

New Approaches in Contemporary Turkish Ceramic Art: Installation, Expression and Concept

Geliş Tarihi/Received: 12.12.2019
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 16.02.2020

Assist. Prof. Şirin KOÇAK
Uşak University
Faculty of Fine Arts,
Ceramics Department
sirin.kocak@usak.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0001-6367-8060

ABSTRACT

New approaches and means of expression in contemporary Turkish ceramic art have developed rapidly in the last 20 years. This development is proceeding simultaneously with different disciplines of art. Today, means of expression in different disciplines such as painting, sculpture, and ceramics give their place to postmodern statements. Aside from the traditional, there is also a search for new means of expression. Methods such as ready-made objects, reproduction, print, repetition and copying are means of expression in contemporary art. Today, some ceramic art works are built on installations. Installation, expression and concept are important in the works of artists such as Burçak Bingöl, İnel İnal and Candeğer Furtun. Thus, the means and perception of expression have gone through changes based on societal occurrences. This research includes the works of contemporary Turkish ceramic artists who implement "Installation, Expression and Concept". It is expected that carrying out an analysis on the works of these artists will determine both the significance of the topic, and the present change and development in Turkish ceramic art.

Keywords: contemporary turkish ceramic art, installation, concept and expression

Koçak, Ş. (2020). New Approaches in Contemporary Turkish Ceramic Art: Installation, Expression and Concept. *ARTS: Artuklu Sanat ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi*, 3, ss. 84-98.

Çağdaş Türk Seramik Sanatında Yeni Yaklaşım Biçimleri: Yerleştirme, İfade, Kavram

Öz

Çağdaş Türk Seramik Sanatında yeni yaklaşımlar ve ifade arayışları son yirmi yılda hızla gelişim göstermektedir. Bu gelişim sanatın farklı disiplinleriyle eş zamanlı olarak ilerlemektedir. Resim, heykel ve seramik gibi disiplinlerde ifade biçimleri, günümüzde yerini postmodern söyleme bırakır. Geleneksel anlatım biçimlerinin yanında yeni anlatım yolları da aranmaya başlanmaktadır. Hazır nesne, çoğaltma, baskı, tekrar ve kopyalama gibi yöntemler, çağdaş sanatın anlatım biçimleridir. Günümüzde seramik sanatında yapılan çalışmaların bazıları enstelasyon üzerine kurgulanmaktadır. Burçak Bingöl, İnel İnal ve Candeğer Furtun gibi sanatçıların eserlerinde yerleştirme, ifade ve kavram önemlidir. Böylece toplumsal olaylara bağlı olarak eserlerin ifade biçimleri ve algısı değişime uğramıştır. Araştırmada "Yerleştirme, İfade ve Kavram" üzerine uygulama yapan Çağdaş Türk Seramik sanatçılarının eserlerine yer verilmiştir. Sanatçıların eserleri üzerinden analiz yapılması hem konunun önemini ortaya çıkaracağı hem de Türk Seramik sanatının günümüzdeki değişim ve gelişimini tespit edeceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: çağdaş türk seramik sanatı, yerleştirme, kavram ve ifade

INTRODUCTION¹

When referring to contemporary ceramic art, terms such as object, expression, form, concept, place, installation, and viewer emerge. Examining the relationship these terms have with each other help us in understanding the formation and development of Conceptual Art and Installation Art. In this process, instead of traditional ceramic production, ceramic artists have developed new means of expression that can be encountered through questioning, concepts, emotions, viewers, and technology. Methods such as ready-made objects, deformation, reproduction, print, repetition and copying have become a means of expression for contemporary artists.

The artist requires a space in installation art and transforms the topic or concept being addressed into an expression while utilizing every aspect of the space. The places where the works are exhibited are walls, the floor, or the entire space. In this process, together with the space, the viewer is also included into the work of art. Aside from modules and objects in the installation, the artist may require sound, video, performance, and technological equipment.

When the topic at hand is evaluated, Burçak Bingöl's works in contemporary ceramic art is of importance. She includes the problem of identity, concepts such as possession–abandonment, tradition and modern in her works. The works in Bingöl's 2017 Istanbul exhibition "Mythos and Utopia" are made up of bisque fired clay, videos, unfired clay, organic objects, and glazed ceramics. It carries the daily life in Istanbul, its location, its historical factors, and decorative elements to a new space. Through interpreting, she attempts to make the viewer live concepts such as the past and the present, the old and the new, inside and outside. While doing this she consciously prefers traditional forms we are familiar with in Turkish ceramic history. She attempts to draw them out of their known features by making new interventions to familiar forms, and brings new expression to old forms through life today. She applies the raw forms of flowers which are decorative elements to glazed ceramics. By exhibiting them on a table she creates an inquiry and thinking space for the

¹ This research paper was presented orally on August 15, 2017 in the 1st Latvia International Contemporary Ceramics Festival Lecture Programme at Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre's Conference Hall, Latvia.

viewer (Image 1, 2, 3). She incorporates the organic and dried forms of flowers throughout the exhibition (Image 4, 5).



