

## Ceramic wall panels in architecture: The case of the work of art titled "Freedom"

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### Abstract

Looking at its historical process, the ceramic tile technique that appears in religious, military and administrative buildings as a wall cladding method, has nowadays given way to ceramic wall panels that contribute to the aesthetic values of contemporary architectural structures. This contribution made by the coordinated effort of the architect and the artist via ceramic wall panels, which started to be installed at specifically reserved spots within such contemporary architectural structures, also adds a positive impression on the identity of the structure. These panels, which are considered to be means of surface enrichment and identity attribution, comprise all the stages of forming a work of art. Light, color, circulation, balance, composition, etc. are the factors which stand out as the significant elements within the artwork. Unfortunately, aesthetic and environmental factors are not taken into account within the scope of the rapidly increasing settlement rate worldwide, including our country; and this in turn causes numerous structures in various cities around the world to look alike in shape and form. Still, there are artists, though few in number, who apply structural ceramic elements, which are both environment-friendly and have been in use for thousands of years, with a contemporary understanding. This study aims to elaborate on this issue with a specific focus on the case of the ceramic wall panel titled "Freedom" by Huseyin Ozcelik, executed in 2012 to qualify as a permanent example in which art engages with education; at the Central Library Building of the Near East University, North Cyprus. This application is a completely subjective, and by demonstrating the design and application processes to a group of students, it was aimed to serve educational purposes as well as to empower the structure with an artistic identity.

Keywords: ceramic tiles, ceramic wall panels, design.

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## 1. Introduction

When their historical process is examined, it is seen that the ceramic wall claddings made for the interior and exterior surfaces of the architectural structures in Anatolia are termed as *cini* (tile). These *cinis* applied differently in civilian and religious buildings were used during the Anatolian Seljuk period in exterior spaces, particularly on minarets and brick carcass shrines in the form of glazed-unglazed bricks that are more resistant to environmental erosion. As for the interior spaces, they are clad with *cinis* which are the main units of the wall claddings with all the patterns, colors, lines and styles of Islamic art. The buildings decorated with these, have taken their places among the unique architectural examples of art history.

"...The Anatolian Seljuks have decorated their mosques, masjids, madrassas, mausoleums and palaces with ceramic tiles, ceramic tile mosaics and glazed bricks" (Oney, 1976)

These tiles, which have one of their sides decorated and brightly glazed, which are means of wall cladding, are applications that mostly depict geometric and floral figures, stylized animal and human figures, and royal daily life and in the Ottoman Period, they took their places in the form of floral patterns due to religious restraints and reached their pinnacle. The social and economic developments in the West starting with the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century have brought a number of changes along. The artists who previously produced artworks oriented towards describing the external world by communicating with it, now started to produce artworks not in the direction of the wills of the aristocracy that protected them but in the direction of their personal ways of seeing. The artists' interpretations of nature and life through the power of their internal worlds have gained significance.

The Ottomans have also been affected by this change. An art school, an example of which is located in Paris, was decided to be founded in Istanbul and *Sanayii Nefise Mektebi* was founded. Osman Hamdi Bey who was educated in Paris, a city which was regarded as the cradle of art at those times, was brought to the administration of Sanayii Nefise, which was founded as a school of fine arts. The school previously working with the support of foreign tutors, was enriched with the return of the students sent abroad to complete their educations and their participation in the education process. Also the artists having completed their education and returned home took part in Sanayii Nefise and applied the art education they received abroad in their homeland.

In the initial years of the Republic, in the field of ceramics just as in the other fields of art, artists were sent abroad. They saw the formation process of the modern ceramic art through experiencing it and received technical and theoretical knowledge. When returned home, these artists addressed ceramics with an understanding different from the traditional understanding, outside the concept of adornment decoration, and they turned towards producing original works. They saw that apart from its usual features of functionality and decoration, ceramics was an artistic way of expression with its plastic dimension. They considered *cini*, which is used with decoration purposes in traditional sense in buildings, as a source of inspiration within the line of modern art. We see the initial works made in this sense in Fureya Koral's and Sadi Diren's works. Departing from tradition, these artists reinterpreted the *cini* art that had been applied for centuries in Anatolia with the contemporary understanding of art and brought the concept of wall panel formed with artistic plastic concerns in the modern Turkish ceramic art. In Fureya Koral's words, panels are deemed as the very first for being artworks bearing the autograph of the artist apart from the traditional *cini* claddings. The use of plate, which was designed as a plate in the traditional ceramic production in the Ottoman period and used with this purpose, with different purposes in the West was a source of inspiration for Fureya Koral.

