Unveiling the Void: Erasure, Latency, Potentiality
Proceedings of 7th Postgraduate International Conference
edited by Asia Benedetti, Marta Del Mutolo, Ester Giachetti, Ilaria Grippa

Horror vacui in Early Modern Ceramics: Overall Approach to Covering Surfaces

Ariane Milicev
Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Universität Bern, Schweiz

Abstract In this paper, the concept of *horror vacui*, i.e. the fear of the void, is applied to early modern ceramics, where the artists decorated every part of their artworks so that no empty space is left. This overall approach in covering the surface is examined based on ceramic examples in the technique of incised slipware, which were produced in Venice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Different methods for covering the surface can be determined, like foliage, interlaced motifs, linear and cross-hatchings, and incised dots. These approaches show how the ceramic artists expressed the idea of *horror vacui* in their artworks.

Keywords Horror vacui. Ceramics. Incised slipware. Venice. Istria. Early modern. Overall approach. Surface covering. Decorating methods.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Concept of *Horror Vacui*. – 3 Overall Approach in Ceramics. – 3.1 Antique Vases. – 3.2 Early Modern Incised Slipware. – 4 Conclusion.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

Quaderni di *Venezia Arti* 9
e-ISSN 2784-8868
ISBN [ebook] 979-12-5742-001-7

Open access
Submitted 2025-10-15 | Published 2025-12-15
© 2025 Milicev | CC BY 4.0
DOI 10.30687/979-12-5742-001-7/004

1 Introduction

Emptiness is practically non-existent on certain early modern ceramics.[1] Their decoration and glaze cover the whole surface, which is abundantly filled with motifs and patterns to avoid empty spaces. There was not only an aesthetic, but also a practical choice behind the complete glazing, as the application of glaze makes the porous clay impermeable and more resistant to external factors. In such abundantly filled ceramic surfaces, there seems to be a fear of the void, also known as *horror vacui*. The idea of *horror vacui* is related to physics and philosophy and refers to the natural tendency of nature to avoid the void and aim for fulness (Michel 2024, 24). I will firsly discuss the concept of *horror vacui*, starting from the ancient understanding of the void put forward by Aristotle. I will then consider how a fear of empty space developed over the next centuries, especially as it concerns the Christian ideas set forth in Genesis. Building on this, I will trace the idea of the void and the aversion to it back to the early modern period and the physical experiments of Galileo Galilei and Evangelista Torricelli.

After briefly defining the concept of *horror vacui*, I will apply it to the medium of ceramics. Art and nature are intertwined terms in antiquity: according to Pliny the Elder, it is possible to determine a connection between *horror vacui* and artworks such as ceramics (Plin., *HN* 7.33-7; Platt 2018, 226).I will identify an overall approach to surface decoration on pottery as early as the ancient Greek Geometric style. I will argue that this is also the case with ceramics of the early modern period. Using examples from previously research on incised slipware[2] produced in fifteenth and sixteenth century Venice, I will show different methods used for covering surfaces on pottery and interpret them as an artistic response to ongoing endeavours to grapple with the concept of the void and the vacuum. The chosen ceramics are located today in museum collections in Istria, in the Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula and the Museo della città di Rovinj-Rovigno, as well as in the MIC – Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza. The examples are richly decorated and show an aversion to leaving large spaces of the surface empty. They stand in contrast to other contemporary tendencies of ceramics, such as the *bianco sopra bianco*, with almost invisible decoration, or the *compendiario* style in sixteenth century Faenza, where a lot of space

1 The research for this article was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation grant no. 223657.

2 Incised slipware is a technique of ceramics, where the artists applied a slip, a white clay, to the formed, leather-hard clay and would then incise its surface with a sharp metal stick (Ferrari 1960, 9).

is purposely left white.[3] The artworks, which will be discussed in the following, display different strategies used for overcoming the typical whiteness of the background of ceramics. The decorations include foliage, hatchings, interlaced motifs and incised dots. I want to explore the question of what it means when emptiness and void are something to be avoided at all costs in the case of ceramics. Reflecting on the opposite, namely the intentional non-representation of emptiness, can help to unveil the void. Thus, by shedding light on ceramics and visualising the *horror vacui* in their surface painting, I want to draw attention to previously little-studied materials and their makers' strategies of dealing with the void.

