

Hasan Sahbaz

By Marc Leuthold

Hasan Sahbaz is one of the many academic ceramic artists creating art in Anatolia. He has spent his entire career under the remarkably vibrant and supportive Turkish academic umbrella. He studied exclusively at one of Turkey's finest ceramic programmes, Anadolu University. Directly after his studies, he was lucky enough to land a teaching job in 2001 at Afyon Kocatepe University. He continues to teach at that school and has intermittently chaired the ceramic programme there.

Undoubtedly, Hasan owes his rapid success to his extraordinarily original and process-intensive artwork. He works mostly with casting slip and his pieces typically consist of a general form with many cellular negative space voids. To create these pieces, Hasan must make an elaborate form or coddle that will hold the slip - thereby creating the sculpture. Using coddles of various shapes he then places dozens of small plaster bars within the coddle. The bars stand up like skyscrapers in a big city. When he pours the slip in the coddle, of course the slip must flow around the vertical bars. Imagine a flood engulfing the streets of New York City. Then as the slip sets up and congeals, Hasan must gently remove the bars (or "buildings"), otherwise the slip would crack as it shrinks around the rigid plaster bars. It is an unbelievably tedious process that requires great patience and a lot of close and careful observation. Hasan spends hours minding these pieces as the slip sets up. Once all the bars are removed, he must drain out the slip so that what is left is many fairly thin walls that surround the plaster bars. Once the piece emerges from the coddle, he must carefully and slowly dry, finish, and fire the sculpture. Usually but not always,

"Self Portrait" - 2015, Organic Ceramic Objects Series
 colourful slip, Black Portrait - 5.8 x 21.7 x 40.4 cm
 Brown Portrait - 5.6 x 21.7 x 40.4 cm. 1200°C - electric kiln firing

the sculpture is tilted up on its side so that viewers can see through the cellular cavities. Sometimes the pieces are presented horizontally, appearing to hover over a pedestal, often creating beautiful dappled shadows that echo the form.

What is so extraordinary about these pieces is the originality and complexity of the process. The pieces started out as non-objective works, I would suspect. Non-objective work and geometry are common motifs in traditional Muslim (iconoclast) cultures. Without being directly representational, these sculptures allude to cellular elements of organisms just as easily as they might reference a view of a city or settlement that one might see out of a plane window at night. Within this macro and micro context, they operate very effectively on a formal level through repetition and variety of form. They are truly extraordinary.

In recent years, the outline of the forms has subtly morphed to include partially representational imagery. One piece appears to be a silhouette of the artist's head. Some may think that figural work is unusual even in a modern secular Muslim country like Turkey. Yet today, thousands of Turkish artists work with the figure perhaps owing to the first president of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal



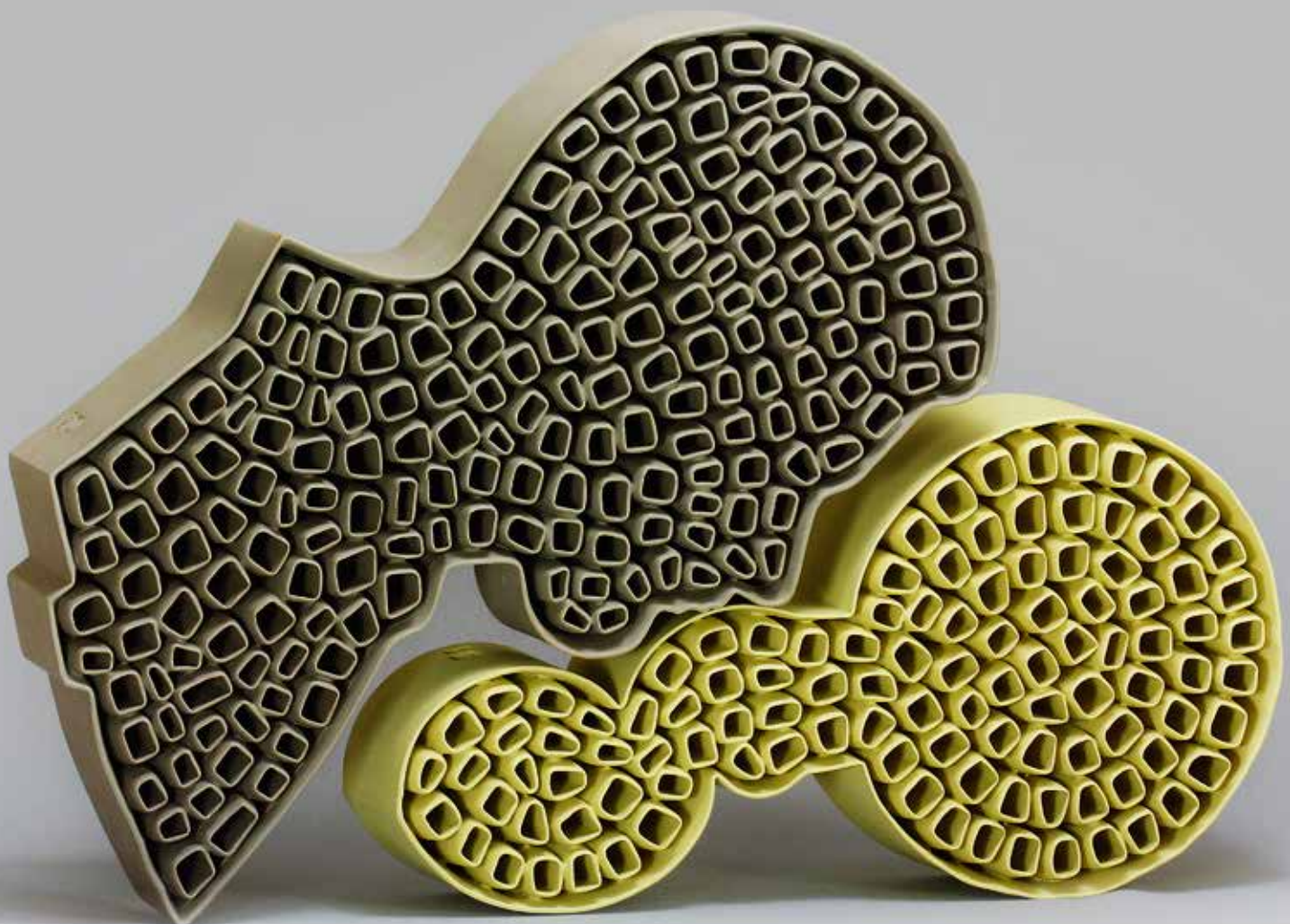
top - "Turquoise Stacking in Black"- 2015
Organic Ceramic Objects Series - h 8.5 cm, d 19.7 cm
slip cast, 1200°C - electric kiln firing

Atatürk, 1881-1938: the visionary founder and first President of modern Turkey was very expansive in his cultural views.

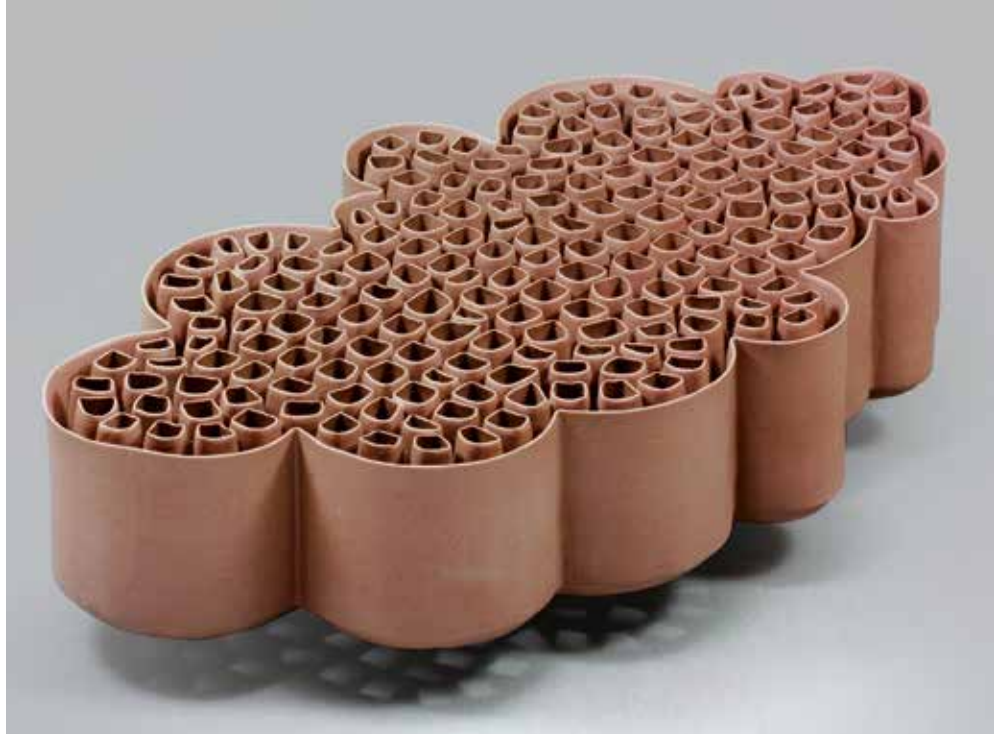
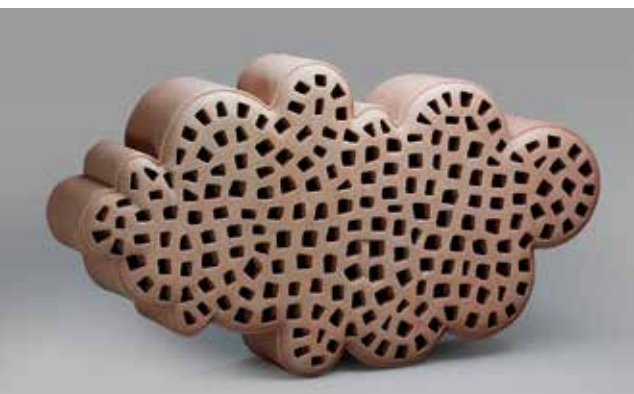
Other sculptures are shaped like clouds. Colours vary, but there is a much greater emphasis on form than on surface.