I dreamed of the wall plates of the Far East and the Ottoman's İznik *cinis*. However these plates, as you know, were not made to decorate walls but to be used as plates. The Westerners who saw the artistic value of these, "treated" them as art and placed them not in their kitchen cupboards but on the walls of their living rooms. It is for this reason that there are very few exemplary collections of İznik tableware here and today's private and museum collections emerged (Edgu, 1992)

So stated Fureya Koral; we have a rich heritage. We should use it well. We should appreciate it within modern values and transmit it to our lives.

Thanks to the artists who breathe the air of the art environment that changes and is enriched through ceramic education carried out in modern sense and the enlightenment process, who analyze well their past and proceed to future by taking firm steps with the influence of breathing life and interpreting it in their own way, powerful ceramic panels started to be made. These panel works which were previously started to be made and exhibited in small scales were produced gradually in much larger scales.

In the years of 1960s and 1970s, during which a culturally brilliant period was being experienced, the developments brought by modernization became salient in every field and with the interest of the well-trained architects in art and artists, ceramic wall panel applications started frequently to appear in modern buildings. Many state or private institutions have taken the initiative that ceramic panels with high levels of artistic value are made either through inviting artists or organizing prize competitions. By this means, many public institutions, hotels and shopping arcades hosted artworks and the modern interpretations of traditional *cini* have taken their places in public spaces and civil architecture. The artworks made in this period have at the same time been regarded as the first products in the field of wall panels in modern Turkish ceramic art.

It can be answered that these periods correspond to a period in which urbanization and architectural building understanding rapidly showed progress and Turkey's relative prospering increased. The prospering upper and middle classes wanted to utilize the spaces where they live also with the visual design aspect of art. This emerged as a tendency becoming apparent in the architecture of both personal spaces and apartments (Gezgin, 2002)

The accumulations of all ages of Anatolia which has a rich cultural heritage have been a source of inspiration for artists. And this has led in modernizing life to the production of many artworks departing from tradition and adapted to contemporary life by artists.

### *1.1 Ceramic wall panels in architecture*

When the ceramic wall panel applications are evaluated within the context of architectural structures, they are designed by considering the effect of the exact function of the buildings, their style, color, illumination and circulation, as well as their interaction with other environmental elements. These are the factors that directly affect the design. In this regard, the coordination between the architect and the ceramic artist is of utmost importance. The architects and the artists, creative executives of the buildings, exchange ideas reviewing the possible whereabouts of the wall panel to be placed. The importance of choosing an appropriate location for the wall panel reveals itself primarily in finding a surface with adequate viewing distance. Therefore, narrow corridors, locations crowded with constructional components such as doors, windows, etc. are not eligible. Hence, architects, upon their coordination with the artist, shall leave void areas within the project. Such areas should either be selected as well illuminated surfaces with appropriate height, or constructed accordingly. Because it can be possible that in the spaces which do not have sufficient height the work of art could be blocked by formations such as seating groups or counters, it will be necessary to take these into consideration.

When designing a ceramic wall panel, especially because the work will be immobile, the identity and utility of the space, the frequency of circulation, viewing distance, etc. should be taken into consideration. For locations with quite a long viewing distance, the perception of the piece will be like a huge smudge. This is very important. In the work that you will make, the central composition that you will highlight in the composition and the proportionate composition pieces that will be accordingly located around it should be easy to be understood in relation to the viewing distance. Otherwise your artwork will look as in a form of a texture and will fail to express its emphasis.

About the wall in İstanbul, Unkapanı Draper's Market reserved for her to make an artwork, Fureya Koral describes the relationship she established with the wall as

When I went to see the wall in its place, I saw Suleymaniye Mosque, not the wall and the market. I saw only that. The market was founded in the skirts of Suleymaniye, or to put it more correctly, in its shadow. What could I do in the shadow of Suleymaniye, that magnificent building? I went there for days and sat opposite of that wall. In the morning, at noon and in the evening. I checked the condition of light. And I watched the silhouette of Suleymaniye changing continuously all day long. Then I distanced from the wall and went out to the main road. The people passing by saw the wall from afar. Hence, only a huge smudge could attract their eyes (Edgu, 1992)

It is so critical; a space inside an architectural structure is determined, a very important space; you are asked to crown this place. You are going to tell something here, it will be effective, its outlook and expression will be special... You are the one to decide everything about it. Surely there will be the influences of the fact that you are selected for this work... Before beginning the design, before crowning the building, there are many roads to be taken and overcome alone... you are going to stay alone and do alone. This was how they took the road; on their own, how it needed to be, they felt that way and did that way.