Image 1. B.Bingöl, Installation view

Image 2. B.Bingöl, "Rooted"

Image 3. B.Bingöl, "Settling Deep Within", 2016

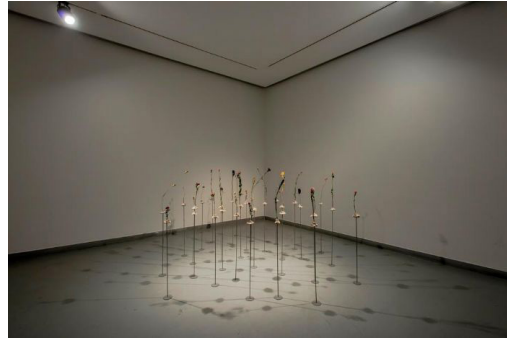


Image 4. and 5. B.Bingöl, Exhibition view at Zilberman Gallery

The arrangement she does on the wall of the space using the raw form of ceramic clay attracts attention. Based on the famous ceramic tiles at Topkapi Palace, the arrangement she makes examines the concepts of history, time, past, present all together. She presents the state of personally being part of the change to the viewer by allowing the transformation of raw clay throughout the exhibition (Image 6, 7).



Image 6,7. B. Bingöl, "The Last of The Golden Ages To Be Lived"

The use of decorative elements in Bingöl's works is a deliberate method. By combining the traditional form with contemporary art, the artist provides new interpretations. These works that connote the questions of art and craft, provide evidence of the transformation of ceramics into a work of art, be it concept or means of expression and installation.

"Burçak Bingöl's works have an analytical approach to the concepts of ornamenting and decorating through the use of copying, tracing and restructuring, which are labour-intensive production methods. Bingöl's works create unaccustomed systems that use the practice of repetition both as production and as a visual language. These works range from abstraction and representation, seduction and estrangement, mysticism and consumerism, creating organic/psychological landscapes that both embrace and disregard Eastern and Western traditions."²

In installations, the space, artist, and viewer should be perceived as a whole. With the space, ordinary objects of use that are found in daily life can transform into an expression, criticism and remark. The use of the object and the way it is exhibited gains meaning by being integrated with the space it is being exhibited. It also becomes a tool for the artist to explain their idea. Insel Inan's work "Threat" is an installation where the object the knife was reproduced hundreds of times using ceramics as a material (Image 8, 9). With this installation, the artist took place in the group exhibition "Zemberek" in Istanbul in 2013. "The exhibition titled Zemberek (The Mainspring), questions the issues of identity, cultural violence, visual memory through individual testimonies of the artists. The exhibition "Mainspring" examines the society, public sphere and art within the borders of chaotic urban structure, proposing a new angle when reviewing social movements, and the actions of

² <http://zilbermangallery.com/burcak-bingol-a117-tr.htm>

the ruling forces that are known to be “beyond criticism”.³ The artist structures his work on the definition of “threat” and emphasizes that situations should always, be relentlessly re-evaluated; reminding us that the siege can only be broken by resolving the nature of those who threaten us.”⁴ In an interview with Inal, “he stated that he created an interactive relationship with the viewers in his works and this relationship was much more prominent in this work. The artist also mentioned that when he did not create this interactive relationship; it is much more successful when it is created on its own, without interference, hence, in his work he is not concerned with persuading the viewer. Inal, who refers to the production process of his work, mentions that the work he designed was produced at another workshop. The work, produced with a high temperature plastic clay, had one ton of pressure applied, and was fired at 1200 degrees.”⁵

