

Moonlight Pieces

Works by Ömür Tokgöz

Article by Feyza Ozgundogdu

BEING AS BEAUTIFUL AS THE 14TH DAY OF THE MOON' is an expression used in Turkish to describe beauty. With this expression, the full moon is associated with a bright and restful face. The light of the full moon emerging in the sky on a cloudless night is fascinating for many people. The moon openhandedly sends the light it receives from the sun, as if it is a gift. Although we are aware that the light does not originate from the moon itself, when watching it we attribute the light to the moon and admire it. The burrowed light has a quite modest and peaceful level and whiteness. The light of the moon softly covers the nature it illuminates, as a white veil.





This moonlight influence, which we observe in the works of most of the ceramics artists who are passionately committed to translucency, shine with the same modesty in the sections of fine porcelain works. We know that these works do not radiate. Yet the light that comes from the source is absorbed by the form with the deep breath of the porcelain and gains its own beauty, character and voice. The light now belongs to the porcelain and we perceive that while the work manifests its strong character with all of its elegance, it also expresses how fragile it could be. There is calmness in the sound of this light, it softly asks you to listen to its secret and the observer gets closer to the piece to hear this whisper. The impression left by the translucent and superfine porcelain bowls of Ömür Tokgöz is no exception.

We witness this poetic moonlight glare in the works of the artist. These pieces are so fine that they seem to challenge their material reality. Revealing their existence within a dimension between material and abstract, these works are the present milestones of the search for achieving a plain style, as far as possible from colours and secrets.

Tokguz's acquaintance with the art of ceramics happened past her engineering education and career. While originally being a textile engineer, she starts to develop an interest towards painting and discovers clay when she, by coincidence, attends a ceramics course after 2003. With the strengthening of her interest, she leaves her engineering occupation behind. For the first couple of years she concentrates

*Facing page: **Blue (Detail)**. 2010. Porcelain, slipcasting, unglazed, coloured by cobalt oxide and fired to 1300°C.*

18 x 12.5, 14.5 x 10.5 and 10 x 8 cm.

*Above: **Optical**. 2008. Limoges clay, slipcasting, unglazed and fired at 1225°C. 14.5 x 10.5 and 10 x 8 cm.*

on research and implementation in order to get to know ceramics closely. Stating that she needs to know ceramic clay well in order to be able to express herself well, Tokgöz starts to question the characteristics, limits and possibilities of this material. The artist states that, by the end of this technical research process she starts to believe that in fact material is not that important. She points out that the techniques and materials employed are similar to a language and what matters is not which language we speak, but what we actually say. "But, of course you have to know your material well. This is something different. If you know it well and you can understand its language you give to it a new idea/meaning."

After setting up her own workshop in Izmir in 2006, Tokgöz understands that the only way with which she can express what she wants to say is porcelain and she starts experimental works with porcelain. "I noticed that I was dreaming to see translucent things. I was more interested in playing with light and shadow. I was more interested in working with translucent objects." Thus, having set off on the search for moonlight, the artist starts her studies in a field where the resources, such as providing porcelain material and suitable technical equipment, are limited in Turkey. Having started experimenting



Top: *Untitled 2*. 2009/2010. 16.5 x 10 cm.
 Above left: *Untitled 3*. 2011. 14 x 10 cm and 10 x 8 cm.
 Above right: *Metamorphosis 1*. 2011. 14 x 10 cm and 10 x 8 cm.
 All are porcelain, slipcasting, unglazed and fired at 1300°C.

with Limoges as the first clay she can acquire, she also enters into theoretical research and learns about the characteristics of other translucent types of clay. "The second serious challenge after material provision was yet to come to light. The porcelain clay that I touched for the first time in my life bore no resemblance to those I had experimented with till then, not to mention the fact that having worked with porcelain clay for only three years, my experience and knowledge were limited."

Tokgöz initiates her works with small bowl forms and works for a long while to solve the deformation problem that occurs at high temperatures in the kiln. In time, the artist finds the way to express what she wants to say with the language of this wayward clay and becomes capable of producing fine bowls without the problem of deformation. In the meantime she attends Sasha Wardell's workshop on porcelain production and learns various techniques that will contribute to her works. "It was not before six months when I discovered what to do and how to do it. As for the entire work to reach the result I desired, I believe it took a year. Yet, the truth is, the relation with clay never ends. Still, every day I learn another characteristic of it."

We can see that the light Tokgöz wanted to achieve when she first set off, led her to experience a process where courage, patience and care coexists. Or, maybe it is the artist's search for calmness concerning life itself that led her to produce these fragile and plain works: "All my inspirations are the result

of my feeling about the time in which we have been living. Maybe my subject is modernity. I am trying to understand its meaning. I feel there is something wrong in our lives. We consume everything. This is like being blind. Are we losing our connection to and control over our lives? Currently, I like working with plain things. No colour, no glaze. Simple forms like bowls. But translucent and fragile. I think, this is the result of the image pollution of everyday life."

