER: 'Factors driving aesthetic trends in the ceramic tile sector' showed how different industrial sectors began to work on designing products and services aimed at satisfying the personal taste of the user.

The project 'Seven x seven', presented at Trans-hitos (Cevisama 2006), suggested ways of working with ceramic products in embodying this trend and put forward a system of ceramic pieces with chromatic and formal variants with the possibility of customising the graphics. Unlike the printing systems that had been used until then, which required ink separation by four-colour printing to obtain a photographic image that the designer interpreted, digital printing systems favoured the participation of the user in the creative process. Different companies currently offer digital ceramic printing services.



'Seven x seven' project by ALICER

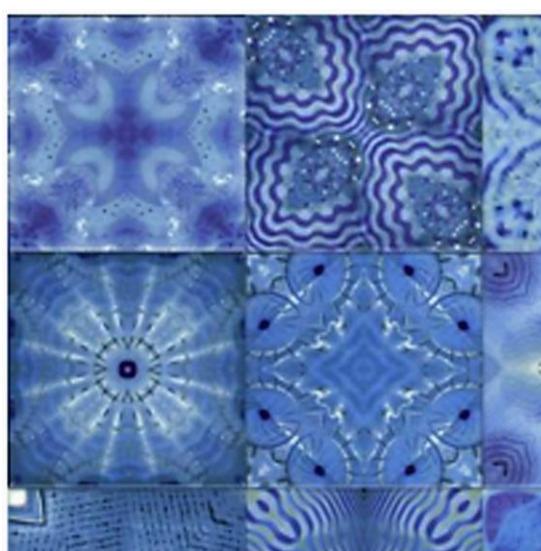
2.1. Signatured Product

Signatured products have found high acceptance by users and buyers, particularly by architects and interior designers, and increasingly by the general public who prefer to know the physical and aesthetic identity of the products that they are purchasing.

This phenomenon, which emerged at the turn of the century, was analysed by David Brooks in his book '*Bobos in Paradise*', which defines a social class that distinguishes itself not just by what it buys but by how it buys this, preferring a high-product range from which to choose. In general, buying becomes an act of acquiring extremely valuable knowledge for well-being; it is not just a matter of purchasing products, but one needs to be able to speak intelligently of them. Customisation is put above standardisation. When the book was published in 2001, this buyer intention was viewed as rather difficult to be taken up by the ceramic industry, but it has today become an actual fact since companies are increasingly articulating services for printing ceramics and murals with different uses.

The ease of designing ceramic products with a digital printing system has favoured the influx of creative spirits from different disciplines, who have been able to express their creativity through ceramics. One of the pioneers in creating graphics proposals with digital printing for ceramic tilings has been the English designer Dominic Crinson.

In 2001, at the 100% Design show, Dominic Crinson presented tiles with indirect digital printing. Despite not providing the same technical characteristics as decorated and fired ceramic pieces, the products designed by Dominic Crinson found widespread acceptance and have been used in public as well as private spaces, customised compositions being made as a function of the area to be clad.



Product designed by Dominic Crinson

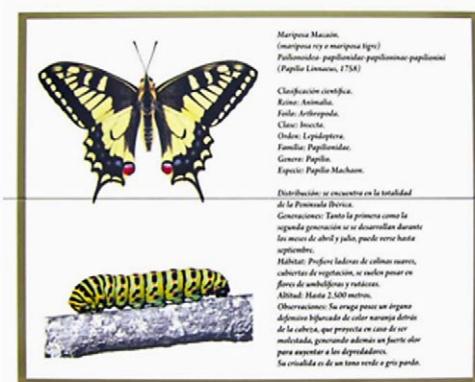
2.2. Urban environment

In 2007 the decoration of ceramics by digital printing was launched as a specialised service for professionals, architects, and interior designers. The company CERACASA pioneered the offer of this custom service, and was awarded the Alfa de Oro prize for the project at CEVISAMA 2007.

This service has enabled playful solutions in town planning to be created for the young, such as the large-scale Snakes and Ladders game in the Castellón harbour area, Moll de Costa del Grao, and a solution with a more documentary character, such as the restaurant 'La Mandarra de la Ramos' in Pamplona, in which the bar counter displays historic images.



Project conducted by CERACASA



Project by Novalinea

However, beyond documentation, the preservation of signage in the natural environment requires products that are able to withstand the inclemencies of the weather and the damaging effects of the sun's rays on colour. It is here that only ceramics can assure permanent stability.

2.3. Recovery of Functionalities

A further digital printing contribution has been the recovery of advertising with a ceramic substrate. In addition to allowing large-sized compositions to be made, which also serve as building protection, and ceramic street signs in urban settings to be decorated, digital printing facilitates sign-writing or sign-painting, which can provide each street or square with a particular historic, symbolic, or modern-day design.



Project conducted by DECORATIVA.

2.4. Digital Printing as Instructional and Promotional Tool for the Ceramic Sector

Beyond academic or regulated training, digital printing helps bring ceramics closer to different student groups (such as architecture, interior design, and industrial design students) and to professionals in the ceramic sector, who have developed projects based on their participation in creative workshops. Examples of such events have been the workshop entitled 'Ceramics and the city', delivered by José Durán, which put forward paving solutions with graphic patterns for the Isabel La Católica square in Castellón, and the workshop 'How decoration becomes functional', delivered by Sam Baron, which brought ceramics closer to the social life of the townspeople, transforming market stalls into a colourful kaleidoscope.

Digital printing appears as an agile, accessible, functional tool for the future. Amongst further possibilities, yet to be defined, digital printing will allow city signage to be enhanced, architecture in the natural environment to be camouflaged, and frontiers in creative exercises to be crossed by wide-scale participation, thus helping to identify end-user preferences in different geographic areas.

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