

Dyunina I.A., head of the artistic faience workshop at JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”, 3466301, Semikarakorsk, 1st lane, house 123; e-mail: innakunakova@yandex.ru

Artistic and technological features of creating floral painting on Semikarakorsk ceramics

Abstract. The article is dedicated to the only traditional art craft in the Rostov region – Semikarakorsk ceramics. This craft has formed relatively recently and remains the subject of scientific research. The article identifies and analyzes the stylistic features of floral painting on Semikarakorsk ceramics, based on which its artistic and technological characteristics are revealed.

Keywords: floral painting, Semikarakorsk ceramics, underglaze painting, traditional art crafts, faience, artistic ceramics.

Semikarakorsk ceramics is the only traditional art craft in the Rostov region, with its products manufactured at the art faience enterprise JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”. The floral painting of Semikarakorsk items reflects the colors characteristic of the Don steppe: orange-golden, pinkish, light brown and greenish hues. A technological feature of Semikarakorsk ceramics is its polychromatic brushwork underglaze painting, which is applied to the fired biscuit body.

The technology of applying painting to a faience item has several specific features. First of all, the artist must prepare the fired semi-finished product for work. For this, the semi-finished item is wiped with a damp sponge to remove dust and prevent it from getting onto the body. After that, the artist proceeds to prepare the paints.

According to the finished sample created by the author of the item, each piece includes a list of the pigment numbers used [3, p. 65]. In accordance with this list, the painter prepares the powdered refractory paints and grinds them with water on a glass surface using a spatula (Figs. 1⁹¹, 2). The pigment is stirred until a homogeneous mass is obtained.



Fig. 1. Preparation of pigments



Fig. 2. Mixing pigments with water

⁹¹ Figs. 1-15. Photo by the author of the article.

The main pigments used for painting are pink, emerald green and dark brown. In addition to pigments, glycerin is added to the mixture – it is necessary for smoother and more even brush movement over the surface of the semi-finished product.

To transfer the outline of the design from the sample, translucent tracing paper is used: it is placed over the desired pattern and the visible outline is traced with a graphite pencil.

Then, using a needle, small frequent holes are made along the outlined contour on the tracing paper. The prepared tracing paper with holes is applied to the semi-finished product and impressed with a pouch filled with charcoal ash (Figs. 3, 4).



Fig. 3. Transferring the design imprint



Fig. 4. Transferring the design imprint

Thus, an imprint of the future design remains on the faience body. The black dust and outline burn away completely during the subsequent firing. As a result of these actions, the artist obtains a piece ready for painting.

Following the sample, the painter applies the main elements of the design in a specific sequence, and then supplements them with details – such as leaves, fine streaking and tendrils (Figs. 5, 6).



Fig. 5. Application of pigment according to the sample



Fig. 6. Completed work

In Semikarakorsk painting, an important decorative element is the blue highlights between the plants, known as “turquoise”. These are applied with a fine brush using a lead-free glaze with blue pigment, diluted with water. This glaze is also called “turquoise” and is an original development of the leading artist at JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”, L.V. Aldoshina.

Turquoise can be applied in two ways. The first method is to apply it over the already painted piece, which allows for a quicker achievement of the desired effect. The second method involves applying it over a dusted design, where a thin layer of glaze is spread on the semi-finished painted piece. This technique ensures a smoother transition from the blue glaze to the transparent one, as it becomes fused during firing.

The main feature of Semikarakorsk painting is its distinctive pictorial character in the decoration of the item. For this reason, brush movement plays a crucial role in the technology: with proper handling, it allows for high tonal detail. A broad brushstroke provides a gradient transition in color intensity – from richness to transparency and softness.

The design on the white background forms a lace-like pattern with a large, bright flower at the center, surrounded by a scattering of smaller elements – flowers, tendrils, twigs and leaves. The central flower is shaped like a rounded cup, composed of petals executed with a curving, gradient brushstroke. The sequence of tonal changes gives the elements volume and relief.

Every artist has an artistic concept that they strive to embody in their work and convey to the viewer. Despite the fact that each painter works from a sample, the design may vary, since Semikarakorsk painting is characterized by free brushwork. The manner of execution differs among various masters: some artists use a brighter and richer brushstroke, while others prefer a more restrained style.

