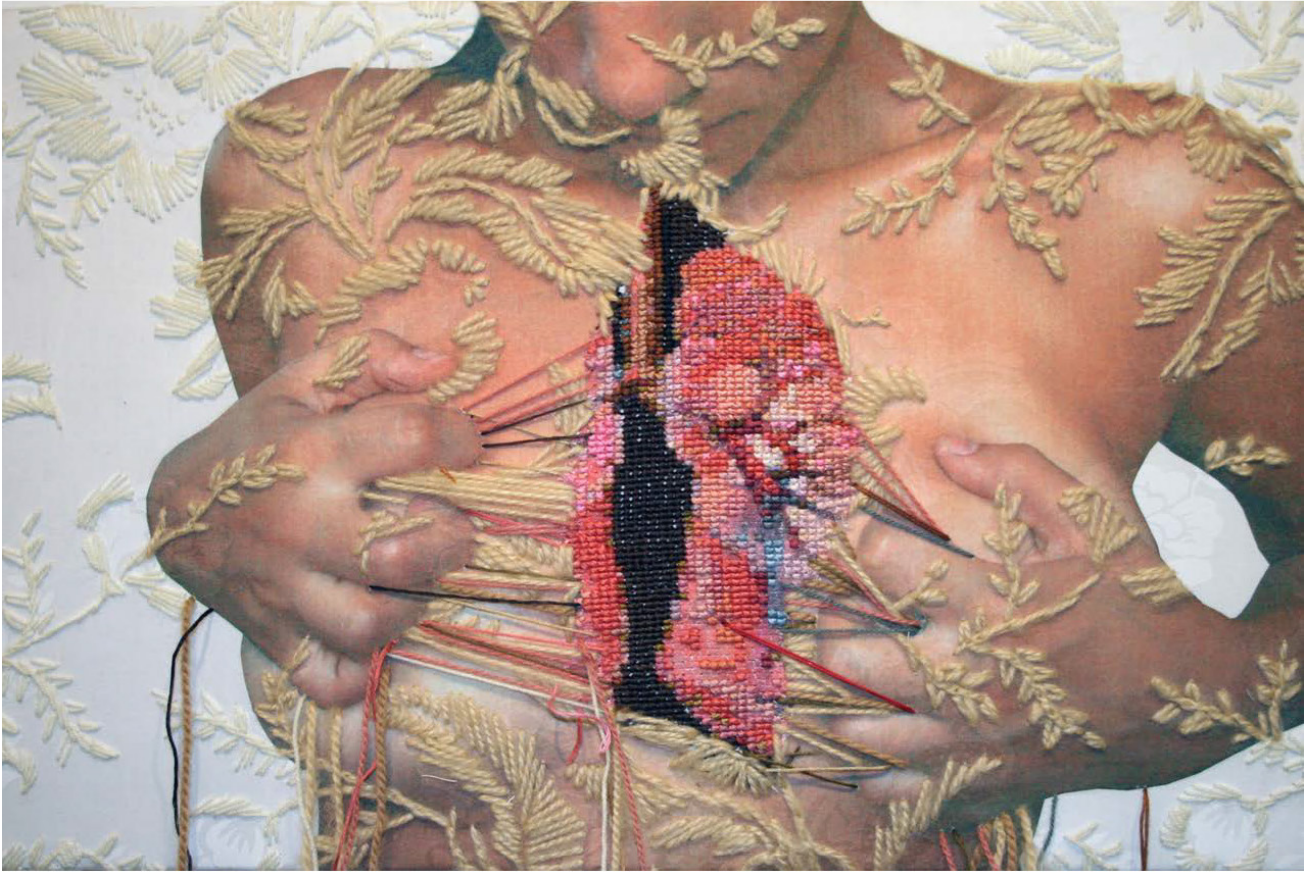


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# P I N E



B R A Z E N

# BURÇAK BİNGÖL

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A dark-haired woman sits still at a white desk, wearing a patterned dress. For several moments she stares straight ahead. Beside her rests a white porcelain vase with a tall, swan-like neck. Suddenly, in a fraction of a second, her forearm raises up and back, knocking the vase off the desk, shattering it into sharp shards on the floor. The woman is Turkish artist Burçak Bingöl, and these actions were preserved in her recent film, "Self Conscious" (2015). "The desk represents where I stand as an artist right now," Bingöl explains. "I'm re-thinking my practice." Breaking the vase with her eyes locked on the camera is a symbolic gesture for the established ceramicist.