I could not change the wall, move it forward or backwards, make it larger or smaller. In the panels located in architectural structures, the architect supplies you the surface with its dimensions, lights and every other thing. And you measure it in your mind and do something. Do not underrate the wall. Stand in front of it and dream for a while. This is what I always do. The architectural drawings on the papers brought to me do not speak to me at the initial stage. I should necessarily be there, against the wall. At different times of the day, I should stand against it and look (Edgu, 1992)

Beyond everything, there is this fact... The SPACE is fixed, that 'moment' is fixed, the life flows... The witnesses of that unchangeable 'moment' are LIGHT, DIRECTION, HEAT... ONE PERSON comes and changes everything. And the name of him/her is 'you'? Is there a happiness beyond this? ...

In the light of all these developments, the ceramic surface works in which the space and the subject are prioritized, should be considered as hosts based on their permanence and as heritage based on their conservation. The space, in which they will be applied, will be the representative of all these features with its identity, expression and way of living.

Today, ceramic wall panels are not handled in interior and exterior decoration only as painted surfaces but are developed in a way to serve certain functions depending on the characteristic of the place they are used. Clay, shaped and colored with the creative power of the ceramic artist can influence the mood of its audience and create sensations of serenity, vigor, and comfort, beyond bringing personality to the surfaces it is applied. (Yilmabasar, 1980)

After this stage, the subject, the concept, and similar elements to be expressed in the design should be handled in the context of the composition. In the composition void vs. fullness, piece vs. whole, contrast, horizontal vs. vertical lines and diagonal motions are all need to be in accordance with each other, as well as to have a correlation of scarce vs. dense. In terms of voids vs. fullness, in the spaces that will be geometrically partitioned, the textures that do not overshadow the impact zone of one another, in piece vs. whole relation, forms that will not be in contrast with but complement the whole concept, in the horizontal vs. vertical relation, the lines that will stabilize the composition should be formed. In the between scarce vs. dense relation, the textures should be placed in a balanced manner on the surface, followed by surface texture placement in between them.

In this paper, the artistic and technical process of ceramic wall panel pieces are to be illustrated via the case of the work of art titled "Freedom", applied on the exterior walls of the Central Library Building of the Near East University, North Cyprus. The aforesaid work was carried out within the scope of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Akademiada events organized by the North Cyprus Near East University, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design. The work titled "Freedom" made by the ceramic group directed by Assist. Prof. Huseyin Özcelik of Hacettepe University, Department of Fine Arts, which spans nearly 9 meter squares, was installed on the exterior wall of the Central Library Building of the Near East University.

## 1.2 The work of art titled "Freedom"

The work bears a special meaning in terms of its location and content. Its importance is increased still more as this place is a university and it was going to be made on the exterior wall of a library hosting numerous scientific and art works. The space of the project was observed and evaluated. The people coming and going, the light, the environment, the location... First, its name was decided. Because it is a house of science and art, with the aim that everyone has to be free and think freely, it was titled as "Freedom". And the main theme was human and was placed at the core of the composition.

Primarily the physical structure of the space was examined for the artwork. The landscape decoration elements, light, view and perception limits were identified. The measurements of the determined space were made and the materials of the wall and its isolation method were identified. These stages are very critical for the application. If it is a surface that is not solid and is heavily subject to rain, it is clad with a water-proof material for isolation and this part needs to be cleared from paint and isolation material for the mounting of the artwork. After all these preliminary works, the group proceeded to the design stage. Since the application was going to be made in an outdoor space, the location (north, south, etc.) of the facet was identified. As it was going to be in an outdoor space, the clay to be used, the glaze to be applied and the colored glass to be melted in the pots for placing in the composition were selected according to the summer-winter and day-night heat differences. The importance of making these choices is for preventing a condition that will have a great expansion impact between the clay containing chamotte that constitute the body and the glaze during extreme heat and cold. In the colored glass selection, it was considered that they had the qualities of easily melting and sticking to the fired clay surface. In addition to these, another utmost critical issue is the necessity of determining the firing temperature correctly for the work in the outdoor space. These artworks which are fired at low temperatures should be fired at higher temperatures for enhancing their robustness and make it reach a level close to vitrification called porosity. Because the works with high porosity will have low water absorption quality, they are preferred in outdoor spaces and they add to the artworks' value with respect to their endurance.