2 The Concept of *Horror Vacui*

Scholarship has traditionally located the origin of the term *horror vacui* in Aristotle's *Physics* (Arist., *Ph*. 4.6-9; Schmidt 2021, 158). Aristotle (384-322 BC) dedicates one part of his book to the idea of the void (Arist., *Ph*. 4.8). He states explicitly that he does not believe in the existence of the void: Ὅτι μὲν τοίνυν οὐκ ἔστι κεχωρισμένον κενόν, ἐκ τούτων ἐστὶ δῆλον (Arist., *Ph*. 4.8.26b21) ("From all this it is clear that there is no such thing as a self-existing void"; transl. by Wicksteed, Cornford 1957, 361). Thus, for him, a true void does not occur in nature. Instead, Aristotle sees the world as full (Thorp 1990, 150). He even makes a joke against those who believe in the void, as classical philologist John Thorp (1990, 149) highlights: καὶ καθ' αὐτὸ δὲ σκοποῦσι φανείη ἂν τὸ λεγόμενον κενὸν ὡς ἀληθῶς κενόν (Arist., *Ph*. 4.8.26a26-7) ("Even if we consider it on its own merits, the so-called vacuum will be found to be really vacuous"; transl. by Thorp 1990, 149). Therefore, Aristotle does not attack the people who contradict his idea directly but wraps it up as a joke and thereby shows the absurdity of the opinion that the void might exist.

Classical philologist Ernst A. Schmidt (2021, 157) disagrees with scholarship tracing *horror vacui* back to Aristotle. He argues that the term emerged in the thirteenth century and should not be projected onto classical antiquity, because Aristotle only disproved the existence of the void, but does not mention the avoidance or fear of the void (Schmidt 2021, 157-8). But Schmidt contradicts himself: he says that the denial that the vacuum does not exist is based on a fear of the void (Schmidt 2021, 163). The concept of *horror vacui* excludes

3 See for example: Ceramic with arabesques in bianco sopra bianco. Ca. 1520, Faenza. Tin-glazed earthenware, diameter 21.7 cm. Inv. 1878,1230.413, British Museum, London; workshop of Virgiliotto Calamelli, Ceramic with putto in compendiario style. 1560-1600, Faenza. Tin-glazed earthenware, diameter: 23.50 cm. Inv. 1923,0611.15. CR, British Museum, London.

the void from the universe and nature. The void is unnatural and against nature, which consists only of things that exist. By denying the nothing/void, a fear emerges that it could still exist somewhere (Schmidt 2021, 163). This is exactly what Aristotle does, he denies the existence of the vacuum/void. It is plausible that Aristotle knew the emotion of *horror vacui*. Thorp, for example, proposes that Aristotle's real reason for not believing in the void is a phobia of the void (Thorp 1990, 150). Medievalist Edward Grant (1981, 67) agrees that only in the Middle Ages, expressions like *natura abhorret vacuum*, *fuga vacui* and *horror vacui*, started to appear. However, the exact origin of these terms remains unknown. The approach to trace the fear of the void back to antiquity and Aristotle's ideas makes sense. It might be true that the term *horror vacui* first appeared in the thirteenth century, but it does not mean that the Greek philosopher did not lay the foundations for *horror vacui* with his negation of the void, and introduced the concept without using the specific term.

The Dominican and theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) takes up Aristotle's treatise, agreeing with him that a vacuum does not exist in nature, and connecting it to Christian thought (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Article 5. Objection 3). Aquinas believes that God is omnipotent and that "nothing is void in God's works" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Article 2-3). Therefore, God's omnipotence would be questioned if a void really existed. This opens up a new area, which moves the concept of *horror vacui* away from Aristotelian physics into Christian theology rooted in the Book of Genesis. Genesis treats God's creation of the cosmos, life and order, and does not end in an empty space or void (Gen 1). The question of what was before the Creation was fundamental for Medieval artists, who wanted to depict Genesis (Fricke 2025, 73). It is debated if first, there was chaos or void.[4] The latter would imply the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, Creation out of nothing, i.e. void (Fricke 2025, 73). The existence of the void in nature would mean that it would go back to a sort of pre-Creation state or that God was not influential enough to reach every part.

