



Talismanic Connotations with Clay

Zehra Çobanlı discusses the sources and process of Ezgi Hakan Verdu Martinez

Above: **Talisman Robe**. 2007. Stoneware, mesh work from clay with metal strings, 1200°C. 70 cm.

Below: **Dreams May Come True Vice Versa**. 2007. Stoneware, slip-casting, applied decoration, 1200°C. 32 x 32 cm.



ART SERVES ITS ACTUAL FUNCTION WHEN THE affectations and manifestations emanating from the artist's culture and true life experiences integrate with new feelings that stimulate the audience. Even small details affecting the artist reach a different pitch with distinct stimulus and their effects are strengthened.

Anatolian culture has a large variety of exciting aspects that can be source material for an artist. Anatolian territories bear traces from various civilisations and have been the stage for the emanation and development of interesting traditions after the settlement by the Turks in Anatolia. Synthesising these cultural interactions with her unique technique, Ezgi Hakan Verdu Martinez bestows reflections from the objects, beliefs and expressions pertaining to her own culture in the ceramics she has shaped with painstaking effort. Martinez, whom I have been supervising in her academic studies since her early undergraduate education years, held her first exhibition during the period when she was tracing back the transformation of calligraphy and typography elements as instruments of communication from her own culture. This exhibition contained visual material that was a result of her research relating to "utilisation of inscriptions in ceramic art as a design element".

In this exhibition, Martinez transformed the elements of inscriptions on to tissues by carrying them on to ceramic surfaces, thus creating a



Left: *Original Talismanic Robe from Anatolia traditions*. 1928. Konya.
Right: *Healing Robe of Sultan Selim*. 2010. Colored stoneware casting clay, mesh work from clay with metal strings, 1200°C. 95 cm.

distinct visual language together with technical variety. She tested a variety of techniques with fragments from manuscripts and imprints in her work and preferred to reflect her feelings not with legible but aesthetic characteristics of the inscriptions. In this exhibition, utilisation of inscription fragments draws attention to her ceramic pillow forms, where she illustrated sleep and dream concepts. As well as seeing the effect of ceramics displaying content from a distance and also when approached, the abstract perspectives are presented, evoking other senses such as hearing, touching and sight.

Contemporary artists are pushing the limits by using all kinds of materials and their efforts to enrich their own means of expression and also to bring freedom to their work. Thereby, ceramic art is carried to different heights in contemporary context, thanks to these emerging original works of art. While artists morphologically push the limits of the materials, they also increase the effects of the message conceptually. At this point, it is possible that interesting works of art with a stronger message and richer content are put forth, when different fields are adapted to ceramic art.

In the first exhibition of Martinez, her *Talismanic Robe*, made up of a combination of ceramic units in the shape of several different letters, emerged as the product of this approach. This robe knitted with the objective of taking the literal meaning away and creating a unified artistic form by utilising the formal aesthetics of letters is presented as a hollow, see-through ghost hanging with nylon threads from the ceiling in a manner that allowed its arms to move. Ceramic units in the shapes of letters making up this shirt created moving shadows that added to the visual experience of the viewer.

The work, although creating timidity behind its bizarre and magical appearance, created a feeling that, if worn, would make its owner invisible. The robe, arousing feelings of intimacy because of its warmth, became a marker for a new direction in Martinez's work and her continuing use of shadow and light.

Sources of inspiration for Martinez's last exhibition (March 2010, at Tunel Art Gallery executed by Ziraat Bank of Turkey) which she has prepared for over the course of two years, come from the kaftans, healing robes, armour and the detail shapes and patterns of the dowry

These works cause audiences to question the habits and traditions of their own pasts and the cumulative knowledge about their own histories and the extent of possibilities presented by ceramic art.



Top and centre: *The shaping and building process of each unit and assembling the dresses*
 Above: *Dowry of Sultan Hatice. 2007. Stoneware, slipcasting with lacework, 1200°C.*

pieces on display in Topkapi Palace.

Ezgi Hakan Martinez tells the story of the emergence of the artworks as follows: “Sources of inspiration for this exhibition come from talismanic clothing. Anatolian people invented many methods to protect themselves from illnesses and to keep them safe from evil.