This artwork can be interpreted in two different aspects in terms of its form and content. In the circular work that symbolizes the Earth as its content, the concept of free people was addressed. The areas within the work are partitioned so as to form a composition within themselves, and are divided by horizontal and vertical lines as well as concentric circles that reach out towards outside. The quadrant shaped form that resides at the upper section of the work and a second form that is tangent to this arc that reaches out towards the bottom and protrudes the lower border of the main circle, makes up a human figure whose hands are wide open, which is the main theme. The waves that lie within the upper semi-circle symbolize the sea; the rectangular shapes that are located among the waves symbolize residences and the human figures that appear within the lower semi-circle symbolize relationship-friendship-solidarity. The small family figures within the rectangle that is located below the arc that denotes the wide open arms, stands for the most precious concept for the humankind, the family. The color white characterizes plainness; the color blue characterizes eternity and the blue glass that was used at the endpoints of the arc line in the upper semi-circle that diverges from the main body and in the round-shaped points at the end of the arc reaching down symbolizes the longing for a clean world.

The raw material used for the work is clay with chamotte. Initially, a platform that measures 4x4 meters was prepared. A thick nylon cover was spread to cover the platform and a craft paper was spread over it to prevent the clay stick on the nylon. A frame that measures 40x50 cm from 2x3 iron beams and a wooden plate that measures 60x80 cm were prepared. At another desk, firstly the wooden plate was put on the desk and then after spreading a thick canvas over it, it was fixed on the desk by clamps settled on the metal frame. Inside this prepared set up, clay that meets the necessary softness standards was filled and compressed. Its surface was smoothed with the tools helping to burnish. It was cut from its sides contacting the frame with the help of a knife and its frame was taken out. The remaining plate that measures 40x50cm was carried with the wooden plate at the bottom, brought to the main platform and left on the desk after being flipped upside down. These processes ended with the production of plates in numbers sufficient to fill the desk by bringing them next to one another. The plates that were put next to one another were stick to each other and made ready to work by leveling them with the help of a wooden straight edge.

Then the design of the artwork that would be applied was carefully transmitted to the surface with a large compass, large ruler and appropriate straight edges. Starting from the centre, the shaping of the design was completed slowly. Additional clay was added onto the areas that were to form the elevations and scraping was carried out on the areas that were to form the depths. The arch-shaped stripe on the upper portion, rectangular shapes that depicts the residences and the area that extends out that is located at the very bottom of the figure were decorated using strips of clay rods, known as the coil method. Once the shaping and re-touch processes were over, the work was dissected into pieces in a manner that would not disrupt the composition. According to the conditions of heat in the working space, it was left uncovered in a controlled way and was left to get hardened. The pieces were in turn removed one by one and their undersides were scraped and enumerated. The work that was split into roughly four hundred pieces was then placed on shelves for the drying process. Since strong air circulation would cause deformation and cracks in the structure, an extremely hot place without air circulation was chosen for drying. After drying out, the pieces were carefully carried to the firing area and placed into the kiln. The first firing, known as the biscuit firing, was made at 1000°C. Following the firing process, the pieces enumerated one by one were united for the second step called the glazing. The liquid glaze was sprayed onto the surface utilizing a paint spray gun, with the aid of a compressor. For the glazing process, powdered blue glass was filled inside small-large, round and rectangle shaped hallowed out pots on the opaque white a specially prepared plastered surface, starting from the bottom and working towards the top, reserving appropriate joint gaps. The installation step was carried out together with the student group participating in and blue glaze forms. After the glazing process was over, the pieces were arranged carefully into the kiln the ceramics and fired at 1040°C. After the glaze firing took place, the work was installed using ceramic adhesive onto workshop events within the scope of 2012 3<sup>rd</sup> Akademiada events.

The existence of artists depends on the work they have created, which in return secure their immortality. This artwork is very precious to me as it will be located abroad, in North Cyprus and inside the borders of its distinguished university, Near East University. I wanted to leave a valuable trace here... a made a wall ceramic work... A ceramic wall surface can be perceived as the conveyance of the artist's thoughts and a signature meant for the future. The wall panel which is the bearer of all this expression is at the same time, significant for having a quality to bear a document that witnesses the period it was created and for this reason the selection of space is made by its artist. In this process efforts are made, emotions are experienced, sharing took place... you put an end. Those points are the attitudes that will not make you regret, that will leave goose pimples and express their happiness... It should be conserved, acknowledged as heritage, respected, should not be forgotten; should make its artist honored and proud.



Figure 1. "Freedom", 2012. Central Library Building, Near East University, North Cyprus. (Diameter: 350 cm)



Figure 2. "Freedom", detail



Figure 3. Detail

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