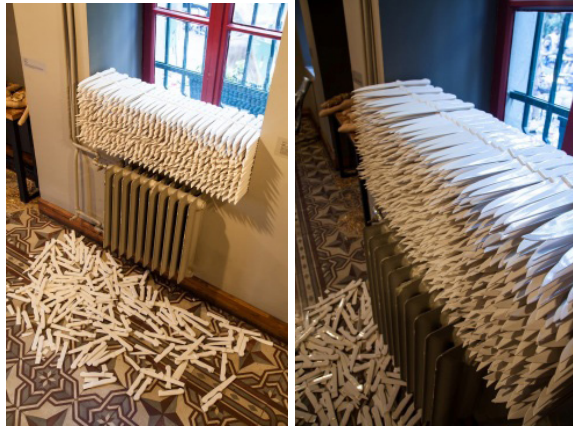


Image 8. and 9. Inel Inal, “Threat”, Ceramic Installation, 2013

Another work of Inal is “Installation, 300+ guns”. This work was exhibited at the 4th International Sinop Biennale, themed “Wisdom of Shadow, Art in the Era of Corrupted Information”. The guns he had made using a reproduction technique were painted by him and children. He implemented a wall arrangement with the painted ceramic guns (Image 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). Commenting on the work, Inal states “The children of the country whose freedom is suspended should be raised as socially beneficial individuals after the completion of their punishment.”⁶

3 <http://zembereksanatetkinligi.blogspot.com.tr/>

4 <http://inselinal.blogspot.com.tr/2013/09/zemberek-sanat-etkinligi-eylul-ayinda.html>

5 <http://www.sehakaratas.com/tehdit/>

6 <http://inselinal.blogspot.com.tr/search/label/Seramik%20%C3%87al%C4%B1%C5%9Fmalar%C4%B1%20-%20Seramik%20Works>



Image 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. *İnsel İnal, "Installation, 300 + guns", (50 of which are painted by children who attended a workshop in Sinop", 2012.*

When we look at Inal's works, it is apparent that he is responding to contemporary topics using political expressions. Therefore, some statements in his works are deliberate. He has transformed objects of daily use into a tool in art and has used a critical means of expression.

In contemporary art production where every material has its place, it seems necessary that ceramists follow the path of traditional ceramic production in expressing themselves when creating their own artistic narration. Artists who think and produce with this approach deem the properties and structure of ceramic as a material significant in creating the work as a whole.

The Turkish ceramic artists who attended the 15th Istanbul Biennale in 2017 themed "A Good Neighbour" are Burçak Bingöl and Candeğer Furtun. The presence of two artists working with ceramic materials in the biennale, which is considered the most important artistic event in the country, is an indication that interest in the material continues.

Candeğer Furtun displays an inquisitive approach to the state and position of ceramic sculpture with her installations. With great dexterity she transforms characteristics such as the form, colour and fabric of the parts of the body into ceramic sculptures. The space where the sculptures that are designed in modular form are exhibited is the artist's place of action; her sculptures serving her expression. The works are realistic representations of the human figure. It creates a breaking point in the viewer's perception of the absolute. When the viewers arrive at the exhibition area, they come face to face with life-size dimensions of the human body. Thus, they communicate and confront their own body and other ceramic bodies. Furtun's work (Image 15) has been exhibited at the "Bozlu Art Project, Respect/Saygi II" exhibition in 2016, among the works of nine of Turkey's most important sculpture artists. The exhibition "by approaching important figures in Turkey's modern and contemporary journey in sculpture, reminds us of our struggle with sculpture in the public arena and inspires new conceptions with an approach that incorporates sole statements independent from the market conditions of the work of art, that changes, transforms and creates new awareness in the viewer, constructing "Respect" for its multifaceted structure."⁷



Image 15. Candeğer Furtun, "Untitled", 1994, Ceramic
(High Temperature), 48x25x13 cm.

We come across Hasan Şahbaz in his series' named "Organic-Inorganic" where he inquires the repetition of small units and whole of the form. In his works we see bordered rooms of architectural elements and images we encounter in

⁷ <http://www.bozluartproject.com/respect-saygi-ii/>

our minds. He approaches concepts such as mathematics, geometry, tradition, craftsmanship, modern and design, in an innovative manner in ceramic material. Numbers, lines, calculations, sketches, patterns, construct are all means of expression sensed in Şahbaz's works. It seems as though the means of expression in his works are evaluated and interpreted as if an architect would do so with the geometric patterns used in architecture. Elements such as the historical imagery, space and colour in the artist's works contribute to the constitution of a universal language in the postmodern process. This situation also brings authenticity with it.

The association between 12 independent forms is seen in his wall arrangement "Organic Ceramic Object" (Image 16). In the repetition of these small geometric units the viewer has the instinct to follow him. It is surprising that these pieces, which seem as if they are elements of architecture, are made of clay. This situation causes the artist to share the special means of communication they have formed with the material with the viewer and to transfer the viewer to their own process.