“Citizens of Anatolia used talismanic objects such as; shirts, jewellery, prayers, healing stones and objects, which they carried because they were believed to have magical powers and create a mystical link between humans and nature.

“They prepared charms, believing in the magical power of shapes and numbers. They felt comfortable with conceptual iterations such as seven Wise Men, seven Sins, seven Layers of Sky, seven Disasters as in the epic of Gilgamesh which is written in the literature.

“It is possible to conclude, given the many examples, that the Turks believed in talismans before and after Islam. Especially the talisman shirts are an example of strength; those shirts which cannot be cut with a sword, were bullet proof, brought happiness, made the wearer invisible and have even been the subject for Dada Gorgut epic (Tezcan, 2006, pp 27).

“My work titled *The Healing Shirt of Sultan Selim* (which I created after being inspired by the shirts made during Ottoman period by thinning the fine cotton fabric to a paper like consistency and printing prayers on it with ink. They were believed to protect the Sultan from illness, evil and death in war. This costume, made up of approximately 1500 different ceramic units, is 95 cm in height. I believe that the magical effect of the gaps created between the units while joining them, is creating more apparent interaction with *chiaroscuro* (light and shade). In fact, it is known that there were astrologers who determined the best date to start the writing on these shirts. Calligraphers engraved the hours of start and completion of the writings on the shirts, which started at auspicious hour according to this date (Tezcan, 2006, s:35). I

also included the starting and finishing time on my work in the exhibition which I consider to be lucky. I started making this healing shirt on 3 April and finished it on 3 August 2010 and began to believe in the luck of three in these dates.”

The majority of Martinez’s work displayed in the exhibition was created by knitting the ceramic units (approximately three cm in length) to each other with wires. The ceramic elements have been shaped



with coloured clay, glazed and fired at oxidising atmosphere at a temperature of 1200°C. We can feel that their talismanic connotations result from the hollow screen mesh appearance of the units. These free style units are arrayed in different positions and directions are connected with wires at approximately equal distance to each other, transforming into forms lending different connotations to each work. The important thing is the suitability of the units to come together side by side, one on the top of the other to create a unified form that is entirely new.

The *Caftan of Famous Ottoman Emperor Mehmed the Conqueror* (Fatih Sultan Mehmet), echoing the form of the tulips growing in the gardens

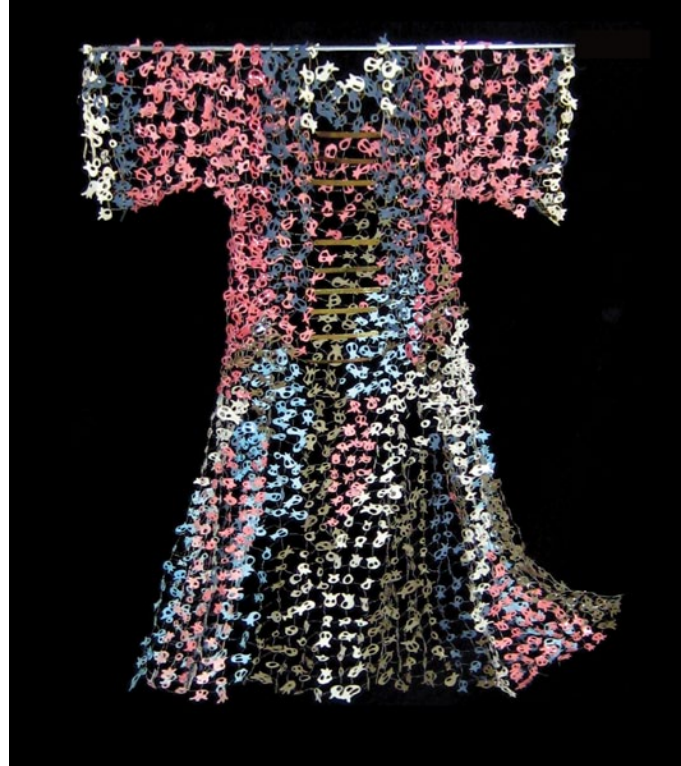
Left: Dress up now. 2009. Cast coloured stoneware, open work with metal fittings, 1200°C. 90 cm.
Right: Bridal Gown Of Naime Sultan. 2010. Cast stoneware, clay open work with metal fittings, 1200°C. 160 cm.



