

# A Study on the Construction of the Relationship between Form and Space in Contemporary Ceramic Sculpture

Zhan Chen, Zhengfeng Huang\*

Guangxi Vocational University Of Agriculture, Nanning, 530007, China

\*Corresponding author: 13977120332@163.com

**Abstract:** *As the concept of sculpture in the context of contemporary art undergoes a profound transformation from a closed entity to an open field, the focus of creation and research in ceramic sculpture has transcended the single dimension of form and technique, shifting toward an in-depth exploration of the interactive mechanism between its formal language and spatial relationships. This paper aims to systematically analyze the constructed relationship between form and space in contemporary ceramic sculpture. It first adopts a morphological perspective to examine how the extension and contraction of form, the cohesion and openness of structure, and the material expression of physical properties presuppose and generate spatial potential. Subsequently, it explores how the three dimensions of physical space, virtual space, and conceptual space are translated and concretely presented through formal language. Finally, it proposes that an "intertextual construction mechanism" exists between form and space, where the two serve as anchor points and contexts for each other, achieving an ontological reconstruction of ceramic sculpture from a static object to a relational "event" within a dynamic equilibrium. This study provides an integrated theoretical framework based on the construction of spatial relationships for understanding the creative logic and aesthetic connotations of contemporary ceramic sculpture.*

**Keywords:** *Ceramic Sculpture, Formal Language, Spatial Relationship, Construction, Intertextuality*

## Introduction

Under the overarching trend in contemporary art that emphasizes field, process, and relationship, the creative practice of ceramic sculpture has increasingly manifested a conscious response to spatial issues. However, existing research has mostly focused on the evolution of stylistic forms or the innovation of materials and techniques, failing to systematically elucidate the dynamic and constructive intrinsic connection between formal configuration and multidimensional space. This theoretical lag has limited a full appreciation of the artistic value and conceptual depth of contemporary ceramic sculpture. Therefore, clarifying the interactive mechanism between its formal language and spatial relationships from an ontological level is not only a theoretical distillation and elevation of specific creative practices but also a necessary academic path for integrating the study of ceramic sculpture into the broader discourse system of contemporary art. This study eschews isolated work analysis and aims, through a three-tiered progressive structure of morphological analysis, spatial dimension translation, and exploration of intertextual mechanisms, to reveal how form and space mutually generate and define each other, thereby elucidating the core constructive logic and aesthetic significance of contemporary ceramic sculpture.

## 1. Morphological Analysis of the Formal Language of Ceramic Sculpture and Its Spatial Potential

### 1.1 The Definition of Spatial Occupation through the Extension and Contraction of Form

The physical form of ceramic sculpture serves as its most direct visual declaration of occupying and dividing space. The extension of form manifests as the active expansion of volume into the external space, physically encroaching upon and redefining the surrounding void through radiating lines, expanding masses, or cantilevered structures. This encroachment is not a mere filling of space; instead, it forms a directional force field through the directivity and tension of the form, compelling the viewer

to perceive the activated spatial range. In contrast, the contraction of form is reflected in the inward convergence of volume, which creates a spatial domain characterized by inwardness and a sense of introspection through depressions, holes, or compact, clustered structures. While a contracted form physically yields a portion of space, it reinforces the boundary and density of the form on a perceptual level, thereby defining a subtle and cohesive psychological space<sup>[1]</sup>.

The dialectical relationship between extension and contraction constitutes the foundational mechanism for the dialogue between form and space. A ceramic sculpture often encompasses both tendencies simultaneously, establishing its presence in space through the confrontation of tensions. The extended parts of the form guide the space to flow outward, suggesting a potential connection with the broader environment, whereas the contracted parts anchor the core, forming a visual and psychological focal point. This dynamic treatment of either occupying or yielding space transcends mere physical volume calculation, transforming into a subtle modulation of spatial mass and potential energy, thus becoming the primary formal language for constructing spatial relationships.

