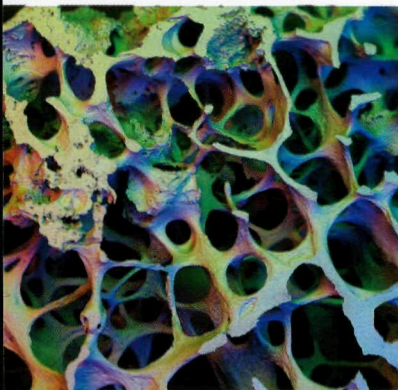


Osteoporotic Ceramic Figures as a New Approach to Art and Life

*Olgu Sümengen Berk-
er explores the art and
science of osteoporosis*

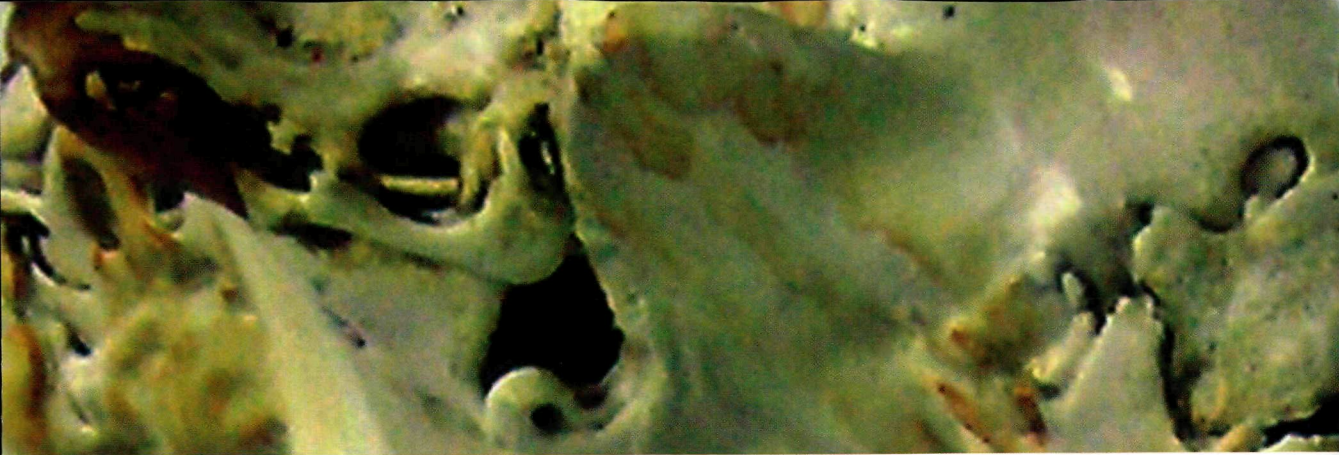


Above: *Seated Figure*. Slipcasting clay and white vacuum clay, transparent glaze. 40 x 50 x 52 cm. 2011.
Below: *Image of Osteoporotic Bone from the Vertebra*.



THIS ARTICLE IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE FINAL STAGE IN A CHALLENGE OF A decade aimed at building unique and original ceramic figures. It can also be acknowledged as a summary of a proficiency in art dissertation, namely, "Osteoporosis in Art" which includes a distinct approach to ceramic figures. In the dissertation, generally in accordance with osteoporosis, the themes of art and life were reflected by various ceramic forms. This article is predicated on the systematic thoughts from which ceramic figures emerge and how they are established to be artworks.

Since the beginning of its existence, art has been recognised as one of the most important fields that distinguishes humans from other beings. Artists, being or not being aware of it, have mirrored the characteristics of their time periods by their artworks. All of the events concerning society (politics and the economy, wars, economic and political crises as well as the contemporary problems of our age such as rural development, immense population increases, environmental issues, genetically



Above: *Bone-like Ceramic Figure. 2011.*
White vacuum clay, oxides and coloured glazes.
23 x 20 x 57.5 cm.

