

Omur Tokgoz's Op Art Ceramics

Article by Leman Kalay

*Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
God said, Let Newton be! and all was light. ~ Alexander Pope.*

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY MOVEMENTS IN THE LONG history of art. Art objects that emerged in the 1960s and were created with optical illusion were called Op Art.

Adopting an abstract attitude, art movements such as Op Art, Minimalism, Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism resulted in artworks that revealed the importance of both the conscious and subconscious. In Op Art, psychological elements such as colour, sense illusion and visual illusion came together to form a basis. Op Art is a movement where technique is a part of the art itself. Scientific approaches are used critically and the viewer integrates with the work and discovers it. Artists created works by combining graffiti with science. Op Art is a non-figurative branch of art, with the sole purpose of creating images that complicate the orientation of the eye. It uses structures such as geometric forms, lines, homogeneously painted surfaces and points that were constituted through logic and mathematical order.

Surfaces and forms constituted this way have

dynamic influences that distort direct perception and create optical illusions. These works, which the viewer is a part of, are transformed into new works that are perceived in different ways by different persons.

Although ceramic art seems as if it followed conceptual changes and trends that developed through art movements during the 1960s and 1970s, it is known there were many 'complicated and widened' areas that were neglected but were already involved in ceramic art. Realisation of the existence of something that already exists begins with writing critiques and theories on contemporary movements that occurred in painting and sculpture.

In the development of today's ceramic art, the separation from tradition, renewal and adaptation to modern age stands out. Leach, a British artist, who came into prominence with regards to theory and practice, laid down the foundations of modern ceramic art in England and Europe while Voukos, an American artist, successfully achieved this in the US.



Op Art was one of the movements that had influence on ceramic art, as it did on many fields of art. Artists produced artworks with simplicity at first seeking to create vague images. In studies involving abstract issues, geometric forms and the compositions they create, it is the interaction of patterns and/or colours that are the features that stand out. Light is also one of the fundamental values in art that is 90 percent visual. Light, which is one of the key study elements of optics, is a detail that has largely influenced visual arts in areas such as eye contact, forms of vision, seeing better, seeing the unseen and seeing the different.

It is easy to see standard Op Art examples in ceramic art where colours and patterns interact with each other at the surface level. Omur Tokgoz, however, creates works utilising different levels. She combines optics with light and presents viewers with new and different worlds. Tokgoz creates thin works using the translucent properties of porcelain. In doing so, light becomes one of her most fundamental values. The combination of optical surfaces with light in her translucent works is done with a magical touch. Tokgoz examines many topics among the study of optic art with this series. In addition to optic art, other works stand out by highlighting a unique technique that corresponds to a printing style. Technically speaking it can be considered a new method.¹

Tokgoz, the creator of these unique works, was born in 1966. The artist graduated from Ege University Textile Engineering department in 1988. Her transition from textile engineering to ceramics

was initiated by the studio of Mehmet Tuzum Kızılcan in 2003. This same artist who had to learn the fundamental steps of ceramics opened her own studio in 2006 with the desire of using porcelain clay as an art material. From this date forward she successfully formed porcelain with her own efforts and with a persistent attitude despite the compelling nature of working with this medium. Tokgoz successfully reveals the beautiful translucency of porcelain in her artworks.

Tokgoz sought a new way of expressing herself in her first years in ceramic arts and thought at the time the material she was working with was not all that important. She tried to learn the language of ceramics in order to express herself over a period of three years. As an artist she drew an analogy with language. To her it was not important which language you spoke as long as you said something with your words. Tokgoz, who dreamed of seeing transparent products, wanted to play with shadow and light. She decided to work with porcelain despite her lack of direct knowledge of its special character and peculiarities. In order to make this a reality she worked hard to decipher the language of ceramics through her own efforts for approximately one year. Her efforts during this dedicated period of discovery paid off and she was rewarded by achieving a certain level of success. By experimenting and trying new techniques she had reached a milestone in her development as an artist.

*Facing page: Optic. 2008. Casting with porcelain and water etching.
14 x 10 cm. 10 x 8 cm.*

Below: Cubic (Detail). 2012.



And while Tokgoz's everlasting relationship with clay would survive, she capitalised on time spent as a guest artist in overseas workshops. Each location or workshop allowed her to work with different perspectives and features of porcelain.