Regarding her creations, the artist makes this explanation sincerely. One can clearly see that her ceramic production takes shape as calm porcelains, a tendency that came along when she realised that she feels squeezed under the rapidly changing visual bombardment that we face every day. "So I like using simple forms such as bowls which have changed only a little for thousands of years. In addition, I like working with repeated forms. They are the same as each other in general and at the same time they are subtly different from each other. It is like a question of comparing the meaning of 'interaction' with 'copy-past'. And finally, they are always fragile pieces. Maybe, this is an irony of the consumers' life."

Her work titled *Optical* is one of the examples that demonstrates Tokgöz's capacity in using Limoges porcelain with control. With perfect symmetry, the surfaces of these bowls are gradually thinned with geometrical divisions. Just as a circle of light around the moon itself, these circular thinnings create hard to believe depths on the ultra-fine sections of the porcelain and they open gates. Being one of the first works of Tokgöz that we have started to see in international exhibitions, *Optical* was exhibited in the 1st International Triennial of Ceramics UNICUM09



Above: **Relativity**. 2011. Porcelain, slipcasting, unglazed, coloured by cobalt nitrate. 1300°C. 14 x 10 cm.
Below: **Ömür Tokgöz in her studio**.

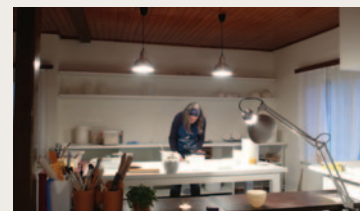
exhibition in Slovenia. We can see that the artist's desire to reach whiteness in time leads her to work with more sinter and whiter porcelain. In recent years, the artist has started to work with harder porcelain types.

The work titled as *Untitled 2* brings forward a quality of volume, beyond the view of three fine bowls. These three forms seem like three flying balloons challenging gravity, they have either just touched the ground or are to rise at any moment. As this illusion is achieved by filling the sections, which raises doubts that they actually have any thickness at all, with the white light, it is also supported with the dynamic view of the bowls. With this work, the artist demonstrates that she succeeded in masterfully using the language of hard ceramic. The whiteness and translucency that she achieves have added a distinctive dimension of sound. The relationship of these works with the atmosphere is closer and stronger. It is as if the volumetric value of these images has no relation with earth anymore. The piece titled *Blue*, with which Tokgöz was awarded the FuLe Prize in the *3rd ICMEA International Emerging Artists Competition*, also manifests the same effect. The bowls are so fine and fragile that, handling the bowls, one can doubt their existence. This is more than just proof of expertise, but a challenge. The point in question here is the questioning or demonstration of the thresholds of perception. This challenge is even more evident in the work titled as *Metamorphosis 1*, which was exhibited in the *3rd International Triennial of Silicate Arts*. How can the bodies of the two bowls that do not belong here, yet are merely visible for us to perceive, be so thin and still have the changing power that transforms them? Only a living organism can be so resistant in order to continue its existence.

We coincide with the same dimension of life also in *Untitled 3* which was chosen to be exhibited in the *Taiwan Ceramics Biennial 2012*. These two bowls cannot simply be described as porcelain clay shaped through casting, but a seashell that builds itself

within the aquatic life, or a piece of light that shaped itself as corals do. On the other hand, with the piece titled as *Relativity*, which was exhibited in the *9th International Ceramics Competition* in Mino, the artist shares a special silhouette with us. On the surfaces of the two bowls with equal dimensions, we come upon the historic city of Istanbul, or according to some with an oriental image, depicted in a perfectly plain style. These images seem to be embedded in the memories of the bowls. While on the left bowl, it is the cobalt nitrate applied on the lip that constitutes the sky of the picture that is depicted with a single line; on the other bowl we see the negative image of this composition. Here, the view makes a reference to a slice of time that is long past, as if the image is hidden behind a cloud of fog, or as if it is a faded old photograph. This time, the cobalt solution used seems to form the sea in the scenery. The bowl on the left is as though it describes the image of old times on the right bowl, to the present time. The bowls are, once again, ultra-fine and filled with light.

Ömür Tokgöz's porcelain works aesthetically bestow upon us the truth of fragility and the sense of calmness that she believes in, adjacent to the noisy images of the daily life, so bright that sometimes they make us squint. The light borrowed by the fine and snow-white delicate bodies refreshes us and covers our souls as a light and white veil, as does the moon.



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