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**DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, NEW FOCUSES:
AN ANALYSIS ON ARTISTS PERFORMING TURKISH ART
OF CERAMICS**

Introduction

As the ongoing process of contemporary Turkish ceramics till present day is examined, it can be suggested that the modern formation of Anatolian art of ceramics distinct from conventional memory and field of practice first coincided with the decade between 1930-1940. The pillars of this formation were settled prior to the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923: Yıldız Porcelain Plant of Ottoman Empire built at the ends of 19th century stands out as a vital meeting point of integration with European art of ceramics. As a natural consequence, décor masters having received in this Ottoman academy a training reflecting the integration were indirectly influenced by European approach.

“It was witnessed during the 1930-40s, 1950s and 1960s that ceramic artists received education in European states...In Europe contemporary ceramic education first initiated almost thirty years earlier than Turkey; however, it was only after the 1960s that ceramics curriculum both in Europe and Turkey could be settled into a fixed program. Those Turkish ceramic artists returning homeland shared their European knowledge and experiences with their students and laid the foundations of contemporary ceramic education ...Contemporary Turkish ceramic artists have at all generations favored academic career more. Hence they have become both instructors and performers of ceramic art” (Aslıtürk, 2009) As Turkish art of ceramics is explored starting from its origination till present day, it is possible to categorize young ceramic artists till

2000s-which also constitutes the center of this paper- under three generations. Till 1950s, the generation that could be named as the founding fathers were the ones having first met with ceramics in Academy of Fine Arts and State Applied Fine Arts School; however due to paucity of substructure they had to receive education in Europe; the second generation comprises of artists trained in fine arts faculties of universities opened outside Istanbul during the 1960 and 70s and post 1980s; the third generation corresponds to the 1990s' generation raised by the former generation.

Different Perspectives, New Focuses

During 2000s, global sharing of information was accelerated more than ever. Young artists trained in fully-equipped ceramics departments at universities and managed to form a collective memory via Turkish art of ceramics to possess the kind of dynamism and self-confidence enabling them to prove themselves in-person. This emerging self-confidence owes greatly to one resource of information: The Internet. This medium shapes Turkish generation equal to its effect over the entire globe. An 'informed' and 'sharing generation of youngsters' now structure their own views through distilling from a panoramic perspective and attempt to express themselves in the best manner. It is now quite convenient for artists to access exhibitions, contests and symposiums to express themselves. Ceramic associations, journals, other publications and museums can now be traced livingly. One other opportunity granted to young artists of today is international mobility: Turkish students can now receive professional training, undergraduate and postgraduate education in European universities much easily thanks to mutual educational agreements signed within the scope of EU membership process; in addition Turkish students can now find it much easier to receive education in non-European countries as well through various scholarships, undergraduate and postgraduate education programs and Artist-in-Residence organizations. Other

developments that should be underlined are the support provided by Turkish universities and Turkish Ceramic Association via organizing international exhibitions, symposiums, conferences, workshops, artists and academicians visits. When combined all together these factors introduce a new profile of ceramic artist possessing different perspectives and creating new focuses. There are now novel artists that are nourished by a variety of resources to create unique works; hence eager to speak out their own words while expressing their message via their original pieces of work.

Having graduated from Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Ceramics in 1998 **Kemal Tizgöl** has completed his MA degree and PhD studies in 2008 in the same department. Currently an academician in Akdeniz University, the artist has partaken in several international symposiums, biennials, workshops and exhibitions where he was awarded with many prizes. Kemal states that the reason he selects to use ceramic material is because he views art as a form of expression continuously renewing itself and he values it as a form of self-expression. In addition to ceramic material he believes that his frequent supplies such as metal plate, wire, plastic are also some of the elements that enrich and unify this language. *“My artistic approach is sources from totally formalist idea as a contrary traditional and ornamental soul of the ceramics. My works usually exist from basic, geometrical and undecorated forms. Hard edges, smooth surfaces, massive and monumental structures are typical visual elements of my works. Repetition of some formal elements in my works helps to create general character and allow developing main idea. Essentially my works are basic, pure art forms, beyond the telling some stories or pretending an artificial conceptual struggle”*. The artist claims that his current works are established upon two phenomena: “Redaction-Reproduction”. For the artist the last series accentuates an idea of re-reading, re-examination, re-interpretation and re-production. Karabey (2012) describes his works in such a way: *“In this exhibition we can see that the artist has focused on different*

variations of the forms he has been using for long; besides by making use of daily objects such as plastic flush pipes, bends, t, blind cap, industrial supplies from scrap yard, moulds of systematic, tissue packing papers he “reproduces” from ceramics material. The artist has sometimes used these forms on their own and sometimes by integrating with their original forms. In his works where he co-employs the original and copy forms, he aims to gain our awareness through a formalist approach of the intertwining real and virtual world of present age” (Photo 1-2).