In the early modern period, physicists continued to discuss the concept of *horror vacui* (Michel 2024, 28). Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) writes that when two marble, metal or glass slabs are positioned onto each other and you want to separate them, for a short moment,

4 Gen 1,2: Because there are different translations of the word *tōhū wā-bōhū* from Hebrew. It can be interpreted as did the Septuagint from Greek ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος "invisible and not yet shaped", which is connected to chaos. Another possibility is as *inanis et vacua*, "empty and void", seen in Vulgate Jerome. (Fricke 2025, 73). The passage Gen 1,2 is transl. in KJV as: "And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters". Therefore, it is in favour of the idea that there was a void before the Creation.

there is an empty space, a vacuum, which draws the other one with it, as if they stick to each other, before the air around fills the space between the slabs: "ci mostra l'orrore della natura nel dover ammettere, se ben per breve momento di tempo, lo spazio voto" (Galilei 1638, 12). According to Galilei, the empty space that occurred is a 'horror of nature', which again refers to the idea of *horror vacui*. The first person to achieve a real vacuum was Evangelista Torricelli (1608-1647), a student of Galilei, in the mid-seventeenth century. With an experiment of a quicksilver barometer, he shows that the cause not the fear of the void, but the resistance of air pressure (Michel 2024, 27-8). Thus, the existence of a vacuum in nature and the idea of the fear of the void bothered the scientists and philosophers in the early modern period. It shows that the term *horror vacui* was in use and it is likely that the ceramic artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries wanted to express this concept in their artworks.

3 Overall Approach in Ceramics

Some ceramics are so richly decorated that every area of the surface is covered. It seems that in those examples, the artists did not want any lacunae to be left, as if they had a fear of the empty space or wanted to express the idea of *horror vacui* in their artworks. I can identify an overall approach in their decoration to cover the entire surface. The artist dedicated the same attention and importance to every part of the artwork. There are some focal points of central motifs, but the interstices are not just left blank, but are decorated. The composition was carefully planned, and every part of the ceramic surface was considered in an all-encompassing sense. Examples of ceramics with the overall approach in their decoration will be shown in the following.

3.1 Antique Vases

As was discussed before, it is debatable if the concept of *horror vacui* existed already in antiquity. The overall approach in the surface decoration of antique vases gives evidence that it was the case. It can be found especially in vases of the Geometric style (1000-700 BC) (Bohen 1991, 59). Typical of this style are abstract, geometrical elements, which cover the whole surface, like circles, triangles, stars, swastikas, meanders, checkerboards and cross-hatchings (Bohen 1991, 59). These ornaments are arranged in a rhythmical way in bands, which run around the ceramic vessel. The artists also considered the shape and size of the vases to apply the decoration in a proportional way (Bohen 1991, 62). Thus, even if the vases in the

Geometrical style are richly covered with motifs, they are arranged in clear zones and are proportionate to the pottery, which results in a harmonious ensemble and the decoration does not feel overcrowded. Yet, an overall approach in the surface covering can be seen.

Pliny the Elder (23/4-79 A.D.) connects the making of ceramics and artworks in general to nature. He writes in his *Natural History* about the various discoveries of mankind (Plin., *HN* 7.56.191-215). Pliny mentions inventions like the production of metalwork, fabrics, the alphabet and poetry, just to name a few. Among them is also the discovery of pottery: "fabricum ferrariam invenerunt Cyclopes, figlinas Coroebus Atheniensis, in iis orbem Anacharsis Scythes, ut alii Hyperbius Corinthius" (Plin., *HN* 7.56.198) ("Working in iron was invented by the Cyclopes, potteries by Coroebus of Athens, the potter's wheel by the Scythian Anacharsis, or according to others by Hyperbius of Corinth"; transl. by Rackham 1961, 639). In consideration of the fact that Pliny intends not only humans, but also mythological creatures like Cyclops in his writings, the accuracy of who invented what should be regarded critically. Pliny further includes a section on the origins of arts, like painting and sculpture (Plin., *HN* 33-7). He also writes about the beginning of pottery (Plin., *HN* 35.43). Classicist Verity Platt (2018, 226) stresses that for Pliny the Elder, human interactions with their environment are fundamental for these discoveries. Thus, the human-nature relationship is closely connected and from this collaboration, the arts and crafts emerged. This again means that the arts, especially pottery, where natural materials like clay are used, are rooted in nature. As art and nature are intertwined terms in antiquity, according to Pliny the Elder, it is possible to determine a close connection between the concept of *horror vacui* and artworks such as ceramics.