Below: *Images of Micro CT Based Analysis of Bone Structure.*

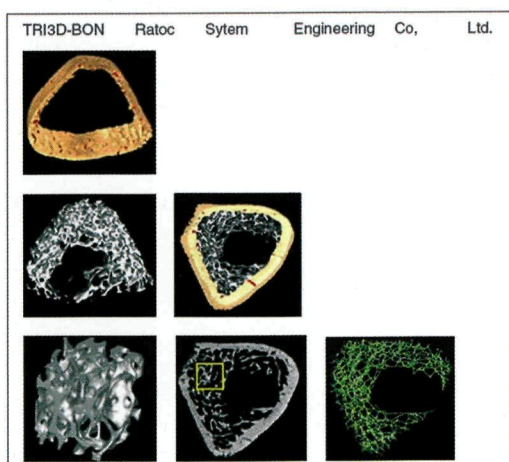
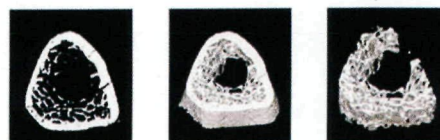
modified foods, along with the expansion in the variety of diseases) greatly influence everyone, including artists and art itself.

As a part of cultures around the world, artists not only reflect these changes and problems but they alter them. With any themes that artists have chosen, the created artwork exposes an aesthetic value that is different from what we call 'beautiful' in daily life. This is why various artworks with diverse expressions can be found in all fields of art. It is important to touch on the subjects of how artists choose their themes, how they express themselves aesthetically and their aesthetic values. Considering 'osteoporosis' and 'art', in order to evaluate the aesthetic value of the artwork that emerges as a result of illness, the notion of the word 'beautiful' in daily life and its aesthetic notion should be considered. The aesthetic notion of the word 'beauty' varies greatly from the notion found in nature.

In L'oeuvre D'art, Lenoir mentions the opinions of Goethe on nature and art. Goethe, in contrast, opposes the idea that nature conquers art by fundamentally distinguishing art and nature. If nature can produce living organisms, art can also produce beautiful artworks, which are as unique as the ones of nature. The parts of the living organisms that are indisputably consistent with each other can sometimes seem ugly to the eye of a person who seeks beauty. The analysis of principles that form the artwork, on the other hand, cannot provide information on life itself, in which case, seeking the laws of an artwork in nature would be a futile attempt. Nature may, of course, inspire an artist, but that would be a field of knowledge that has no relation to the knowledge required for art. To confuse these two types of knowledge would harm one as much the other. (Lenoir 54)

As Goethe has clearly distinguished, an artwork, even if it has been inspired by nature, carries an aesthetic value that is defined by the rules of aesthetics rather than the beauty of its subject. Parallel to this viewpoint, discrimination of Sitki M Erinc's 'beautiful in nature' and 'beautiful in art' is also distinctive. "So 'beautiful in art' also includes the 'ugly'. Any ugliness in nature can be admitted as beautiful, provided that it is acknowledged as artwork. At this point, the mission of the artist is also important. Showing the 'ugly' as 'beautiful' is not the mission of the artist. The artist may make 'ugly' 'uglier', but if the work is acknowledged as artwork according to the rules of aesthetics, then the artist has created the 'beautiful'." (Erinc)

While creating, how the artist transforms reality and how he or she produces unique and exceptional artworks is of utmost importance. The themes that can be expressed as ugly, bothersome or disastrous can also be the theme of art, as well as all the other





Above: *Bone-like Ceramic Figurine*. 2011. White vacuum clay, oxides and coloured glazes. 31 x 24.5 x 54.5 cm.

Below: A detail shows forming the clay to exhibit the osteoporotic textures by adding some materials in it.

aspects of life. Themes such as death, disasters and illnesses, which are usually regarded as disturbing, bothersome and ugly are commonly the subjects of artworks.

Moreover, it is possible to find these examples in various

fields of art, from architecture to textile arts, from graphic arts to photography.

Illnesses are facts of life that people do not want to have or even think about, are considered bothersome and, in some cases, visually ugly. On the other hand they are a part of life and even more, sometimes they state the borderline between life and death.

Similar to all other damage that nature applies on all creatures, osteoporosis causes damage to the human body. Osteoporosis can be thought of as the loosening and the break-down in the bone structure, occurring by malnutrition, poor life conditions and other factors. This loosening and breakdown is similar to fruits and vegetables getting mouldy or decomposing. Therefore, it is important to define what osteoporosis is, how and why it is placed on ceramic figures.

In 1994, the World Health Organisation recognised osteoporosis as a disease and in the report of World Health Organisation Study Group, it was defined as: "As a disease process, it causes a decrease in bone density that is a major contributing factor to the increased risk of fracture." (WHO Study Group 3) Today, the bone structure can be viewed by electro-microscopes and various methods such as x-ray and screening and they can also be modelled by 3D programs. All these images and models are references for the ceramic figures.

