

ALTERING, DEVELOPING, TRANSFORMING ARTWORK: SUSTAINABILITY OF ART Personal Art Projects in the Specific Field of Ceramics***DEĞİŞEN, GELİŞEN, DÖNÜŞEN ESER: SANATIN SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİRLİĞİ Seramik Özelinde Kişisel Sanat Projeleri****Şule Altay******Abstract**

In this paper; the artistic objects/works made by the artist/researcher have been reconsidered in terms of the sustainability of the art and the artwork, and the possibilities of alteration and transformation have been examined. The ceramic works produced personally in previous years have been subjected to formal and conceptual alterations, the processes have been analyzed and reported, and a method using artistic and practiced research methods has been determined. Another focus of this paper is to discuss the relationship the ceramic material establishes with the art object opposing the physical and conceptual transformation and with its artist. What is recommended and experienced in this article is, examining what perspectives this practice can create as a working method for both artists and artists/academics.

Keywords: Sustainable Artwork, Ceramics, Artistic Research, Practiced Research.

Öz

Bu çalışmada; sanatçı/araştırmacı tarafından daha önce yapılan sanatsal nesnelere/ eserler, sanatın ve sanat eserinin sürdürülebilirliği noktasında tekrar ele alınarak değişim ve dönüşüm olanakları incelenmiştir. Kişisel olarak daha önceki yıllarda üretilen seramik eserler, biçimsel ve kavramsal değişikliklere uğratılmış, süreçler analiz edilerek raporlanmış olup, sanatsal ve uygulama araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bir yöntem belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın bir diğer odağı ise, seramik malzemesinin, fiziksel ve kavramsal dönüşüm karşısındaki sanat nesnesi ve sanatçısı ile kurduğu ilişkinin bir tartışmasını yapmaktır. Bu makalede önerilen ve deneyimlenen; bu uygulamanın hem sanatçı hem de sanatçı/akademisyenler için bir çalışma metodu olarak ne gibi perspektifler oluşturabileceğinin incelenmesidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sürdürülebilir Sanat Eseri, Seramik Sanatı, Sanatsal Araştırma, Uygulama Araştırması.

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**Research Asisstant, Hacettepe University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Ceramic and Glass Department, sulealtay@hacettepe.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7813-1420>.

1. Introduction

As has been described, art is authentic and ideal by nature. However, as well as being an overly romanticized definition, this state of ideality usually requires experience of time, creativity, talent and time. Usually, being able to produce a mature artwork is the result of its artist's years of work and possibly hard times experienced. Today, both with the technological advances and the effectiveness of social media, the field of art, as in other fields, obliges its performer to be fast and productive. The work of art has had to become rapidly produced and consumed in both art environments and academic fields. When considered from the point of view of the artist or artist candidates, starting from the education period, the artist candidates have to constantly produce in order to improve themselves and sharpen their hand and mental abilities. Thus, in applied fields, artist candidates live a life full of model works and work premises which have not reached the ideal they had set, so that they can define their own path during or after their education. The works that have reached the maturity to be exhibited, live for one or a few exhibitions while the works that have not found a permanent place or owner can turn into material and spiritual burdens for their producer. Considering that, these objects with artistic value can also be defined as diaries in which the performers experience the stress of being stuck somewhere in between and express themselves, their thoughts and feelings at the same time, it seems possible and available for research for these expressions to update themselves objectively and conceptually within the same body or to alter and transform. This study, in which artistic research methods are used, especially focuses on the features that distinguish ceramic material from others, and strives to create a space where the possibilities of alteration over time, both formally and semantically, are examined and discussed.

2. Discussing the Subject Through Ceramic Material and Ceramic Art

This study is based on the idea of losing the motivation to keep the ceramic works that have been personally produced as artworks and transforming these objects into new works by using them like ready-made materials. There are many examples and purposes of conversion of ready-made objects and waste materials into works of art. However, at this point, it has been noticed that the practice in the personal research is that, the object used is already produced

by the same person and has artistic value. Thus, it actually is quite different from the other examples as well as being made of ceramic material.

Clay, which is a natural material that is formed as a result of various natural events and hydrothermal activities of the materials that make up the earth, and their getting a plastic and shapeable composition and state, gets solid and called ceramics when exposed to heat.

Although the chemical and physical alteration of clay under heat enables the material to remain durable in nature for thousands of years, it as well, makes it glassy and fragile. As well as not producing any waste for nature, this material can be included in the production process again, at least to a certain extent, by being grinded in factories and added into clay mixtures. However, it should not be overlooked that the production stage of ceramics may cause environmental problems. Although the waste generated in industrial production is particularly high, as mentioned above, industry seems to absorb it up to a degree.

In ceramic education, the wastes produced in schools are incomparably less than the industry and although efforts are made to even reduce them through the zero waste projects and awareness that have been initiated in schools, they cannot be zeroed out. All these waste and recycling concepts have started to come to the fore with the acceleration of studies on sustainability, the regulation of policies and the increase in awareness all over the world. However, student works that have not yet reached the ideal, which emerged as a part and indispensable part of art education, or the testings, models and works of the artist, who continues to produce artworks after education, can turn into spiritual burdens that stand between art and waste.

Although it is possible for artists to reshape the materials they use in a work or model, and this may disrupt the integrity of the existing work of art, it is mostly the material that is intervened, reused and reshaped here.