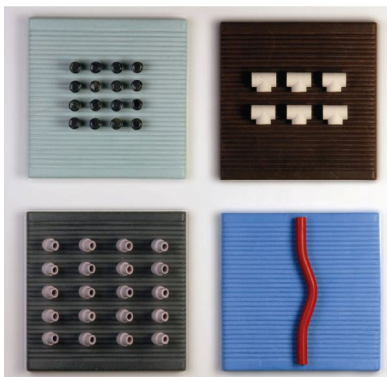


Photo 1. Kemal Tizgöl “Dialogue 1”
Ceramic, 31.5x31.5x6.5 cm, 2012

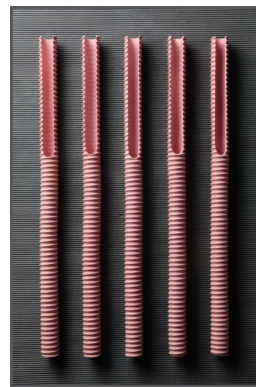


Photo 2. Kemal Tizgöl “Dialogue 1”
Ceramic, “Prelude” 41x60x7 cm , 2012

Aygün Dinçer Kırca commenced her ceramics education in year 2000 in Mimar Sinan University. Having completed her PhD in Ceramics Design in 2012, Aygün presently is employed as an academic staff in the same university. Having spent six months in Denmark during 2010 for professional researches and analyses the artist has participated in a long list of National and International exhibitions and workshops. In her work ‘Imperfect Perfect’ we can see two pieces stuck on a surface that most probably represents a bottle cap and glaze that represents bottom of a bottle (Photo 3). The piece separated from its setting left behind a visual expression that is much more effective than its presence reflected with the glaze in the back. With this formation the artist makes us think that the object can

exist as imperfect, defective or incomplete. *“And yet it is this imperfection that makes it beautiful; just like incomplete pieces found in archeological excavations. In place of missing piece an industrial piece of broken porcelain work has been integrated with the work as an industry fragment”*. In *“Look at me once more”* we see amorphous balls fired in Raku and reflecting soot traces and cracked glaze tissues. These pieces possess a natural composition that reminds one rock pieces excavated almost randomly. On top of these raku pieces a cup is left in a neat position by putting downwards on its porcelain plate, in another one there are broken pieces of cup on its plate, a cup handle stuck on a different ball, and on the others there are sporadic porcelain pieces that create a contrast on the viewer’s perspective. Though the work is compiled of ceramics pieces thoroughly, there are references to two separate languages: Ceramics is both a work of art and industry. The very same natural material – soil - goes through different processes and reunites in this work. *“In this work by depicting the effect of human factor on the transformation in nature through utilizing an industrial product it has been aimed to enable the viewer to empathize with the changes in nature”* (Dinçer Kirca, 2012) (Photo 4).



Photo 3. Aygün Dinçer Kirca
“Imperfect, I'm perfect” Porcelain on
 glazed ceramic tile 40x40cm, 2012



Photo 4. Aygün Dinçer Kirca
“Look at me once more!”
 Raku firing, ceramics and porcelain
 assemblage. 2012

Until receiving her PhD degree in ceramics which she started as an undergraduate student in 1997 in Hacettepe University, **Deniz Onur Erman** personally states that ceramics, clay, fire, glaze, workshop productions and 3dimensional forms creation have been a major source of joy, satisfaction and passion for her. Having continued her graduate studies between years 2003-2005 in England, University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) - Art and Design - Ceramics Department, the artist mainly focused during her studies on porcelain and high-temperature firing technologies. That is the place she started to shape the actual material lured her in the art of ceramics and formed her artistic approach and style; the porcelain. The educational and social journey she took up in England assisted her greatly in self-recognition, self-understanding and discovery and decides on what she aimed to do for the rest of her life. Having returned to Turkey upon completing her graduate studies in England, the artist took up a teaching position in Gazi University, Faculty of