With these figures, it has been possible to congregate art with the change in bones that is the result of the inevitable deterioration of inner structure. The sponge-like structure that is coincidentally bonded, strong and high-massed in the healthy bone, as a result of osteoporosis, becomes weak, thin and easily breakable, similar to a net of rigid fibre. A decrease in endurance of the skeletal system occurs by the deformation of the inner structure that actually strengthens the bone. As a result, growing spaces are formed in the bone structure.

These figures were formed with influence of the deformation of the bone structure which also causes a deformation in the entire appearance of the body. Lenoir's statement is important for explaining how this kind of deformation is expressed in other artworks and the aspect of these artworks against the reality in nature. "Look at this man whose breast and back are bulged out. While his neck cartilage is getting longer,

his spine is crumbled, his head slipped back, his hands have come closer to his wrist joints, elbows slipped to the back. All organs are trying to find the most suitable strong-point in this system which has become odd and his face has an impression of pain and suffering. Nature creates living beings and the artist creates images of beings. For the pieces that nature has produced, viewers must bring sensation, thought and spiritual impression. But in the case of an art piece, viewers want to and must look for all these in the art piece itself. The outer surface is alive, addresses our moral and sensitive competencies, sensualities and reverences of our minds, delightful to possess, full of life, perfectly formed and beautiful. (Lenoir 57)

These figures came out as an expression, not of the beautiful, but the ugly deformation that nature forms. It is somehow oppositely an aesthetical and artistic expression. The trend of using the figure is often seen in contemporary ceramics artists' work, as it has been in other disciplines in the past. The human figure and the female body have continued to be indispensable themes of art in our times. The figure is formed either realistically or in stylised form or sometimes by abstracting, depending on the perspective





Above: *Osteoporotic Figurine*. 2011.
Slip casting clay with additional materials,
oxides and coloured glazes. 30 x 40 x 145 cm.

of that specific time and artist. (Sönmez 114) As Sönmez also noted, the theme of the figure has been worked on for thousands of years in art. But when it is considered that art produces new perspectives, new and unique pieces, it is possible to see that every artist has different interpretations and expressions. As women are the most affected by this disease, the ceramic figure's interpretations are the main purpose of this artistic practice. Ceramic figures refer to individuals' places in social life, by their postures with their old and decayed bodies and by their net-like structures. It is possible to make an analogy between the deformation that is similar to Diderot's old man description and the human beings' physical, psychological and sociological states. People's statures in social life and their relations with other individuals seem similar to arbitrary networks in the bone with its tight or loose bonds, tiny or wide pores. These bonds mimic the invisible net of relationships and communication. For this reason, while handling osteoporosis as an art subject, it must be thought of as not only a disease but also as a structure that is similar to social life and the individuals in that dynamic and changing life.

While shaping and forming these figures, techniques that are appropriate for the inspiration and aesthetic norms were applied. These ceramic figures must be evaluated not as images of an illness but rather the artists approach to a theme. Along with the philosophic approach to the theme of osteoporosis, which is a different area of specialisation, figures were formed as a textural structure. This using of a textural structure to compose the entire body of the figurine was intended to create new and unique ceramic forms that are aesthetic.

Clay is a material that is suitable for mixing with other materials that can burn, melt or transform by firing or chemically reacting with some substances such as vinegar or hydrochloric acid. These physical and chemical characteristics of clay affect the physical endurance and aesthetical value of the created artwork.

While forming the figures, additional materials such as flax, pieces of tourniquet, increased the resistance of the clay during the drying stage and, furthermore, these materials were lost during the firing. Thereby the figures became lighter, more fragile and more porous just as the bones or the body does with osteoporosis. As a result, the figures gain an expression of wear, tiredness and gravity that come from the decay and the deformation.

In addition to the use of various colouring and glazing techniques, such as coloured clays with coloured glazes, uncoloured clays with transparent glazes, different expression opportunities were employed with uncoloured naked clay bodies. Electric kilns were used at various temperatures and experiments were done with woodfire. Using various techniques and methods of forming clay as a material with osteoporosis generates endless possibilities for the artist. For this reason, these figures should be perceived as the starting point of a new vision and a new artistic style.

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