

In Studio with Şirin Koçak

Evelyne Schoenmann



*S*irin, at the beginning I like to ask my guests about their training and ceramics background.

Firstly, I completed my associate degree at Izmir Ege University Ege Vocational School, Department of Ceramics, then I completed my Bachelor's degree at Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Ceramic and Glass Design, and again at Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Fine Arts, Department of Ceramic and Glass Design, Master's degree and Proficiency in Art. During my Master's degree, I was an Erasmus student at Bratislava AFAD Academy of Fine Arts and Design. These covered the years 1998-2014.

Before and after my PhD education, I prioritized international ceramic art events. I had the opportunity to work with many artists from around the world. This gave me the opportunity to get to know the world of ceramics better and it enabled me to position myself in it.

What does your work as a lecturer at Usak University involve?

I have been working as a lecturer at Usak University Faculty of Fine Arts in Turkey since 2010. Currently, as an Associate Professor, I am the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Head of the Ceramics Department. I give theoretical and practi-

cal courses to our undergraduate, graduate and proficiency in art students. I work as a member of the Board of Directors of the Leather, Textile and Ceramic Design Application and Research Centre and the Graduate Education Institute at the university. I work to develop international collaborations. I follow the development of the ceramics sector in Turkey and lead our students to gain experience in the sector with applied courses. I try to participate with my students in all kinds of art platforms, symposiums, workshops and exhibitions to which I am invited. I include my students in every stage of my personal productions. I take an active role in the or-



ganization and realization of national and international exhibitions, competitions and events.

When I look at your work, I don't get the feeling that you concentrate on a single technique. How do you start? Do you for instance have a project in mind and then decide on one technique or another?

I have done a lot of research and studies on clay shaping methods, firing techniques, decor applications and types, raw glaze preparation processes, including comprehensive theoretical and practical applications. I learned, developed and

applied the techniques that aroused my curiosity and that would help me express the subject and concept I wanted to address. Therefore, I do not focus on a single technique. Technique is a tool for me. Daily issues and changes in the world are the issues that affect me. In today's world where changes are very fast, I am looking for ways to express life and my stance in life, my thoughts and feelings with the soft material at hand. I try to create unique and organic textures between my inner world and the soft clay material. I like to transform the material naturally without interfering too much. I like to use, see and feel my fingerprints, which

reveal my identity and cannot be imitated, in each of my works. I often hear that my works, which evoke archaic associations, have a tactile attraction. It may indicate that the messages I want to convey reach the audience in the right way.

And then there is the Days of One Heart project, which is very touching. Can you tell us the story behind it?

It is a project consisting of photographing a single heart-shaped ceramic piece every day for three years in different places, spaces, in between daily work. This form was constantly the victim of an accident during a period when I was



producing intensively in the studio. It fell on the floor, liquids were spilled on it, a student of mine unintentionally hit it, it fell on the floor again, it broke many times. Each time I picked it up, cleaned it and restored it. I had produced many works in this form, but for some reason only this form had suffered many negative consequences. Then I started to think about this situation and decided to take the form under protection. I kept it with me every day and night, I carried it in my bag. Every day I took snapshots that could reflect the emotional state I was experiencing inside. I identified with it and completed my days by taking photographs that could reveal my own emotion in a concrete way. Then I told the story to the artists. They then wanted to touch the form, some caressed it, some kissed it... I took photographs of the artists with my heart form and completed the project with this process. I have not

yet exhibited the entire project. I am waiting for the right time.

Does the project with the broken hearts have anything to do with it? Do you process experiences, ups and downs in life, joyful but also negative in your works?

Yes, all the installations I created with heart forms emerged simultaneously. I produced my own heart forms because it is a vital organ of the human being. I tried to express, convey and share the changes in my life, my relationships with people, my sadness, insecurities, anxieties, fears, losses through heart forms.

With your latest works, one gets the feeling that it must be very meditative for you to work on them. Is this impression true?

It is absolutely true. My recent work continues as the Meditative Series. This series started in 2021. The reason for the

beginning was that my father was in intensive care for months during Covid-19, struggling to stay alive. Praying for the survival of someone we love every moment, every second, and making efforts to breathe showed me once again how precious every moment of life is. I realized that being able to inhale and exhale a breath and sustain this state are the most precious moments and seconds in life. I needed clay both physically and mentally because my fears, anxieties and efforts to help in the process lasted for months. The repetitive processes caused me to produce repetitive units with clay. A unit became identified with a breath. As I produced in the studio, I realized that my mind and body started to relax.

By the way, my father is doing well again.

You made one of these works for us. Please describe the technical process.

Clay is a very complex material, not easy to handle. It is almost a miracle every time to finalize the subject you want to express with ceramic material. No matter how adequate our technical equipment is, when we consider the production process of ceramics, it brings many unpredictabilities. This also makes the production process uncertain. I want to eliminate these uncertainties as much as possible. I prefer the simplest of ceramic shaping methods. In fact, if I can, I want to forget all the techniques I know and touch the clay with the simplest, most primitive movements and work with this primitiveness. Pinching and coiling are the methods I always use. I created the ground of my work using the coiling method. I love the softness of clay and I always prefer to produce my works in this consistency. I like the feeling of everything happening spontaneously, suddenly, and I can realize this with clay, one of the softest materials. In the Meditative Series, I do not use any additional materials other than clay and my fingers. Every tool or device can be a factor affecting my communication with the clay. I create my surfaces with the repetition of units that I simply produce with my hand. I follow the textures that my fingers create on the clay surface. I capture movement with a single simple piece of clay, I complete my work by repeating the movement or texture I capture over and over again. I perform a single firing during the firing process. I want to think simply, live simply, produce simply.

Can you tell us anything about future projects, wishes or ideas?

I have planned a solo exhibition where I will share my recent works. I am still preparing for it. I want to focus on projects for students. I also want to get to know local women who traditionally produce ceramics in Turkey, I want to be a part of their lives, work with them, talk to them, bring many of them together on a platform. I hope I can do it.

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Evelyne Schoenmanns next
interview partner is
Doris Becker, Luxembourg

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