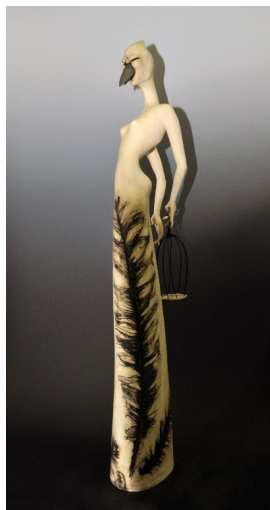


Photo 5. Deniz Onur Erman, porcelain "Untitled", 2009

Fine Arts. Currently we are granted with a chance to observe her artistic productions on several exhibitions and symposiums. The artist claims that ceramics is the best way that she can express herself, visualize her thoughts and concretize her perspective towards life. *"My ceramic works are just like me; contain in themselves contrasts, oppositions, fine details and patience. Personally I am always in an attempt to establish harmony in one single unity between harshness and softness, soundness and frailness, singularity and plurality, control and randomization, maturity and immaturity. Occasionally I add some humor on it. There is one thing I am perfectly aware of;*

you cannot touch the clay with anger, fury or force; you just cannot shape ceramics under those feelings. You have to touch with affection, love, passion; fire with patience; try to enjoy every moment and every stage of its creation” (Photo 5).

Leman Kalay is one of the young artists of whose works we have frequently seen in various international events lately. Graduated from Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Turkish Traditional Tiles and Ceramics in 2006. Received her MFA at the same faculty Department of Ceramic and Glass with thesis titled “Printing Techniques which Used on Ceramic Surfaces” in 2009. On her works she generally uses photos with some printing techniques. She has lots of works which made with laser printing process. She tries to take attention of some topics on her works such as; war, global warming, gravity, pessimism, etc. Studied as a post graduate Erasmus student at Vilnius Academy of Arts in Lithuania in 2008. She studied on her PhD at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Ceramic in Ankara. Received her PhD with thesis titled “Minimalist Installations in Ceramic Art” in 2013 February. She was a lecturer between 2010-2013 at Ordu University (Turkey). She works as a Visiting Professor at Kyung Hee University, College of Art&Design, Department of Ceramic, in Korea. Leman’s PhD report is based upon analyzing her personal artistic works within the context of ‘Minimalism’ and ‘Installation’ concepts. Minimalism and Installation which are quite common in ceramic art has been attempted to analyze in a general framework, nonetheless as opposed to old minimalists, ‘Concept’ phenomenon that is quite common in many of the modern artists has presented itself in all works. *“In addition to minimalists who deny concept, many of the modern works created in line with this approach actually conserve in themselves a concept and render messages to their viewers. Though in my personal works I employed geometrical forms and recurrent elements that lay the base of minimalism,*

integration of concept with the work is exemplifying of the degeneration of Minimalism today". Leman underscores that recurrent elements that lay the basis of minimalism and arrangement style in her original works is an approach emphasizing the close connection with art of installation. According to her, object arrangement selected as the language of expression analyzes a phenomenon on intellectual, aesthetical and conceptual platforms by using the space and objects as tools. "In my productions I employed hard edge geometry of minimalism and through the arrangements solidified via recurrent elements, I tried to accentuate the concepts I selected. The emerging works not only embraced attractive or important subject matters of the present day with the viewers but they also lay the base for the prospective works of art" (Photo 6).



Photo 6. Leman Kalay, "Vicious Circle I" (Detail)
Vitrified casting, installation 63 x 42 x 7 cm, 2012.

Having completed her Bachelor's degree in year 2005 in Dokuz Eylül University, Department of Ceramics, **Şirin Koçak Özeskici** finished her MA thesis in 2009, thence commenced her PhD studies. In the delicate ceramic works of Şirin, you can see similarly hand worked forms reproduced in a myriad of ways; each capturing a

different emphasis as though filmed under different conditions and in varied light. Depth, personal impression and illusion are companions to this sensitively emotive work. Şirin uses a variety of alternative firing techniques, naked raku, saggar and pit firing; she uses a variety of clays to achieve her delicately constructed forms. For her inspiration comes from ancient archaeological finds, architectural construction, tactile sensation and the power of interaction. With some echo of the delicacy and transience of paper wasp nests, the evidence of time and habitation is ever present. Clearly marked, her finger prints are forever frozen in the material, proof of her interaction, immortalizing the maker far beyond the grave. Touch Series is composed of elements produced via pit firing technique. Each element possesses quite influential colors and bears on themselves traces of original stains. “Touch” is a title that matches perfectly with these random stains: *“Each intervention on ceramics has created striking signs. In that aspect I believe any sentimental experience is an exclusive touch on human soul”* (Koçak, 2014) (Photo 7).