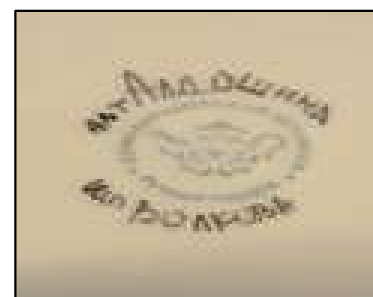


Fig. 7. Trademark

Each master-craftsman prefers the works of a particular author whose creations resonate with them personally. As a result, what emerges is not merely a copy, but a unique piece of traditional applied art. On every product, on the bottom, there is a trademark of both the author and the craftsman (Fig. 7).

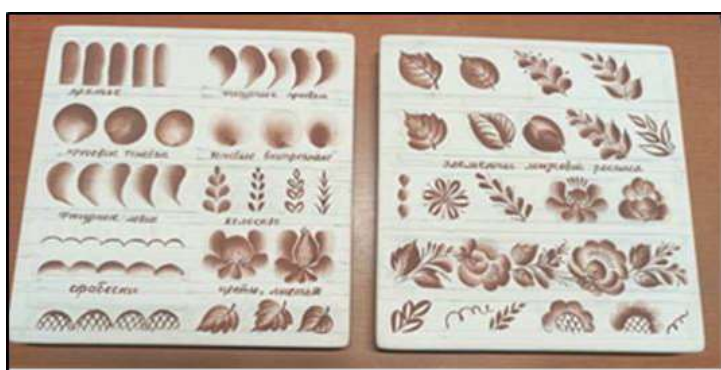


Fig. 8. The main elements of the floral painting in Semikarakorsk ceramics

Large flowers are juxtaposed with a net-like ornament and figurative arabesques, executed with a fine brush. The arabesques consist of narrow, rounded lines or brushstroke semi-ovals.

The main component of the Semikarakorsk painting technology is the brush “chiaroscuro stroke”, which is subdivided into several varieties: straight figurative, right figurative, left circular, inner shadow.

From the aforementioned types of brushstrokes, the key elements and motifs of Semikarakorsk painting are formed (Fig. 8).

The main motifs of Semikarakorsk painting are flowers, while ears of grain, leaves, tendrils, arabesques and curls serve as additional elements. Although arabesques and tendrils are not considered the principal components of the composition, they require a high degree of precision in execution, as the work is done not with the entire brush surface, but only with its fine tip.



Fig. 9. Painting brushes for applying underglaze decoration

For the execution of the painting, brushes made of squirrel hair No. 3A, 4A, 5, 6, 8, 10 are used (Fig. 9). For detailing fine elements such as tendrils and arabesques, “pestrotochnye” brushes No. 2 are employed.

The importance of the technological features of applying floral painting lies in the precision of execution and the necessary sequence of actions. The uniqueness of the work is based on knowledge of the specific characteristics of materials and their artistic possibilities, which allows for the creation of expressive images.

The floral decoration of items with Semikarakorsk painting is distinguished by its diversity, which is determined by the individual creative style of each artist. The artistic features of Semikarakorsk faience are formed from compositional solutions, individual motifs and their variations, as well as additional decorative techniques. When constructing a composition, the primary consideration is the proportion between the sizes of flowers, leaves and additional elements. An important condition for the harmony of the artistic solution is the correspondence between the composition and the shape of the item.

Each artist at the enterprise expresses their own vision of floral painting while preserving its stylistic recognizability. For example, an individual approach to the interpretation of the traditional Semikarakorsk painting is evident in the creative works of L.V. Aldoshina and T.Yu. Tokarenko. Although all their works demonstrate the general artistic features of Semikarakorsk painting, a comparison clearly reveals the recognizable individual style of each artist.

The floral painting of L.V. Aldoshina is typically built around a large central flower, surrounded by additional smaller elements. Bright color contrasts express the full diversity of the nature of the Don region. The set “Krai Donskoy”, presented to the Art Council in 2005, showcases all the distinctive features of her artistic work (Fig. 10).

Practically, all items in the tableware set feature a central composition. The rich, saturated contrasts between the pink flowers and green leaves of various shades convey the full vibrancy of the native land. On the larger items of the set, the painting is executed on a grander scale and is more densely filled, yet a sense of lightness and airiness is preserved, allowing the whiteness of the body to show through. Between the decorative elements, “turquoise” highlights are used – a technique that has become a hallmark of her work.

Fig. 10. L.V. Aldoshina.
Tableware set
“Krai Donskoy”. 2005.
Museum of JSC
“Semikarakorsk ceramics”



The floral painting of T.Yu. Tokarenko differs significantly from the works of L.V. Aldoshina. Instead of a riot of color, she prefers soft color transitions with frequent use of salts, which lend her pieces a delicate and watercolor-like quality. It can be noted that, in developing her designs, the artist drew inspiration from the works of the impressionists.