Left: *Armour of Sultan Süleyman*. 2010

Knitting with chains, stoneware squares of three cm. 65 cm.

Right: *Perforated Caftan of Fatih Sultan Mehmet the Conquerer*.



of his palace, consists of approximately 1700 ceramic tulips in five different colours. Sultan's armour is knitted with 400 glazed squares and triangle units attached to each other with chain links.

The *Lucky Carpet and Pillows* for this exhibition were inspired by the items of Sultan's dowry. Each unit of the carpet, consisting of approximately

1500 pieces created with colour transitions from white to dark green, is made up of one leaf of the clover. They are dowry items prepared so that they bring luck to the bride.

The *Pillows* are made in four different sizes and reflect the adornments in dowry tradition and the elegant and sensitive state of women with their lace works. The dress, *Bridal Gown of Naime Sultan*, made up of 1000 ceramic units is dedicated to and takes its inspiration from Naime Sultan, Sultan II, Abdulhamit's daughter, who wore a white wedding dress for the first time in the Ottoman Empire. This work connotes Turkish women dressing in the three skirts style traditional dress.

While interpreting the traditional costumes, Martinez is also interested in making her own dress design with a contemporary approach to creating an ambiance with fashion design utilising colour that gives a feeling of a glamorous appearance.

Another work inspired by Anatolian traditions displayed in Martinez's exhibition is *Seven Mehmet, Three Mustafa*. This work has evolved from the talismanic shirt tradition in Anatolian culture. These shirts are worn by new born babies in Konya and believed to protect the baby from epidemics of those early days, from death and to ensure the healthy growth of the baby.

According to this tradition, a shirt is sewn with 70 stitches from the pieces of fabrics cut from the clothes of seven children called Mehmet, and three children called Mustafa. The seven blue beads on it assume



the duty of protection. It is said that such traditions in various parts of Anatolia exist in Japan, Iran and India, as well. These kinds of beliefs, in a way, enable us to discover common ground that helps to build bridges creating intercultural links.

Today, also, fulfilling the arising need to suppress or bring forth various feelings inherent in human nature such as happiness, passion, ambition, fear, hope, anxiety and desires such as establishing dominance, in learning the things we are curious about, breaking taboos, divination, luck and fortune, cause the belief in magic to persist. Martinez's works bring together the different centuries in new forms of interpretation of these superstitious but colourful beliefs that still continue with symbols, textures and traces on various contemporary costumes and articles. These works cause audiences to question the habits and traditions of their own pasts and the cumulative knowledge about their own histories and the extent of possibilities presented by ceramic art.

REFERENCE

Hülya Tecan, *Healing Shirts in Topkapı Palace*, 2006. Istanbul Bika Culture Library (Bika Kültür Kitaplığı) Publication .



Top left: *Interpreted Talismanic Robe design.*

Top right: *Martinez. Mixed decorated stoneware slab. 1200°C. 32 x 25 cm.*

Above: *The Artist and Zehra Çobanlı.*

Professor Dr Zehra Çobanlı is a Turkish ceramics artist and a writer. She served as the Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts at Anadolu University in Eskişehir between 2007–2012.

Çobanlı studied in Turkey, then continued her art education in Australia and Japan. She has served on many international juries including the World Ceramic Biennale in Korea. Çobanlı has more than 15 solo exhibitions in Turkey, Japan, New Zealand and the UK. She has contributed to ceramics art education in Turkey through her books and articles and her lectures and consultancies since 1980. (zcobanlı@anadolu.edu.tr)

Assistant Professor Ezgi Hakan Verdu Martinez graduated from the Ceramics Department at Anadolu University Faculty of Fine Arts in 2001. She earned an MA Degree in 2003, PhD Degree of Arts in 2007. She became an assistant professor at Anadolu University and has participated in 45 group exhibitions in Turkey and abroad. (ehakan@anadolu.edu.tr)

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