### ***1.2 The Guidance of Spatial Flow through Structural Cohesion and Openness***

Structure serves as the internal logic that supports the form and determines its mode of spatial interaction. The cohesive structure emphasizes the close clustering of formal units around a core, with connections between parts tending to be closed or semi-closed, thereby forming a self-sufficient entity with a clearly defined boundary. This type of structure directs a static, centripetal spatial experience, where spatial flow tends to slow down or terminate on the surface of the form, and the viewer's gaze is guided and converges within the structure. Its spatial significance lies in establishing a clear, stable object that forms a distinct subject-object separation from its surrounding environment, with the spatial relationship presenting an explicit duality.

The open structure, in contrast, breaks the self-sufficiency of the form by deliberately introducing the void as an essential component of the composition through techniques such as interpenetration, layering, framing, or gridding. The structure no longer attempts to enclose the space but instead guides space to penetrate, intertwine with, and flow through the sculpture itself. Both the visual path and the imaginary path are directed by the structure, meandering between solid forms and voids, thereby allowing space to be experienced as a continuous, dynamic, and rhythmic process. The open structure dissolves the traditional perception of sculpture as an isolated object, transforming it into a spatial generator and regulator that actively participates in and shapes its own field, leading to a construction of spatial relationships characterized by interpenetration and continuity.

### ***1.3 The Interaction between the Material Expression of Physical Properties and Spatial Perception***

The physical properties of ceramic materials constitute an inseparable dimension of its formal language, profoundly influencing the texture and temperature of spatial perception. The warmth or coolness, lightness or darkness, and transparency of glaze colors directly act upon the visual atmosphere of space. A warm, opaque glaze may absorb light, giving the form a sense of heaviness and intimacy, thereby creating an introverted and embracing spatial quality. In contrast, a cool crystalline glaze or a translucent celadon glaze reflects and refracts light, endowing the form with visual characteristics of lightness or austerity, thereby extending the depth and illusion of space. The texture of the material's surface, whether smooth as a mirror or rough as rock, regulates the nuanced layers of spatial perception through its distinct interaction with light and its potential resonance with the viewer's tactile experience<sup>[2]</sup>.

The physical properties of ceramics manifested during the firing process—such as the sense of weight, fragility, and distinctive forming traces—also participate in the construction of spatial meaning. A seemingly lightweight piece of thin-walled porcelain implies a fragile and diffuse spatial presence, challenging traditional perceptions of volume. Meanwhile, a work that retains traces of clay-slab bending or wheel-throwing materializes the process of transformation in time onto the form itself, thereby attaching a temporal dimension to the spatial experience. The physical properties of the material are no longer a passive medium that merely carries form; instead, they become an active vehicle that emits perceptual information and engages in subtle energetic exchanges with the spatial environment. This interaction, grounded in the authenticity of the material, enables the spatial relationships constructed by ceramic sculpture to transcend pure visual geometry and incorporate the complex connotations of material poetics and phenomenological aesthetics.

## **2. The Translation and Presentation of Spatial Dimensions in the Form of Ceramic Sculpture**

### ***2.1 The Intervention of Physical Space and the Adaptive Variation of Form***

Physical space, as the absolute field in which ceramic sculpture exists, provides inherent conditions of scale, proportion, and boundaries that serve as the foundational constraints and interactive conditions for the generation of form. The placement of a work within a specific space triggers an adaptive variation of form in response to the characteristics of that field. In the face of a towering or low-ceilinged space, the form may respond through vertical elongation or compression; when situated in an open or confined setting, the form accordingly considers the degree of horizontal extension or concentration. This variation is not a passive adaptation; rather, it results from the formal language actively incorporating the parameters of physical space—such as viewing distance, angle, and lighting conditions—into its own grammatical considerations, thereby allowing the sculpture and the site to form an inseparable visual whole. This holistic quality implies that the formal logic of the sculpture has preemptively embedded within it a "prediction" and "response" to its spatial context, with the finalization of its form being accomplished through a simulated dialogue with the specific spatial conditions.