3.2 Early Modern Incised Slipware

The idea of *horror vacui* in early modern ceramics is expressed not so much as geometrical patterns, like in antique vases, but in a more playful way of decoration. Artists used diverse methods to cover the surface of ceramics, including foliage decoration, hatching, interlacing elements and incised dots, which I propose to consider as an overall approach to decoration in the following examples.

3.2.1 Foliage and Hatching

Figure 1 Foliage decoration. Third quarter of the fifteenth century. Ceramic, incised slipware, fragment of a reconstructed plate, 11 × 13 cm. Produced in Venice or Ferrara (?). Study Collection, Muzej grada Rovinja-Rovigno – Museo della città di Rovinj-Rovigno. Photo by the Author

In this example of a ceramic piece, now held in the collection of the Museo della città di Rovinj-Rovigno, the surface is entirely covered with decoration **[fig. 1]**. The fragment belonged to the rim of a big plate, as can be seen in the reconstruction. Yet, the overall approach is clearly continued also in the centre of the vessel. The richly covered surface of the fragment is divided in different sections, which are arranged in a circular manner. In the inner part of the plate, two leaves and a twig can be identified. The second section, a ring closer to the border, shows squiggly foliage. Art historian Francesca Saccardo (2002, 106-7) sees the idea of *horror vacui* in early modern ceramics, which are densely decorated with shoots or tendrils of oak leaves in a late Gothic style. In the ceramic example, this is especially the case in the centre, where the leaves cover a large part. But there are more decorations: the two sections are differentiated by several small circles in a row. They are flanked by branches, out of which the botanical elements in the two registers grow. The outer part is accompanied by a similar chain of small circles, which forms the border together with two smaller lines on each side.

The background, i.e. the space between the leaves, is not left empty, but is filled with incised hatching. In this technique, parallel lines are positioned in proximity to each other. Since they all run in the same direction, they can be called linear hatchings. Hatching techniques were commonly used in other media as well, like drawing and printmaking, where their use achieves shadowing and chiaroscuro.[5] In the ceramic example, the background appears darker because of the hatching, against which the foliage stands out.

Moreover, the decorations are coloured. The artist painted the leaves with green (*verde ramina*) and yellow (*giallo ferraccia*) glazes. He applied manganese to the small circles as well as the twig in the middle part of the plate, which appear in a violet/brown colour. These glazes are typical for incised slipware (Saccardo 2002, 107). This colouring and overall approach of decoration and hatching emphasises that no area of the pottery should be left blank. The idea of *horror vacui* can be seen in this rich decoration of the ceramic surface, which does not leave any sections unattended.

3.2.2 Interlacing and Cross-Hatching

Figure 2 Interlaced motif. Fifteenth century. Ceramic, incised slipware, fragment of a bowl (obverse), 12 × 8 cm. Donation Prof. Luigi Conton, produced in Venice. Inv. no. 2822, MIC – Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza. Photo credit: MIC – Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza

5 See for example: Raphael, Three standing nude men and the leg of a fourth. 1505-08. Pen and brown ink drawing, 2.43 × 1.48 cm. Inv. 1895,0915.628, British Museum, London.

The next ceramic, today held in the MIC – Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza, shows an interlaced floral motif **[fig. 2]**. The intertwined lines create a sensation of tridimensionality and depth on the planar ceramic surface. They are coloured with yellow glaze. It seems that these lines are tendrils, out of which green glazed leaves grow, positioned in the interspaces. In the middle of the vessel, the interlaced lines join to form the image of a flower decorated with linear hatchings. The artist fills the remaining interstices with cross-hatching, another technique used across media to achieve light/dark contrasts.[6]

This method of cross-hatching also appears in gold tooling, particularly with halos in panel paintings showing a rich decoration.[7] One way of tooling the halos is freehand with a stylus and the artist covered the interstices between the decorative forms with cross-hatchings (Skaug 2008, 571). I see the same approach in the ceramic example, where the interspaces between the interlaced decoration are filled with cross-hatchings. Since the artist removed the slip in the act of incising the lines, this part is set on a lower level and enhances the tridimensionality. It seems to be a suitable way to densely cover the background and to leave no lacuna.