At the beginning of her creative journey, her perception did not fully align with the Don region themes. However, through persistent and meticulous work, studying the life and nature of the cossack village, as well as visiting museums and exhibitions, her works became recognizable.

The tableware collections “Retro”, “Sweet” and “Thyme” do not impress with brightness and festivity but rather demonstrate interesting artistic effects, subtlety, and delicacy. The smooth tonal transitions and small floral ornamentation of the “Sweet” set are a characteristic example of the embodiment of the distinctive features of T.Yu. Tokarenko’s artistry (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. T.Yu. Tokarenko.
Tea set “Sweet”. 2023.
Museum of JSC
“Semikarakorsk ceramics”

A significant contribution to the development of Semikarakorsk faience with floral decoration was made not only by the artists who were at the origins of the enterprise in 1972, but also by modern specialists. Their creative approach to the development of floral painting reflects artistic exploration in the vein of innovation and reinterpretation of traditions.

In comparison with the warm, richly colored and laconic decor of L.V. Aldoshina’s pieces, the works of artist V.P. Gurova are distinguished by a more restrained color palette, a more complex composition and soft, flowing lines.

A characteristic feature of L.V. Aldoshina’s work is the use of large, rounded faience forms decorated with big, rounded flowers and a minimum of additional decorative elements. This contrasts with the more refined shapes of V.P. Gurova,

whose paintings are dominated by an abundance of small decorative elements, curls, tendrils, relief and the use of salts.

Young artists S.A. Alyokhina and L.N. Obukhova prefer small forms that are technologically convenient for production. In most of their works, they turn not to fantasy flowers, but to more realistic depictions, executed in a decorative manner, while maintaining a unified style, using traditional techniques and a color palette characteristic of Semikarakorsk ceramics.

The examples show how diversely the artistic traditions of Semikarakorsk ceramics can be interpreted by individual artists: differences are seen in compositional solutions, the range of decorated items, specifics of painting, shapes and sizes of flowers, as well as the degree of realism or fantasy in the inflorescences. For example, the compositions of artist L.V. Aldoshina are distinguished by rounded outlines, with decor of round and lush flowers arranged in the center of the faience pieces. Often, the main motif of her painting consists of three large flowers surrounded by leaves and additional small elements. The color palette of her works is bright and festive (Fig. 12).

The sprawling painting with broad and luminous brushstrokes, executed by the artist O.P. Kunakhovets, is applied to the faience surface in such a way that it allows the beauty of the white background to be fully revealed (Fig. 13). In the works of these two artists, floral motifs take on particularly whimsical and fantastical forms.



Fig. 12. L.V. Aldoshina.
Dish “Don faience”. 2003.
Museum of
JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”



Fig. 13. O.P. Kunakhovets. Soup vase
“Krai Donskoy (var)”. 2001.
Museum of
JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”

The interpretation of floral motifs in the works of artists V.P. Gurova and T.Yu. Tokarenko is different: here, the shape of the item itself dictates the specifics of the painting. The artists strive for elegance and refinement, which is also reflected in the character of the plant ornaments.

In the works of V.P. Gurova, the petals of the central flowers have an elongated shape, and the compositions are characterized by soft lines and a delicate color palette (Fig. 14).

The floral painting of artist T.Yu. Tokarenko often consists of a scattering of small flowers with miniature inflorescences. In most of her works, floral motifs frame landscape compositions (Fig. 15). To achieve smoother color transitions, she frequently uses salt underpainting, which makes the painting more delicate.



Fig. 14. V.P. Gurova. Plaques “Flora of the Don”.
2012. Museum of JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”

Thus, despite the established characteristics of Semikarakorsk painting, each artist strives to express their own vision in their work while preserving the traditions of this style. An art historical analysis of the works by leading artists of the craft leads to the conclusion that original authorial solutions, while maintaining traditions as a fundamental basis, contribute to the development of Semikarakorsk ceramics.

Fig. 15. T.Yu. Tokarenko.
Tea set “Spring drip”.
2004. Museum of
JSC “Semikarakorsk
ceramics”



Semikarakorsk floral painting is a type of decorative design that ensures the recognizability of the traditional stylistic features of the ceramics of the Don region. That is why the study and mastery of the techniques of floral brushwork painting, while observing its artistic and technological characteristics, is an important condition for the preservation and further development of this type of painting.

The interpretation of historically formed traditions, their preservation and development, is only possible by ensuring conditions for specialized continuous professional education [1], including directly within the production environment [2].

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