The adaptive variation of form is further reflected in the predetermination of the viewer's bodily experience and movement path. The sculpture's configuration, volume, and opening designs imply a latent instruction guiding the viewer to circle around, pass through, or pause for contemplation. The intervention of physical space compels the form to transcend isolated objecthood and evolve instead into a "spatial arrangement," the formal logic of which internalizes the patterns of human behavior and sequences of perception within space. Through this conscious variation, ceramic sculpture transforms static physical space into an experiential field rich with dynamic perceptual possibilities, achieving a translation of spatial conditions into a formal narrative. The crux of this translation lies in the fact that the form is no longer merely an object within space; instead, it becomes a medium that reorganizes spatial order and guides both vision and bodily experience, with each formal adjustment constituting a subtle reconfiguration and redefinition of the power structure of space<sup>[3]</sup>.

### ***2.2 The Creation of Virtual Space and the Construction of Negative Form in Sculpture***

Virtual space refers to the non-physical parts defined, enclosed, or implied by the physical form, serving as an active element of equal importance to the physical form in the spatial construction of ceramic sculpture. The deliberate creation of virtual space marks a fundamental shift in formal thinking—from shaping the solid to managing the relationship between the solid and the void. This is achieved through the active construction of negative form: apertures, cavities, gaps, and the voids formed by the interplay between forms are no longer backgrounds or passive residues but become visual subjects endowed with form, light, and rhythm. The shape, size, and degree of transparency of the negative form directly determine the visual quality and fluidity of the virtual space.

The essence of negative form construction lies in the formal treatment of "emptiness," compelling the viewer's vision to oscillate between solid and void, thereby enabling the perception of spatial layering and rhythm. A meticulously crafted negative form can absorb and reflect light, induce the flow of air, and even become the focal point of visual focus. The boundaries of the solid form thus become interfaces that generate virtual space, with their concavities, turns, and openings directly shaping the character of that virtual space—whether it is deep and serene or open and airy. Here, the task of form is not merely to assert itself but also to generate an expressive "nothingness" by defining "emptiness," thereby constructing a richer and more tension-filled spatial totality through the dialectical interdependence of solid and void. This construction reveals the transformation of the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of "treating the blank as the black" within contemporary three-dimensional form, where virtual space is not a "void" but rather the crucial site for the circulation of energy and the generation of meaning—a domain where the dynamic force of form can dwell and extend<sup>[4]</sup>.

### ***2.3 The Externalization of Conceptual Space and the Symbolic Distillation of Form***

Conceptual space refers to the non-physical space evoked by the work, existing within the viewer's consciousness and cultural context, and originates from the artist's conceptual projections and cultural reflections. The primary means by which ceramic form externalizes this abstract space lies in the symbolic distillation of form. Formal elements shed their purely physical descriptions, being simplified,

transformed, or combined into symbols that carry specific conceptual meanings. These symbols may derive from abstractions of natural phenomena or may be ideologically endowed geometric forms, with their significance residing in pointing toward a conceptual field that transcends the physical site. Symbolic distillation is not a mere simplification of form but rather a condensation and purification of meaning, enabling form to detach from concrete references and gain the potential for multiple interpretations, thereby building a bridge toward conceptual space.

The process of symbolic distillation is one of refinement, stripping away narrative details while reinforcing the metaphorical and symbolic potential inherent in form itself. A recurring motif of fissures may point toward the dimensions of time and memory, while an orderly arrangement of stacked forms may metaphorically suggest concepts of growth and structure. The cultural attributes and traces of craftsmanship inherent to the ceramic material itself are also incorporated into the symbolic system, thereby enriching the depth of conceptual expression. Through this distillation, form becomes the coordinate and entry point into conceptual space, guiding the viewer beyond the surface of physical form and into a network of meaning interwoven with cultural associations, personal experience, and philosophical reflection. What the sculpture constructs, then, is not merely a visual and physical spatial relationship but also a spiritual and conceptual spatial field. Ultimately, this externalization process renders ceramic sculpture a condensation of concepts, its presence in physical space functioning as a trigger that activates and unfolds an infinitely extendable conceptual universe — invisible yet perceptible and contemplable.