Presenting his artwork and representing Turkey in a global arena are key elements in Hasan Sahbaz's artistic practice and philosophy. Hasan has entered his work in many competitions, dozens within Turkey and his work has deservedly won prizes, presumably for its originality and refinement. He has also exhibited at Faenza (twice) and as recently as 2015. This year also, his work was included in the 8th Gyeonggi International Ceramics Biennale in Korea and he has exhibited at Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Germany. Hasan is very interested in Turkey maintaining a position as a country with artists that can compete on an international level. In fact he has strong ideas about the Turkish Academy. In Turkey, earning a doctorate degree in ceramics and promotion to high levels of the professoriate are linked to high levels of English language mastery. Hasan feels that this is an artificial barrier that is irrelevant and that rank should be based strictly on research and artistic

below - "Self Portrait" - 2015, Organic Ceramic Objects Series -
colourful slip, Brown Portrait - 5.6 x 21.7 x 40.4 cm
Yellow Object - 6.7 x 37.2 x 19.2 cm, 1200°C - electric kiln firing



right -
 "Pink Cloud", 2015
 Organic Ceramic Objects Series
 colourful slip , 8.7 x 27.6 x 44.8 cm
 slip cast, 1200° C - electric kiln firing



merit. He feels that this skews the system. He also feels that too many artists are dependent and connected to the academic system for support. He advocates projects, subsidies and public art projects that would allow a larger number of artists to work independently of the academic system. Norway has lifetime stipends for select artists and Japan has National Living Treasure titles that are conferred on a lucky few artists. The Netherlands was famous for having generous living allowances for artists. And many countries have large public art budgets and percent-for-art laws that enable artists to live outside the academic system. Despite these reservations, Hasan feels that a number of Turkish Universities offer ceramic programs that are competitive on a pan-European level, and he seems determined to prove that his artistic vision is of this high calibre.

Hasan Sahbaz has created a unique position for himself as a ceramist working in Turkey. In a country where seniority and rank in academia confer tremendous respect and status, Hasan, who is a lecturer rather than a professor, has realized he can build his career based on the quality and originality of his work. He has further discovered that he can compete in international juried exhibitions and have his work judged simply for what it is, rather than for his individual circumstances.

Hasan's work is extraordinary. When one looks at it, one is dazzled by negative space and complex repetition of form. Because it is so unique, one wants to study it and perhaps understand how it is made. Hasan is enough of a traditionalist and ceramic craftsman not to be able to embrace cracks and "flaws" that might add even more meaning and significance to these pieces. Still, given his socio-political views, it seems consistent for him to focus on virtuoso technique and the sheer beauty of his pieces. Hasan Sahbaz is in the prime of his creative practice and we can therefore expect even more innovation and creativity from this extremely talented, leading emerging international artist.

Marc Leuthold creates objects, installations and videos that create a dialogue between cultures, history, and the senses. Leuthold is a Professor and heads a Ceramics programme for a State University of New York Campus. In 1999, Leuthold was elected a lifetime member of the International Academy of Ceramics, Geneva, Switzerland. www.marcleuthold.com

HASAN SAHBAZ was born in Aksehir/Konya (Turkey), in 1975. He graduated from Anadolu University, Fine Arts Faculty, Department of Ceramic, in 2001. At the same university, he completed a master's degree thesis, "Minimalism in Modern Ceramic Art", in 2006. His artwork has been exhibited at Icheon World Ceramic Center in Korea, Keramikmuseum Westerwald in Germany, Riga Porcelain Museum in Latvia, Manises Ceramic Museum in Spain, and Faenza International Ceramics Museum in Italy. He has had 8 solo exhibitions. This year, he received an "Honorable Mention" at the 8th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale in Korea. Hasan Ahbaz is an instructor at Afyon Kocatepe University, Fine Arts Faculty, Department of Ceramics since 2001. He is a member of the Turkish Association of Ceramics.

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