

# Labour of Love



Melis Buyruk, *Habitat The Snake* 2019, Ceramic and 18K gold, 125x125cm

*Turkish ceramic artist **Melis Buyruk** speaks to **Sharvari Alape** about mastering sculpting, using art as a form of emotional relief, overcoming internal struggles and her most recent solo exhibition at Leila Heller Gallery*

For Turkish ceramic artist Melis Buyruk, being lonely is something she loves because, according to her, only in this state can art be created and built on. Sculpting ceramic to form a shape with visible artistry and underlying significance is no easy feat. It requires time, dedication and patience. “As an artist that works with a material that requires high technical mastery, one really needs to be disciplined and dedicate a lot of time to one’s practice,” says Buyruk. “This means a lot of alone time.”

With an unprecedented interest in ceramic art, Buyruk graduated from the Ceramic Department



in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Selçuk University in 2007. “When I played with dolls as a child,” Buyruk explains, “I started to create things for them – I was sewing clothes, shoes and accessories, as well as attempting to build houses with things I found around. I even began painting the walls of our own house. Regardless of my age or the material I engaged with when creating art, I felt free.” Recounting her early encounters with art in childhood, Buyruk admits that although her interest in art began as a child and she always wanted to create with her hands, it wasn’t until later on that she found her passion for sculpting. “This enrapture with physicality led me to be more process-driven and turn to sculpture,” she recalls. “I first began to use ceramic as a medium when I started going to university. I then dedicated myself to studying porcelain for four years and began what I like to think of as my second education as an assistant with a ceramic artist.”

For Buyruk, art encourages creating and reconnecting with one’s imagination, which is a form of emotional relief. Her art delves on the complex relationship between humans and nature by playing on the forms commonly found across flora, fauna and body parts. This complexity is portrayed through porcelain with intricate details and defining features that demand utmost attention with the juxtaposition of porcelain’s notion of high value, decoration, and ornamental character with the fleshy, organic qualities of nature. However, for all its mesmerising outcome, pursuing ceramic art is not without certain trials. “Because porcelain is an organic material that dries quickly, I also needed to be extremely organised in my working hours, and cannot be flexible, which does affect my social life,” she confesses.

Currently, Buyruk is exhibiting her fourth solo show entitled *Habitat* at Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai, which marks her first exhibition in the broader MENA region. *Habitat* features nine porcelain works that present new hybrid and alien forms through integrating elements of the human body and animal body parts into floral arrangements enclosed in a lit-up box.

“Creating a new world and a new topography is the inspiration behind *Habitat*,” she says. The eerily monochrome work attracts questioning eyes and pricks the audiences’ conscience. “I would want visitors to be reminded that they are in fact, a part of nature, and at this very moment, are evolving into new hybrid forms. I think we see ourselves as separate entities to the rest of the world, allowing us to be more destructive to the environment. I hope encountering my merging of forms helps to psychologically break this physical binary.”

Buyruk’s first solo exhibition, *You are here* (2015) in Turkey, followed by her subsequent shows, *Never Enough* (2016) and *What’s Strange, Who’s Weird?* (2019) successfully explored different levels of artistic creativity imbued with her ingenuity. However, one constant has been the porcelain material she engaged in everyday, thus, allowing her to understand its physical qualities

and potential. “My first solo show took place five years ago when I was quite an egalitarian, and concerned with disparities between societies. But now I have broadened my focus to include all aspects of the natural world, from insect to flower,” Buyruk admits.

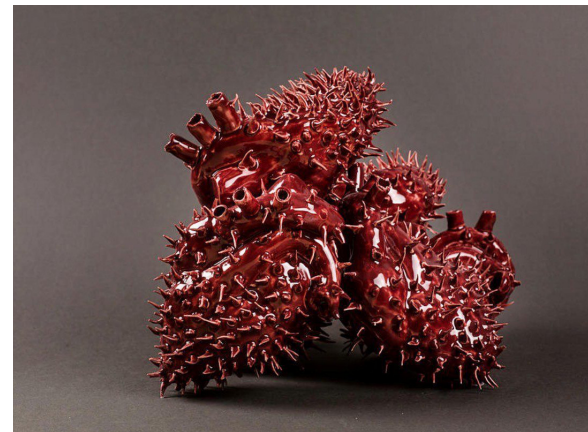
Interestingly enough, Buyruk’s favourite artwork is not from any of her exhibitions. It’s her graduating project that she holds most dear to her, which came to be in the collection of Vehbi Koc Foundation, and is still exhibiting at the Koc Museum in Istanbul, launching her career. “I created an installation of dead sea creatures and garbage on the pollution in our seas – It was essentially my first artwork as an artist and last work as a student. It’s a very cyclical work for me, and stands at the crux of the different stages of my artistic journey,” she recollects with fondness.

Growing up, Buyruk considered herself fortunate to have not experienced any external obstacles, having met only encouraging people and forming authentic relationships. “For me, my obstacles are more internal, where sometimes I am my own roadblock,” she explains. “When things go wrong at the studio or during the sculpting process, I immediately fall into a void. I only can survive this feeling by working harder.”

Buyruk often views the works of international artists to gain new perspectives and be driven to rethink her ways of creating. Inspired by the works of Jan Fabre, Buyruk considers his work to be in dialogue with her work. “I find his sculptures really breathtaking when you see them in person. Only at a closer look, does one recognise the shells of the dead beetles, prompting us to re-question what is beauty and what is ugliness,” she explains. As a tenacious artist who sculpts small samples of

each pattern and details before creating the larger work, Buyruk wants to be remembered for her reinterpretation of porcelain. “I would like to be known for my celebration of and dedication to intricate details that demand labour of love.” ■

*Habitat* by Melis Buyruk is on view until 23 May at Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



Above: Melis Buyruk. *Love/les*. 2014. Porcelain; Below: Melis Buyruk. *Habitat The Rat*. 2019. Porcelain. 120x145cm