Photo 7. Şirin Koçak Özeskici Touch Series, Pit Fired 2011

Having completed her Bachelor's degree in Hacettepe University, Department of Ceramics in 2007, **Pınar Baklan** received her Graduate Degree in 2011. Commencing her PhD studies in the same university, Baklan spent time in Poland in year 2013 to conduct ceramics researches and practices under the scholarship of Poland Government. In her works the artist foregrounds visual illusion concept which is the characteristics of experimental art movement known as Op Art. In her MA Thesis titled "Visual Illusions in Contemporary Ceramics Form and Surfaces", the artist devoted an elaborate research on Op Art Movement. This concept constituting the report of her master's degree has also been the main feature of ceramics works. *"What is my objective in ceramic art works is to mesmerize the viewer via strong visual effects and illusions. In the works I design to create non existing forms and actions in real life, I select to choose unique patterns and materials. I would like to see*



Photo 8. Pınar Baklan
"The Optical Form", White Ceramic Clay,
14x27x37 cm, 2015

that by sticking to the idea of illusion through different arrangements, colors, tissues and decorations it is possible to create a unique approach. I would like to prove through my personal stance that Op Art and visual illusion are not merely chessboard patterns and that they can be performed on three dimensional works as well not only on art of painting or graphics alone" (Baklan Önal, 2011). Aside from the subject matter focused on the artist's 2011 dated thesis work she has been reflecting on her pieces of art the topics related

to the environment, natural life and organisms, transformation and activism. In her recent works she has been more inclined to express her awareness on nature by making use of visual illusion method. She aims to reflect her conviction that as ecologic problems are treated in one pot with other agendas, it is becoming something even harder to view within illusion (Photo 8).

Having completed her Bachelor's degree in 2002 and MA in 2007, **Yeşim Zümrüt** received her PhD in Ceramics Design in 2012 with her thesis titled "Evaluation of Ecologic Art originated in post 1960 Period within the Scope of Concepts and Objectives". In her PhD thesis Yeşim underlines that ecologic art is a form of global artist movement that goes beyond the traditional artistic productions and institutionalization and focuses on living ecosystem and attempts to solve ecological problems creatively. The artist participated in "Our Golden Values" titled ceramics exhibition in 2008 organized as a reaction against gold digging works planned to be executed in Kaz Mountains, Turkey. 16 ceramics artists opposed to the program that would damage forestry lands and water resources -all more valuable than gold itself - and in the end the collapse of entire ecosystem. The exhibition opened by these artists in Troya Site has been visited by 15.000 people according to official data and through penetrating into societal perception in many ways; it could finally make itself heard. For her work titled "Breath" Yeşim selected the most common tree in the region - oak tree - and by manipulating the frailty of ceramic material she integrated nature's processes. 3-4mm thick plates opened with porcelain clay were shaped by covering with balloons that left its upper part open and these forms were fired under 1100 Centigrade degrees. Subsequent to the firing, balloons have been placed inside ceramic forms and by using fishing lines these balloons have been hung on trees. Thus ceramic forms have been carried with balloons. As the air inside the balloons carrying ceramic forms decreased in time, at the end of two-week exhibition all forms have fallen down and got broken. *"The warning 'Your works are being broken' of site workers and for the viewers sitting and watching to*

witness the moment of fall and break, the process acted as a complementary part of the entire piece of art". Ceramic forms contained family pictures of 4 generations on their bottom thanks to transfer technique. These pieces with the pictures they exhibit place emphasis on real-life processes, breath that we take with the nature thanks to trees and the fact that we shall all disintegrate one by one once we lose the trees (Photo 9-10) In her PhD study the artist posits this question on Ecologic Art approach: "As was in the past even today many people demonstrate a prejudiced, skeptic and sometimes demeaning attitude to a new ecologic art application or project. Though the common sense advocates that message should be prioritized there are some criticisms underlining that viewed work reflects a jumpy approach and that some meanings are forced to integrate within this process or product. What should be the expectation? Should there be an aesthetical worry?... Within this context the answer provided to the question "is the effort satisfactory or not for these objectives or targets?" matters vitally. The demand of a good number of ecologic artists from the artistic world is to reinterpret historic criteria to analyze such works again" (Zümrüt, 2007).



Photo 9-10. Yeşim Zümrüt
"Breath" Porcelain and balloons, installation, 2008

Outcomes

The development witnessed parallel to the global changes in modern Turkish art following the 2000s has been quite effective in the emergence of new generation mentioned above. Ceramics artists - mostly younger generation - receiving education in Turkey and grasping the chance to self-express themselves via international exhibitions, contests and relevant activities contribute positively to the Turkish art that is now attracting global recognition. It is feasible to mention a good number of Turkish artists belonging to post-2000 generation; however, the samples have been limited to provide a particular framework for this presentation. I would like to sincerely thank to seven artists contributing to the subject matter of this paper. In addition to the original works of these artists particular emphasis has been paid to reflect their self critics or evaluations concerning their own productions. In the formation of contents, interviews and correspondences with the artists provided substantial contribution.

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