### **3.The Intertextual Construction Mechanism between Form and Space**

#### ***3.1 The Stability and Centrifugal Force of Form as a Spatial Anchor***

From the perspective of intertextual construction, the form of a ceramic sculpture first exists as a crucial anchor point within space, with its physical presence and visual weight providing a perceptible foundation of stability for the fluid and transient nature of space. This stability derives from the form's honest response to gravity, scale, and material, establishing it as an undeniable spatial fact around which all spatial relationships unfold. The configuration, texture, and volume of the form determine the specific quality of its role as an anchor — whether it serves as a steadfast and substantial core or a slender and sensitive presence — thereby preliminarily defining the fundamental mood and energy level of the spatial field. This anchoring function essentially establishes the origin of a coordinate system for spatial experience, serving as the static reference point from which all subsequent dynamic relationships can unfold.

However, the formal anchor in contemporary ceramic sculpture is often neither static nor closed. The tension, directivity, and sense of incompleteness inherent in its form release a centrifugal force. This centrifugal force is realized through asymmetrical compositions, dynamic tilts, tendencies toward fragmentation, or lines that point toward the external space. This centrifugal force acts upon the surrounding void, rendering it no longer uniform and static but rather drawn, disturbed, and imbued with invisible vortices or trajectories. Stability and centrifugal force constitute a pair of contradictory yet unified forces: the former ensures the work's presence and recognizability within space, while the latter drives the spatial relationship from a static state of "surrounding" toward a dynamic state of "extension" and "interaction," thereby initiating a process of continuous dialogue between form and space. The existence of centrifugal force implies an inherent tendency toward movement and an overflow of energy, challenging the traditional notion of sculpture as a frozen moment and transforming space into the field where this potential movement extends and manifests itself<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### ***3.2 Space as the Context for Form: Situational Generation and Meaning Attribution***

Within the intertextual mechanism, space is not a passive container to be received but rather an actively engaged context that participates in the generation of meaning. A specific space — whether a white cube exhibition hall, a historic building, a natural landscape, or a virtual field — carries its own history, scale, lighting conditions, and functional attributes, all of which collectively constitute a unique situational framework. When a ceramic sculpture is placed within it, this spatial context "reads" and "rewrites" the form, endowing it with additional layers of meaning that transcend its inherent formal semantics. A rustic ceramic piece placed within a heritage site may evoke archaeological associations with material civilization, whereas the same work situated in a minimalist contemporary space may accentuate its formal autonomy and material purity. Here, space functions analogously to "context" in

linguistics: it frames and filters the potential interpretations of formal symbols, directing them toward specific channels of meaning.

The core of situational generation lies in the encounter and synthesis between the spatial context and the symbolic system of form. The physical attributes of space (such as the direction and quality of light, the ambient sound and temperature) and its non-physical attributes (such as the memory of a place and cultural connotations) jointly activate or transform the potential semantic directions of the form. Space becomes an indispensable component for the final realization of the form's meaning; it is not merely the backdrop against which the work is presented, but rather the field where its semantics are enriched and concretized. In this process, the meaning of the form becomes open-ended, context-dependent, and inherently flexible, with its ultimate interpretation inevitably being the result of a mutual negotiation and co-action between the spatial context and the formal text. This negotiation process reveals the profound implications of the "site-specificity" of an artwork, namely, that its complete aesthetic statement cannot exist independently of its specific place of installation, as space itself serves as an intrinsic variable and active participant in the production of meaning.