Image 16. Hasan Şahbaz, "Organic Ceramic Objects", installation

65 x 65 x 7cm., Pigment - Colorful slip, Slip Cast, 1200 C Electric kiln firing, 2015

Marc Leuthold's evaluation of Şahbaz's works is "Hasan's works is extraordinary. When one looks at it, one is dazzled by negative space and complex repetition of form. Because it is so unique, one wants to study it and perhaps understand how it is made. Hasan is enough of a traditionalist and ceramic craftsman not to be able to embrace cracks and "flaws" that might add even more meaning and significance to these pieces. Still, given his socio-political views, it seems consistent for him to focus on virtuoso technique and the sheer beauty of his pieces. Hasan Şahbaz is in the

prime of his creative practice and we can therefore expect even more innovation and creativity from this extremely talented, leading emerging international artist.”⁸

The artist constantly tries to expand the boundaries of the material. Aside from this he is also known for his constructive criticism in ceramic and art education, and his conscientious approach to societal occurrences.



Image 17, 18, 19. Bahar Ari Dellenbach, “ Reflection”, 15x35x10 cm., 1200 C, 2015

Bahar Ari Dellenbach, who has approached figure within the frame of societal reality, is an artist who actively produces with ceramic material. Her figuratively themed works are critical, just as her contemporaries. Her works are actual and momentary. They describe a situation, scene and presence surrounding a sequence of events.

Her works are reflections of the psychological, social, and emotional characteristics of individuals in society. The artist transforms what she selects from daily life, momentary photo frames into sculptures. She criticizes herself and has the viewer question it too by bringing them into this critical situation. She starts a process of inquiry by confronting people with their questions. She also contributes to the development of awareness in societal criticism. What draws viewers to the centre of the artist's sculptures stems from her narrative ability. The situation the works represent is transparently shown to the viewer.

⁸ New Ceramics The European Ceramic Magazine, November/ December 2015, “ Hasan Şahbaz” by Marc Leuthold, p.15, 2015

The eyes of the figures on the artist's "Stones and Heads" series are sometimes open and sometimes closed. The mouth is usually open and screaming. The lining up of repetitive figures express a societal situation. Bahar Ari Dellenbach's work Reflection (Image 17, 18, 19) is in the image of a momentary story of a face-to-face figure. The artist's remarks on her works is "my works present a critical view of social, political and cultural issues. Social subjects like environmental pollution, devastation of nature, war destructions, consumption culture etc. are handled in these works. However, individuals are held responsible in essence, and they are canalized to self-criticism. Symbolized, interesting, strange and random objects as well as evident contradictions serve for this purpose without any compromise for consideration."⁹

Political, economic, socio-cultural pressure, globalisation, geographic locations, subjective experiences and complexities push the ceramic artist into the cycle of ready-made objects, material, structure, and conceptual construct. These enable artists to organise a space where they can structure their works while developing artistic narration. It can be seen that installations are mostly made up of reproduction and repetition of units. The units that are used are reproduced and shaped using basic production methods of ceramic materials. The units are designed and hand-made or moulded and reproduced using production methods for ready-made ceramic objects. Therefore, the product is manufactured in an industrial production process.

The artist emphasises on the kind of order/disorder the units will be placed in, how they will reach a whole through the placement, and how the whole will overlap with the concept. Also thinking of the relationship between the place/wall/space where the emerging arrangement will be exhibited, making sure that this relationship is not entirely detached. The units can sometimes be plain forms relating to the space and they can sometimes be entirely independent of the space.

⁹ <http://www.baharari.com/artist-statement.html>



Image 20, 21. Şirin Koçak, "The Signs", 2013

Photography: Sandra Poplavska

The circumstances experienced in a world where socio-cultural structures are coming together and borders are being removed constantly shape the artist's sensitivities, perception, and skill in communication. Recycling, environment, consumerism, violence, discrimination, colonialization, ethnic issues being common problems in the world, lead to the artist witnessing these in an intellectual context.

Growing up in an era when the Iran-Iraq war happened, civil war and separation occurred in Yugoslavia, the Berlin Wall was broken down, the Soviet Union was dissolved, and groups with different ethnic backgrounds constantly migrated, Şirin Koçak is looking for a means of expression to understand and analyze our world today where rapid changes occur.

While communication technologies and new media is creating a complex web all around the world, it is also making it easier for the circulation of artists and their art works. The artist travels around the global art world and continues to find inspiration by getting to know world cultures. However, world cultures have also started to resemble each other. Regardless of their religion, language or race, the whole world has started carrying the same bags, wearing the same trousers and shoes, drinking the same coffee, and eating the same food. Koçak, who questions cultural identity in a life where constant breakdown and integration occurs, ponders on the concepts of belonging and ownership. She tries to balance uncertainty, distrust, alienation, fear, aspects of risk factors that control people, with plain and

basic characteristics that again belong to humans. In other words, she creates plain forms with ceramic clay. She uses the softness of clay to transfer fingerprints, which form the most fundamental part of human identity, to her works. Global forms stand out in the arrangements seen in images 20 and 21. Repetitions that form thin layers and symbol-like forms can be seen when examined up close. It is as if each one is a sign sending out a message and searching for a new world, a new language, a new life. The forms invite the viewer in, try to move them away from the moment, get lost in the layers and examine them for a long period of time. Even if it is for a moment, it invites modern man to detach from daily life and find themselves. By abiding to these forms, Koçak reaches new compositions that are different from each other, helping the viewer escape the complicated world.