Figure 3 Interlaced motif. Fifteenth century. Ceramic, incised slipware, fragment of a bowl (reverse), 12 × 8 cm. Donation Prof. Luigi Conton, produced in Venice. Inv. no. 2822, MIC – Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza. Photo credit: MIC – Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza

6 See for example: Amico Aspertini, *Virgin and Child*. 1490-1552. Red chalk drawing, 1.70 × 1.32 cm. Inv. 1946,0713.241, British Museum, London.

7 See for example: Masolino da Panicale, *The Archangel Gabriel*. Ca. 1430. Tempera on poplar panel, 76.6 × 57.8 cm. Inv. 1939.1.225, Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

The decorative scheme extends to the underside and foot of the bowl **[fig. 3]**. There is a flower motif in the middle of the foot ring, partially coloured with yellow and green glaze. Geometrical patterns ring the rim of the vessel, alternating between seven linear hatchings, coloured in yellow, and one zigzag line in green. Thus, the concept of *horror vacui*, to leave not a single space empty, is evident in the richly decorated obverse and the artist even included the reverse of the ceramic bowl. The overall approach in covering the whole surface was therefore carried to extremes in this example.

3.2.3 Incised Dots

Figure 4
Female figure. First half of the sixteenth century. Ceramic, incised slipware, fragment of a plate, 15 × 10 cm. Produced in Venice. Inv. no. A-2172, Muzej grada Rovinja-Rovigno – Museo della città di Rovinj-Rovigno. Photo by the Author

The next example of a ceramic piece with an overall approach shows the profile of a female **[fig. 4]**. This ceramic is held in the collection of the Museo della città di Rovinj-Rovigno. The figure itself is not decorated, because the artist used the white colour of the slip to represent her skin. Her hair is executed with wavy incised lines and coloured with yellow glaze to depict her curly blond hair. This is a representation of the ideal beauty in a Petrarchan sense of white skin colour and blondness (Hall 1996, 466). Since the female is unidentifiable, it is likely a depiction of ideal beauty (Cropper 1986,

178). Whiteness is positively associated with virginal purity, grace and goodness (Hall 1996, 466). But Whiteness is also connected to white privilege and stands for the superiority of the white race in a colonial framework (Hall 1996, 462, 466). Beauty and Whiteness are related ideas in the early modern period, as can be seen with female portraits with these characteristics, which is also the case for the ceramic example.

In contrast to the white figure, the background of the pottery is richly covered. The surroundings around the female's head are treated with rows of small, incised dots and coloured with green glaze. The part below the green background, starting from the neck of the figure, is covered with horizontally incised lines, closely situated in parallel, and divided by two vertical lines. This and the green area cover the surface intensively.

On the one hand, the artist left the figure intentionally white, while on the other hand, he decorated the surroundings even more strongly. This gives a good contrast and lets the figure stand out against the agitated background. The concept of *horror vacui* can be seen especially in the background, where the decoration covers every part of it. But the overall approach also includes the female, which is the central part of the image. There, the artist plays with leaving one part of the surface white. This empty space can be regarded as part of the composition and translated into a figure, so that it is not considered a void anymore.

Art historian Richard Ettinghausen (1979, 16) noticed this as well: he comments on the negative character of an empty background in Islamic art, where the artists tried to eliminate it or turn it in a way that it has a decorative function itself and becomes positive. Ettinghausen sees the tendency of *horror vacui* to fill all the empty spaces represented in Islamic art beginning in the ninth century and stresses the void's negative connotation, by giving examples of *horror vacui* in diverse media, such as Iraqi wood carvings, Iranian ceramic bowls and Persian 'vase carpets' (Ettinghausen 1979, 16-18). The negative association with the void was not yet remarked so clearly in this paper, but it is a plausible way to express the fearful approach of the artists against the void. In turning the empty space, i.e. the negative, into a figure or decoration, as the artist did in the example with the female, it receives a positive association.

