

Burçak Bingöl

The artist, who recently had a residency in St Ives, talks about her love for ceramics, and how histories can be preserved in clay

Burçak Bingöl in her studio in Istanbul, Turkey, July 2022, photographed by Nazlı Erdemirel



TATE ETC. *What attracts you to ceramics?*

BB Ceramics are in our daily lives, but the way in which they are made is such a mystery. The production process comes with a set of strict rules and methods, and you have to collaborate with the natural elements of fire, air and water. This complexity, and the material's connections to history and geography, mean I'm still discovering new things about ceramics that continue to inspire what I do today.

ETC. *How did you learn the medium?*

BB Learning ceramics is a never-ending process. I studied sculptural ceramics to PhD level at Hacettepe University in Ankara, where modernist abstraction was the thing. I remember frequent, harsh criticism from our teachers, saying work was too illustrative, figurative or decorative. They would literally change the form of our sculptures. When I think back, there was a real violence in this form of teaching.

In the early 2000s, during my Master's degree, I had the chance to be in New York, where I worked as an intern for *American Ceramics* magazine and for many artists. These experiences shaped my approach to the medium, opening up a whole space in my mind about the expressive potential of ceramics.

ETC. *Back in Turkey, did your art change?*

BB When I came back to Ankara, instead of making abstract sculptural works, I started to cast everyday objects – like cheap plastic vessels or pickle jars – in ceramics. I called them 'alienated objects'. By copying a form through casting, you maintain a direct connection with the original object, which plays on people's collective memory.

Moving to Istanbul has shaped my whole practice. Unlike Ankara, the modern capital, everything here is so irregular, strangely connected and chaotic. This is a city where different times happen at the same time. The visual and architectural heritage of ceramics has given me the tools and the vocabulary to help me understand the culture of a forgotten past.

ETC. *How was your recent residency at Porthmeor Studios in St Ives?*

BB Coming from a culture where forgetting is the norm, being in a place where the past is so present was very striking. I was particularly impressed by Barbara Hepworth's art and life, and I spent time at the Leach Pottery, researching local clays and Bernard Leach's influence. With an artist friend, I even dived to collect china clay from a freezing cold lake. When you're in another environment, you discover your different selves. All these experiences have become a part of my artistic process.

ETC. *Can you tell us about the installation you are planning for Tate St Ives?*

BB I'm planning to create an imaginary kiln interior in which a firing is still ongoing – you'll see lots of melting forms, mid-transformation. In this load, various natural and cultural forces – both constructive and destructive – will act on each other. You'll find objects exploring how modernist legacies have been echoed in Turkey, and how they are experienced today. When you load a kiln, strange things can happen. I'm hoping the firing process can be a way to understand transformation, influence and mediation.

Burçak Bingöl, Tate St Ives, 14 October 2022 – 15 January 2023. Curated by Anne Barlow, Director, with Giles Jackson, Assistant Curator, Tate St Ives. SAHA supported Burçak Bingöl's research, residency and production for the exhibition.