The work was formed during the International Ceramic Art Symposium "LANDscape" organized in Duagavpils, Latvia in 2013. The work was produced at a time when the artist was distanced from her own daily life and was in search for a new world.

Aside from the artists whose works were mentioned, it can be seen that there are many artists in Turkey who do ceramic installations. Some of these artists are; Kemal Tizgöl, Elif Aydoğdu Ağatekin, Özgü Gündeşlioğlu, Buket Acartürk, Canan Dağdelen, Mutlu Başkaya, Ayşe Kurşuncu, Ayşe Günöz Balyemez and Yeşim Bayrak Avinal.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, today, when societal dynamics vary at any moment, and transformations occur, the perception of the artist and the messages they give to society are important. The Turkish ceramic artist has also kept up with this transformation and development, searching for new and different means of expression. As a result of this search, moving away from the forms using ceramic as a material for centuries, conceptual structures and arrangements have been carried out with an innovative approach. Contemporary topics and ready-made objects have also been included in the artistic production process of ceramics. Thus, the perception of art work in contemporary Turkish ceramic art is continuing its

development through change.

REFERENCES

Bingöl, B. Burçak Bingöl. <http://zilbermangallery.com/burcak-bingol-a117-tr.htm>. Access Date: February 12, 2020

Bozlu Art Project. Respect/ Saygı II. <http://www.bozluartproject.com/respect-saygi-ii/>. Access Date: February 12, 2020

Dellenbach, B. A. Artist Statement. <http://www.baharari.com/artist-statement/>. Access Date: February 12, 2020

İnal, İ. Zemberek Press Release. <http://zembereksanattetkinligi.blogspot.com.tr/>. Access Date: February 12, 2020

İnal, İ. Tehdit 2013. <http://inselinal.blogspot.com.tr/2013/09/zemberek-sanat-etkinligi-eylul-ayinda.html>. Access Date: February 12, 2020

İnal, İ. Seramik Çalışmaları- Seramik Works. " Gölgenin Bilgeliği: Bozulmuş Bilgi Çağında Sanat" Temalı " Sinop Bienali" Başlıyor. <http://inselinal.blogspot.com.tr/search/label/Seramik%20%C3%87al%C4%B1%C5%9Fmalar%C4%B1%20-%20Seramik%20Works>. Access Date: February 12, 2020

Karataş, S. Threat. <http://www.sehakaratas.com/tehdit/>. Access Date: March 26, 2018

Koçak, Ş. LANDEsc International Ceramic Art Symposium Latvia. <http://sirinkocakceramics.blogspot.com/2013/09/landesc-international-ceramic-art.html> Access Date: February 12, 2020

Leuthold, M. (2015). *New Ceramics The European Ceramic Magazine*, November/ December 2015, " Hasan Şahbaz".

IMAGE REFERENCES

Image 1. <http://zilbermangallery.com/mitos-ve-utopya-e203-tr.htm>

Image 2. <https://www.burcakbingol.com/mythos-and-utopia>

Image 3. <http://zilbermangallery.com/burcak-bingol-a117-tr.htm>

Image 4. <http://zilbermangallery.com/mitos-ve-utopya-e203-tr.htm>

Image 5. <http://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2017/04/mostra-burcak-bingol-zilberman-gallery-istanbul/>

Image 6,7. <http://zilbermangallery.com/mitos-ve-utopya-e203-tr.htm>

Image 8,9. <http://inselinal.blogspot.com.tr/2013/09/zemberek-sanat-etkinligi-eylul-ayinda.html>

Image 10,11,12,13,14. <http://inselinal.blogspot.com.tr/2012/08/4.html>

Image 15. <http://www.bozluartproject.com/respect-saygi-ii/>

Image 16. <https://www.sahbazhasan.com/organic-objects-series-2012-2016?lightbox=dataltm-iz47qv3d7>

Image 17,18,19. <http://www.baharari.com/awards-4.html>

Image 20, 21. <http://sirinkocakceramics.blogspot.com.tr/2013/09/landesc-international-ceramic-art.html>