A similar example, today held in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula, shows a figure in profile, framed by a lobed register of incised dots which pierce the white slip to reveal the dark clay body underneath **[fig. 5]**. The figure is executed with thick, incised lines. The facial features, headpiece and garment, with a detailed, decorative design, are clearly visible. Though we see only a fragment of the total composition, a comparable floral pattern appears in the upper half of the ceramic piece. Another botanical element is located

on the left part of the fragment, where the artist removed much white slip to elevate and accentuate this decorative element.

Figure 5 Figure. Second half of the fifteenth century. Ceramic, incised slipware, fragment of a plate or bowl, 8.5 × 10.1 cm. Produced in the Veneto or Emilia. Inv. no. AMI-S-10500, Archaeological Museum of Istria, Pula. Photo by the Author

The area around the figure's head and visible torso, consisting of many small, incised dots, represents a common technique used for covering the background in early modern ceramics. One I would argue is reminiscent of the granulation technique (*granare*) used for the decoration of gold grounds in panel paintings (Eclercy 2007, 546). During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, artists painting on panel used motif punches for tooling the halos (Skaug 2008, 571).[8] The interstices are often filled with stippling, i.e. granulation, achieved with a small ring punch (Skaug 2008, 571). I see a connection between the treatment of the ceramic surface and halos in panel painting.

8 See for example: Masolino da Panicale, *The Annunciation*. Ca. 1423-24. Tempera (and possibly oil glazes) on panel, 148.8 × 115.1 cm. Inv. 1937.1.16, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Cennino Cennini (1370-1440) mentions this method for processing gold in his *Il libro dell'arte*: "Questo granare che io ti dico, è de' belli membri che abbiamo. E puossi granare a disteso, come ti ho detto; e puossi granare a rilievo" (Milanesi, Milanesi 1859, 93). Here, Cennini distinguishes between two procedures, the plane treatment and the relief technique of granulation. While the former is more relevant to the ceramic example, on which incised dots cover a swathe of surface area. The art conservator Erling Sigvard Skaug (2008, 572) explained 'granare a disteso' as: "the all-over filling of the surface with a texture or ornaments". Thus, I would argue that the granulation technique is applicable to the surface covering in ceramics and connects to the idea of *horror vacui* with the overall approach.

Furthermore, the small dots arranged in lines may relate to pouncing, a technique used in the fifteenth century to transfer drawings to another surface, also employed in maiolica decoration (Hess 1999, 5). Curator Catherine Hess describes the process of pouncing in the following way:

> It involves pricking small holes through the lines and contours of a cartoon's image with a needle, holding the pricked cartoon (*spolvero* or *spolverezzo*) against the surface to be decorated, and then tapping a cloth bag containing pounce (*spolverizzo*) – commonly pulverized chalk, graphite, or charcoal – against the cartoon. When the cartoon is pulled away, the design's outline remains on the surface in a series of small dots. (Hess 1999, 5)

The results are dotted lines in powder form, similar to those on the background of the ceramic example, which are also organised in lines. I propose that the pouncing and/or the granulation technique inspired the ceramic artists to use incised dots as decoration.

In the ceramic example, they are in combination with a green-orange glaze. This dark colouring, together with the small, incised dots, emphasises how the artists wanted to avoid the empty space. Apart from the face of the figure, there is another light part. These stand out against the dark background and incised parts. The contrast is even more extreme than in the previous example. Thus, the concept of *horror vacui* can be seen in the dark background with incised dots, counterbalanced by the lighter parts. The latter are not omitted, but included in the overall approach of the decoration to cover the surface.

4 Conclusion

In summation, I apply the concept of *horror vacui* to certain extant examples of early modern ceramics on which the artist decisively deployed multiple mark-making and glazing techniques to achieve an overall surface covering. These include foliage and interlaced motifs; the leaves and intertwined motifs richly covering the surface give a sensation of sculptural or pictorial depth. Linear and cross-hatching marks form patterns that fill space. Incised dots occur in combination with dark green glaze to form the background of a figure in contrasting white. The figure's Whiteness is not a void, I argue, but part of the whole decorative scheme and therefore something positive.

