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The interpretation of architectural objects in plastic arts, “encaustic tiles in Cyprus”

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Abstract

This study was conducted in hope of increasing the awareness of Cypriots on encaustic tiles which are one of the most important elements of architectural heritage and thus help to protect this heritage from disappearing. Because of modernisation and developments in interior decorating, encaustic tiles have started to be forgotten. In this study, literature researches have been carried out about many things from interior decorating to encaustic tiles. Photographs were taken in houses where encaustic tiles have been used. Houses in North Cyprus were investigated with data from received speculations and with random sampling. The results were used to make canvas works and prepare an exhibition. Results indicated two important measures to protect this architectural heritage from disappearing in the face of developed technology and the changed world as in previous historical times. One of these measures is increasing the awareness of public on the importance of encaustic tiles and the other is increasing the number of firms producing encaustic tiles and providing their sustainability.

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1. Introduction

When looking at the Island of Cyprus, it seems nearly impossible to assume that the subject of thesis has not been affected from the historical process, cultural change and the many civilisations that have passed from the island and that this cultural heritage has not been changed with each newcoming civilisation. Coloured floor tiles have also been investigated socially and culturally throughout this process of change. “For centuries, the Island of Cyprus has been host to important civilisations; it is a piece of land which holds within its body continual values that have accumulated throughout the historical process until our day. Under different administrations for centuries, it has been under the influence of many cultures and civilisations and from the past to today it has become a mosaic of cultures. In successive order, being Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman, British and today’s administration, different rules and cultures have influenced the island in different ways.” (The Handbook of Cyprus, 2007, 1)

“There are many monumental constructions built on the island, examples of civil architecture with architectural and artistic value, and its street texture of organic structure, not to forget the many uninflected and authentic settlements that make up this texture.”

In these places of settlement and site specific constructions we notice that the floor tiles come forth as elaborate and eye-catching examples of decorations with their original texture. Villages and cities, besides their similarities, with their unique physical and architectural characteristics, all have identities. As an example, it can be observed from the marbles also that every street and every family’s living space have within them their own unique decorative characteristic. “In houses as places of settlement, one of the important architectural elements which emphasise

identity is 'Coloured Floor Tiles'. In the south and north, floor tiles have become a symbol of the Cyprus house and the street texture in regards of interior architecture and can even be considered to carry antique value. The process and making being a difficult one, this craft, although continues to exist today, with modernism and the development in the field of decoration has been forgotten and faces risks of disappearing." (The Handbook of Cyprus,2007,5)

There are two general problems that make this research significant. These are:

- a) There are no documents to provide information on the coloured floor tiles of Cyprus;
- b) That the coloured floor tiles being an important part of the architectural heritage of Cyprus are beginning to disappear.

1.2 Purpose

With the development of modern technology, our historical artefacts and cultural heritage have in time lost their old usage necessity, leaving their place to the endless opportunities offered by technology. Therefore, the uses of these floor decoration elements that once marked the period and were highly preferable has gradually decreased and now face the danger of disappearing. Although the wide range of alternatives produced by developed firms in the field have pushed us to forget our historical heritage, it wouldn't be wrong to say that research and work in the field will to some degree reveal the relationship between the art and technology. Besides the architecture of Cyprus, in other Mediterranean coasts, Istanbul, Safranbolu, Salonica, Italy, Spain and Argentina, it is also possible to find examples of floor tiles where the making and technique depends entirely on human power and creativity. As a result, with the development of industry and technology, it appears that the aim should be to get society to use and re-interpret this forgotten cultural heritage again.

The aim of this research is to re-interpret an architectural heritage which has begun to disappear, in the field of the plastic arts. In these lines, to put together an exhibition of 'The Interpretation of Floor Tiles with Plastic Values', which will be an effective way to emphasise the importance of these values. Also, researches, articles, theoretical detums have been collected on this subject. For the theoretical research the archives of the Eastern Mediterranean Library, the Near East Library, the National Libraries of South and North Cyprus, Department of Antiquities and Museums were investigated. Cyprus houses have been visited and tile examples found within have been photographed in order to create visual documentation. With the help of the collected visual and theoretical detums, floor tiles were interpreted within the medium of plastic; three dimensional experiments were conducted and brought to conclusion.

Method

Researches, articles, theoretical detums have been collected on this subject. For the theoretical research the archives of the Eastern Mediterranean Library, the Near East Library, the National Libraries of South and North Cyprus, Department of Antiquities and Museums were investigated. Cyprus houses have been visited and tile examples found within have been photographed in order to create visual documentation. Within the scope of possibilities, conversations with real owners of the houses were put together as interviews and used. Floor tiles examples found in the Museum of Cyprus and the Museum of Leventis, after inquiry of the resources, were again used in the thesis.

Results

1.3. The Definition of Coloured Floor Tiles

Coloured floor tiles were discovered towards the end of the 19. Century and at that time were used as a new means of decoration which required no method of cooking. (Navarro, 2006) In general, marbles are the stones that are formed when under heat and pressure limestone and dolomitic limestones undergo metamorphosis and re-crystalise to gain a new structure. In industrial sense; all types of greywacke/rock which have a commercial value, as well as can be cut and polished are given the name marble. Using types of marble of different colour and construction characteristics as a means of decorative cover stone in interior and/or exterior surface cover is a very common practise. Taking its name "commercially" and from places marble is found, from its colour or from the marble's

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