It is interesting to note Tokgoz does not like to mention what her works are about. She states that this is something personal and individual. She feels meaning depends on her relationship with the viewer. When requested to provide a compulsory explanation about her works she reflected the following in an interview on 31 September 2015:

"I usually do not use colours or glazes, I produce plain bowl forms. But, I can say that transparency and fragility are the important features of the works. I guess this is a way that I chose due to the visual pollution in our daily lives. The pollution is on television, on the Internet, in the streets, it is everywhere. . . It is everything in perception, that ended up identical and valueless. . . That is why I prefer plain forms like the bowl form which underwent little changes in thousands of year. I enjoy making products that are repetitions of other products and although they all look the same at first sight, they are all different. And this can be thought of as a comparison of the meanings of the words 'interaction' and 'duplication'. But the most important thing is that it is so fragile that nobody would want to buy it in order to own it, and this is an irony against the consumption society."

Using the bowl form as a blank canvas, Tokgoz transforms each of her forms into art objects with textures obtained from using various materials. As a result of the merge of surface studies with light, a visual feast draws in the hungry viewers. They cannot resist the beauty of these detailed, hand crafted forms, but are equally impressed by their technical expertise and value.

The artist achieved international success with her piece called *Optic* in 2008 work. Her first major example of Op Art work featured a series of gradually thinning circles on a surface that included the element of light. It was exhibited in the first international triennial in Slovenia. The piece

was formed by a casting technique using Limoge porcelain clay and then gradually thinned with a method of water etching. It was fired at 1225°C and consisted of two forms: one having a diameter of 14 cm and height of 10 cm and the other with a diameter of 10 cm and height of 8 cm. The work was also included in the collection of the Koroska Gallery of Fine Art.

The artist continued using geometric elements after *Optic* and in 2012 carried over her Op Art influences toward a more advanced level with a series called *Square*. The work featured *Squares* that gradually get smaller depending on a person's perception. After producing works using water etching, the artist utilized surface studies and performed experimental works using various textured materials. Tokgoz, having already developed a unique kind of printing technique in an effort to obtain the desired surfaces with light, made the move towards a masters series and away from experimental. The works consisted of two forms both fired at 1300°C and formed by a casting method. One had a diameter of 14 cm and a height of 10 cm while the other's diameter was 10 cm and its height was 8 cm. In 2014 the work was exhibited in the Keramikmuseum Westerwald competition and is now part of its permanent collection.

The *Square* series was followed by a new series called *Cubic*. The artist, who had come so far and learnt so much, proved she was ready to take her work further. Combining technique with brilliance these works amazed viewers. Her predominant use of light and shadow and the works' ability to alter individual viewer perceptions did indeed raise her to the next level. The use of various materials could also be seen in these forms. The pieces were also formed by a porcelain casting technique and fired at 1300°C. The smaller one was 14 cm in diameter and 10 cm in height and was deemed worthy enough to receive honourable mention in the 2014 Mino Ceramic Art Competition organised in Japan. These same works are now on display in the Museum of Modern Ceramic Art in Gifu, Japan.

Another bowl set in the same series with diameters of 18 cm and heights of 12 cm received second prize in



the 4th International Triennial of Silicate Arts organized in Kecskemet, Hungary. This exhibition and award brought the artist an even greater recognition. Tokgoz, who twice was involved in artist residencies in Kecskemet, was awarded the right to hold an exhibition there.

This artist transformed the bowl form, which has been replicated and processed for hundreds of years, into a completely different form. Her unique printing technique, various materials, and use of light created on this simple form ends up producing wonderful three dimensional effects. The technical and mathematical acuity of the artist can be clearly observed in her optic works. Starting with just a basic ceramics education background, Tokgoz became the first artist in her country to successfully use porcelain in this manner; a remarkable feat considering it was a material completely new to her.

Her modest and naive personality is readily seen in the purity of her objects and the work has brought her international awards and the right to enjoy artist residencies in many countries. This year alone Tokgoz received the 59th Premio Faenza da The Lyons Club Faenza Host Prize, a competition held for many years in Italy, and she attended the Arctic Center in Finland as an invitational artist.

The works of this fine artist are housed at the museum collections of many countries such as Finland, Taiwan, Latvia, Japan, Spain, China, Slovenia, Hungary, Germany and Italy. With her works possessing a unique aesthetical and technical quality, Omur Tokgoz not only lightens her immediate surroundings but many places far away as well.

ENDNOTE

1. The technique will be discussed in more detail in another article.

REFERENCES

Tugal Avci, Sibel; Olusum Sureci Icinde *Op Art*, Istanbul, 2012.
Tokgoz, Omur.



Facing page: *Square*. 2012. 14 x 10 cm and 10 x 8 cm.

Below: *Cubic*. 2012–2013. 14 x 10 cm and 20 x 8 cm.

Both are plaster and paper mould with slipcasting of porcelain.
Above: Omur Tokgoz.

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