I began by outlining how the concept of *horror vacui* has occupied scientists and philosophers for centuries, though its origin in classical antiquity or medieval Christian theology remains a point of debate. Regardless, I trace the feeling and thus the essence of the fear of the void back to Aristotle's treatise on the vacuum. Also, the connection between void, nature, and art is an important factor that informed the early modern ceramics. This and the further discussion of the idea *horror vacui*, which continued until the early modern period with Galilei and his students, demonstrates that it is likely that the ceramic artists knew about these discussions and reinforces that the idea of *horror vacui* can be applied to ceramics, as I did in this paper. Not only with the discussions on the idea of the void, which were apparent in the early modern period, but also with the extremely rich covered surfaces of the ceramics, and therefore expressions of the artists' feelings and discussions through their artworks, the concept of *horror vacui* can be identified.

My focus on different decorative methods on early modern ceramics is an attempt to understand how these artists may have approached the fear of the void, and how they managed to express it in their artworks. The concept of *horror vacui* also says a lot about the idea of the void, which was to be avoided at all costs and seen as something negative. It thus helps to unveil the void. This could be expanded further with more examples of pottery, where the idea of *horror vacui* is embedded and may illuminate other approaches to the surface decoration. Another idea would be to identify ceramics on which the artist attempted to depict the void itself. It would then be interesting to compare them with the ceramic examples in this paper, to see how the methods in dealing with the idea of the void differ. Moreover, other media, like early modern drawings or panel paintings with gold decorations, that discuss the void or the fear of it, could be further compared to the ceramics.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Aquinas, T. (1265/66-73). *Summa Theologica*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/a/aquinas/summa/cache/summa.pdf.

Blayney, B. (ed.) (1769). *Genesis*. *King James Version (KJV) of the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Galilei, G. (1638). *Discorsi e dimostrazioni matematiche, intorno à due nuove scienze attenenti alla mecanica & i movimenti locali*. Leiden: Ludovico Elzeviro.

Milanesi, G.; Milanesi, C. (a cura di) (1859). *Cennino Cennini: Il libro dell'arte*. Firenze: F. Le Monnier.

Rackham, H. (transl.) (1961). *Pliny the Elder's Natural History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wicksteed, P.H.; Cornford, F.M. (transl.); Heinemann, W. (eds) (1957). *Aristotle: The Physics*, vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Secondary Sources

Bohen, B.E. (1991). "The Dipylon Amphora. Its Role in the Development of Greek Art". *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 25(2), 59-65.

Cropper, E. (1986). "The Beauty of Woman. Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture". Ferguson, M.W.; Quilligan, M.; Vickers, N.J. (eds), *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 175-90.

Eclercy, B. (2007). "'Granare'. Zur historischen Terminologie des Goldgrunddekors im Traktat des Cennino Cennini". *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 51(3/4), 539-54.

Ettinghausen, R. (1979). "The Taming of the Horror Vacui in Islamic Art". *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 123(1), 15-28.

Ferrari, V. (1960). *La ceramica graffita ferrarese nei secoli XV-XVI*. Modena: E. Bassi.

Fricke, B. (2025). *Creation and Creativity in Medieval Art. Illustrating Genesis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Grant, E. (1981). *Much Ado about Nothing. Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, K.F. (1996). "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness. Teaching Race and Gender". *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47(4), 461-75.

Hess, C. (1999). *Maiolica in the Making. The Gentili/Barnabei Archive*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities.

Michel, S. (2024). *Leere. Eine Kulturgeschichte*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Platt, V. (2018). "Ecology, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*". *Journal of the Clark Art Institute*, 17, 219-42.

Saccardo, F. (2002). "Venezia. Un quadro delle produzioni ingobbiate dal XIII al XVIII secolo". Lavagna, R. (a cura di), *Atti. Problemi e aspetti delle produzioni ingobbiate. Origini e sviluppi, tecniche, tipologie = Atti del XXXIV Convengo Internazionale della Ceramica* (Savona, 25-26 maggio 2001). Firenze: Edizioni All'Insegna del Giglio, 101-16.

Schmidt, E.A. (2021). *Das Leere. Eine Untersuchung der Theorien in Antike und Früher Neuzeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Skaug, E.S. (2008). "Painters, Punchers, Gilders or Goldbeaters? – A Critical Survey Report of Discussions in Recent Literature about Early Italian Painting". *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 71(4), 571-82.

Thorp, J. (1990). "Aristotle's *Horror Vacui*". *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 20(2), 149-66.