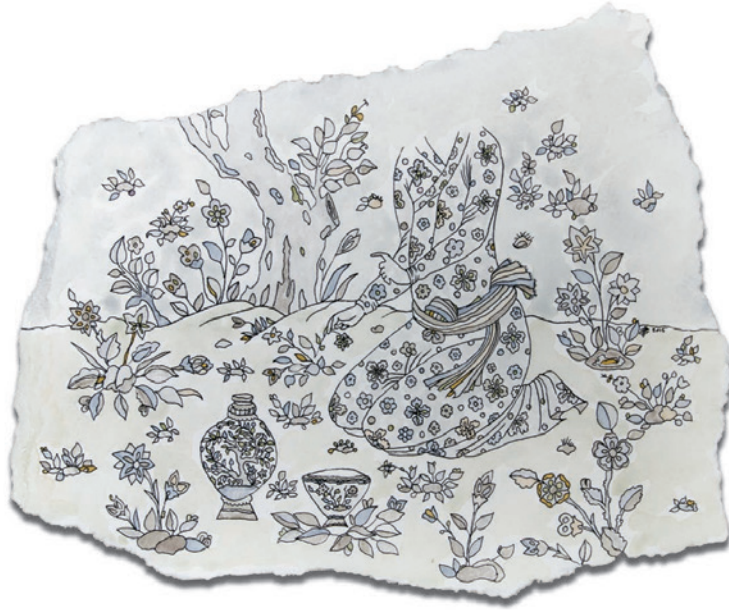
Bingöl studied ceramics for thirteen years, completing her PhD at Ankara's Hacettepe University in 2008. She has become known for her detailed flower motifs that cover ceramic objects of all sizes, often replicating them on textiles and wallpapers. Bingöl creates a dizzying visual scene while highlighting weighty

issues—for example, the relationship between what is seen and unseen, and between tradition and subversion.

One of her recent exhibitions, an installation in the *Minor Heroisms* exhibition at Istanbul's Zilberman Gallery, titled *Unforeseen Resistance* (2015), pairs a ceramic vase with printed wallpaper and a drawing. The piece as a whole is a response to the 2013 political demonstrations in Istanbul's Gezi Park. The drawing, inspired by a tile panel in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, depicts a picnic scene where the motifs and figures transform into each other. An unformed lump of clay makes up the vase's base while the top is precisely formed, giving the effect of a completed ceramic rising out of the material—or perhaps sinking back into it. A green grass motif on the vase is repeated continuously on the wallpaper. "The ceramic sculpture is the appearance of the detail in a full, formal body," says Bingöl, who carves spherical shapes in the air with her hands as she speaks,



"THE FLORAL MOTIFS OF THE SCULPTURE AND THE  
WALLPAPER COME DIRECTLY FROM THE GRASS OF  
GEZI PARK WHERE WE OCCUPIED."







Above: *Self-Conscious*, 2015  
Video, 43"

Right: *Cruise*, 2014, Ceramics, 200 x 190 x 30 cm

to emphasize certain words and phrases. "The floral motifs of the sculpture and the wallpaper come directly from the grass of Gezi Park where we occupied—just like the vase—with our bodily volume in 2013 to perform our most heroic act; to resist."

Bingöl often combines unexpected elements in her work, creating hybrid pieces that are at once solid and fragile, feminine and masculine, traditional and contemporary. Her work challenges disciplinary boundaries, existing in the nebulous space between arts and crafts, between high and low culture.

In 2014, Bingöl completed *Cruise*, a huge ceramic truck front (200 x 190 x 30 cm) that took her six months of long days on a factory floor to create. The three-dimensional piece is ornamented with traditional floral patterns; the masculine object is overlaid with a feminine motif. The truck is intended to represent alienation in modern Turkish society, with heritage as a burden that needed to

be carried. "I was obsessed with making a ceramic truck," she says. "After three years of thinking about the project, I had no choice but to try, at least to see if it was doable or not . . . And it was." Bingöl mentions she was a little shy about finally exhibiting the work, as it exposed her obsessive mind. "Finishing this piece was an act of being brazen towards the ceramic material itself," Bingöl reflects.

"The word brazen is also deeply related to my production," Bingöl says. "The first example I can think of is applying floral motifs on my sculptures. This was a gesture I was able to make because I was working in the tradition of feminist art, which eventually turned into one of the important themes of my work."