### ***3.3 The Contemporary Reconstruction of the Ceramic Sculpture Ontology under Dynamic Equilibrium***

The ultimate aim of intertextual construction lies in achieving a contemporary reconstruction of the artistic ontology of ceramic sculpture through the continuous dynamic equilibrium between form and space. This reconstruction is first manifested in the transcendence of the traditional notion of a static, closed object. Sculpture is no longer regarded as a self-sufficient entity with fixed meaning but is instead understood as an "event" that continuously "occurs" within a specific spatial relationship. Its ontological integrity resides precisely in its exchange of energy with the environment, its encounter with the viewer's perception, and the transformation of its own meaning across different contexts. Ontology shifts from an "object" with clearly defined boundaries toward a "state" or "process" that relies on a network of relationships<sup>[6]</sup>.

This reconstruction further extends into the dimensions of material and concept. The inherent material qualities of ceramics — such as their craftsmanship, fragility, and cultural associations — generate new expressive dimensions when confronted with contemporary spatial concepts such as site-specificity, virtual space, and relational aesthetics. The process of formal generation may be deliberately foregrounded, the intervention of space may be prefigured within the logic of creation, and the "completed state" of the work may possess variable boundaries. The ontology of ceramic sculpture is thus redefined as an "entity in relationship," an artistic form that maintains dynamic equilibrium and continuously renews itself within the sustained tensions between physical properties, spatial contexts, and cultural discourses. This marks its transition from the traditional domain of craft arts into the contemporary art discourse centered on the construction of spatial relationships as its core issue. The reconstructed ontology emphasizes a quality of "generativity" and "relationality," where its value no longer resides solely in the perfection of form and technique, but rather in its capacity to initiate, sustain, and deepen a tension-filled and productive dialogical relationship with space and with the viewer.

## **Conclusion**

Through a progressively layered argumentation, this paper demonstrates that the construction of spatial relationships in contemporary ceramic sculpture is a dynamic process triggered by the inherent potential of formal language, mediated by the active translation of spatial dimensions, and ultimately realized within an intertextual dialogue between form and space. The morphological characteristics of form, structure, and material constitute the material foundation for the generation of space, while the spatial dimensions of the physical, the virtual, and the conceptual provide the field for the translation and realization of meaning. Furthermore, the intertextual mechanism formed between the two through "stability and centrifugal force," "situational generation," and "dynamic equilibrium" fundamentally reconstructs the artistic ontology of ceramic sculpture, transforming it from an object rooted in craftsmanship into an "event" that continuously unfolds within a specific network of relationships. This theoretical understanding not only deepens the comprehension of the contemporary transformation of ceramic sculpture but also offers new perspectives for future creation and criticism. Building upon this foundation, subsequent research may further explore the more complex influences of digital virtual space, cross-media contexts, and specific sociocultural fields on the construction of spatial relationships

in ceramic sculpture, thereby continuously advancing the theoretical boundaries of this field.

## References

- [1] Jiang Wukai, Lai Junyou, and Xiao Jiwei. "A Brief Discussion on the Relationship between Formal Language and Space in Ceramic Sculpture Teaching." *Ceramics*, no. 02 (2025): 83-85.
- [2] Huang Lei. *A Study on the Formal Language of the Combination of Form and Decoration in Contemporary Ceramic Sculpture*. 2025. Jingdezhen Ceramic University, MA thesis.
- [3] Chen Jinyu. *The Application of Spatial Compression Formal Language in Ceramic Sculpture Creation*. 2024. Jingdezhen Ceramic University, MA thesis.
- [4] Zhou Yuting. *From Readymade to Ceramic Sculpture: A Study on the Artistic Application of Material Transformation*. 2024. Jingdezhen Ceramic University, MA thesis.
- [5] Liu Changlu, and Peng Yihong. "A Brief Discussion on the Imagery Expression of Contemporary Ceramic Sculpture." *Ceramic Science & Art*, vol. 58, no. 07 (2024): 32-33.
- [6] Qi Zeqing. "A Study on the Form of Plant Morphology in Modern Ceramic Sculpture Art." *Ceramics*, no. 03 (2024): 94-96+102.