Born in 1976 in Turkey and raised in Görele, a pebble-beached port town perched on the edge of the Black Sea, Bingöl went to the capital city of Ankara to study singing at age nine. For the next six years, she continued her choir courses at the conservatory. When







BINGÖL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CERAMICS, ESPECIALLY  
TRADITIONAL TILE DECORATION AND PATTERNS,  
HAS ALWAYS BEEN PROBLEMATIC—A LOVE/HATE  
RELATIONSHIP OF SORTS.



*Detail above and previous spread: Temporary Permeable, 2016  
Site-specific installation, Ceramic, wallpaper, 290 x 190 cm*



she turned twenty, Bingöl began work toward a fine arts degree in ceramics, completing her bachelor's degree in 2000, a master's two years later, and a PhD in 2008. Although Bingöl was producing ceramic work in her studio throughout this time, she did not have many opportunities to show to a broader public.

"I was living the wrong life in Ankara, but I had no idea what the problem was," Bingöl says. Knowing she needed to make a change in her art practice, Bingöl went to New York City for an artist residency in 2009 and took photography classes at The New School. For the next year, she fed off of the creative energy of the city and worked out how to move forward.

Istanbul was Bingöl's next destination. As her relationship with the Turkish cultural center grew stronger, her works started to focus on "objecthood," emphasizing traditional motifs and modern techniques. Istanbul has long been seen as a place where east and west collide: the east carries its mystical and historical identity, whereas the west tends to favor a more rational system. The idea of dichotomy embedded in the city has a deep influence on Bingöl. "When certain things are out of sight, one forgets about them," she says. "In Istanbul I'm confronted with history at all times. I'm also reminded of my own past; having the history very present and dominant in the city reminds me of who I am, reminds me of my roots and pushes me to radiate."

Bingöl's relationship with ceramics, especially traditional tile decoration and patterns, has always been problematic—a love/hate relationship of sorts. She has evolved past traditional motifs and creates her own interpretation of floral designs. Bingöl often uses a ceramic decal technique, applying pre-printed decal images onto glazed ceramics, then firing the ceramics again in order to set the patterns onto the glazed surface. Bingöl employs this technique to marry a modern process of quick reproduction with the centuries-long Turkish tradition of hand-painting ornate motifs onto ceramics.

Although ceramic production is typically associated with the functional and industrial, Bingöl creates mostly ideological and conceptual pieces. "Ceramic is a very strong and challenging material," Bingöl explains. "I was initially captured by the material and its complications. The more you learn and discover about it, the more you lose yourself and just follow what the material dictates. I came to a point where I could only do what the material pushed

me to do. Eventually, I had to detach myself from the material and find my own voice. Now, I feel like I am in charge and I use the material, not vice versa."

While ceramic production is technically tough (often messy and physically demanding), the end product is fragile. A dichotomy already exists in the material, and the contrasts in Bingöl's work seem to play off of this. "I would like to keep pushing the limits of the material as well as the audience," Bingöl says. "At the moment, I'm at a stage where I'm looking at the history of the material. It's research that goes back to the very meaning of the traditional to construct new ways of understanding the past."

The inherent fragility of a ceramic object and the tension this brings is one of Bingöl's central concerns. She is interested in making a ceramic object where the potential of the object's fracturing is present. By drawing attention to this violent potentiality, Bingöl makes the viewer aware that the tranquil beauty of her delicate floral patterns are perpetually at risk. With the comfort of familiar motifs, she makes visible the discomfort of their possible disturbance or destruction.

In her 2013 ceramic sculpture *Barbie Blues*, Bingöl created a miniature figure with a Barbie-doll body to critique the specifically western standard of idealized beauty for the feminine form. The figure is seated at a desk, with her head in her hands. A thick twist of hair winds down to her tiny waist. While the top of the sculpture is bone-white, the bottom—including the legs of the table, chair, and the woman figure—is glazed cobalt blue. The ceramic floor is the same shade of blue, as if it had bled up into the legs of the figure and furniture, trapping the woman in her surroundings, and creating a portrait of depression and despair. These juxtapositions of idealization and ruination that Bingöl creates are both beautiful and jarring.

As we talk about her art, life, and everything in between, one thing comes up again and again: her relationship with desks. Desks are quite important in Burçak's life, because her desk is where she concentrates, reads, writes, and dreams about her future work. When Bingöl sits down at her own desk, she describes entering a sacred place where she is isolated from the outside world and can forget her daily worries. There, she finds the clarity that allows her to work. 