Ceramic seems rather restrictive and unlucky at this point. It is possible to interfere with the form of ceramic, which gets solid and rigid when exposed to heat, only by using diamond-tipped cutters, by breaking or adding something. Or, through some interventions on its glaze, a surface transformation may be possible. However, during all these interventions,

the codes of the first work may either be completely erased - in the case of completely grinding the material - or they are necessarily kept up to a certain degree.

Most of the materials used in fields such as painting and sculpture allow for later alterations and additions. A canvas can be repainted white and used as if from scratch, a metal can be remelted or shaped, a piece of wood can be re-etched and reshaped, regardless of its shape, as much as its current volume allows. Ceramic, on the other hand, takes its final shape when it enters the kiln, upon the decision of the artist. The material allows the improvability of the design up to this point if not even an earlier stage up to the drying stage.

Related to their work and process, ceramic artists always have to be more planned and anxious than artists working in other fields. Although clay's plastic quality allows additions during the shaping phase, ceramic artists know that they cannot make any changes on their form from the moment they move to drying stage, let alone the deformations and cracks that they may encounter during this process, and they are expected to have made the decision regarding their final form. The biscuit-fired form, which takes its solid and rigid shape exposed to high temperature, again contains the concern of both some problems that may occur in the kiln and the fact that it will become unalterable, at this point.

Following this stage, the form that satisfies the artist at least for that moment is taken to the glazing stage. Both applying glaze and firing are processes that require mastery and are open to mistakes, problems and therefore concerns. Glaze may melt down, cluster, crack, may not come out as desired, may get affected by other works in the kiln, etc.

All in all, if the form taken out of the kiln is usable or in the desired size and finds a place for itself in an art environment, it qualifies as an artwork. If it enters in the collection of a museum or art lover, it lasts for a lifetime, if not, for one or a few exhibitions...

The works that cannot find a place and viewer for themselves unfortunately turn into objects that need to be preserved for a while for its artist. In a while, they might even turn into *things* that need to be disposed of, in order to make room for new ones.

The focus of this study is to investigate the possibility of re-joining these objects, which remain in limbo and turn into spiritual burdens on the artist, in the field of art, its usability as a

working method and the conceptual extensions, rather than recycling and upcycling of the material or a nature consciousness.

3. What Meanings Might Sustainability Have?

Although the term sustainability is mostly used for materials and resources, the focus of this study is to investigate the sustainability of art by developing and altering these claims of artistic objects, by developing and changing the material or the concept they focus on. What brought the research to this point is the idea of reviewing the old-dated works kept in the boxes in order to revise within the scope of sustainability. When ideas on the issue expressed themselves as questions, they created a research and theory context as follows:

At this point, is it possible for a ceramic work to be reviewed in its entirety by its creator?

Can allowing these works to transform and alter be considered as a way of sustainability of art beyond the material level?

Can this method create a refreshing space for the artist, who have to produce according to various deadlines?

Can a second or third possibility of life be attributed for works after they are created for the first time?

Although these views do not coincide with the greatness and unshakable integrity of art and the artwork, it is thought that, it coincides with the current situation of the artist, who has to constantly produce works as a result of fast consumption in the field of art in today's environment.

Can this method not only lead to a simple reviewing of old works, but also to re-analyze and update the works they have created at different points of their own life -with a different self-, with bigger steps?

Conceptually, being able to intervene in the past form and its producer, today, but the fact that the interventions are limited as the material is now rigid, can also be evaluated through a metaphorical meaning. Just as it is not possible to change the past and what we can change is our perception and perspective from today to that day...

Of course, it is not an easy task for the artist to build a new discourse on an old work, nor is it a method that can be applied to each and every work. The artist relate with each of their work, tell a story and develop a discourse through it. Each artistic act takes a long time and effort. Therefore, each of them is very valuable for the artist. It is very difficult for the artist to leave these works, to give up on them. They may even have difficulty to give their works to a museum collection to meet the viewer or to sell them. Therefore, it will be just as difficult to smash or alter their works. In this case, the piece with which the artist will relate to is not or cannot be chosen by chance.

However, the preconditions for an artist's re-intervention on an old work may be the feeling of being incomplete, not being/finding it adequate or not thinking the same way as in the past. The artist may want to erase statements from that passed period. The artwork also contains a diary-like function for the artist. Especially, ceramic, which becomes rigid when exposed to heat, makes a note in history, but the ironic possibility of it to break to smithereens at any moment, which results from its fragile nature, gives its artist an ambivalent power.

When these points are also considered, ceramics contains many cores of solid nature and life. Especially, reviewing an old work from today's perspective can be a way for a person to develop a more mature understanding of that day and create a metacognitive awareness. The concept of metacognition was first used by Flavell in 1979 when describing 'the knowledge of one's own cognitive processes and using it to control these processes' (Atakan, 2014:26). According to Flavell:

The monitoring of a wide variety of cognitive enterprises occurs through the action of and interactions among four classes of phenomena: (a)metacognitive knowledge, (b)metacognitive experience, (c) goals (or tasks), and (d) actions(or strategies.[...] Metacognitive experiences are any conscious cognitive or affective experience that accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise (Flavell, 1979:906).

Naturally, when the fields of art and design are considered, developing a metacognitive awareness of one's own production is both a necessity and a process that must be carried out on one's own. As an artwork cannot be considered separate from its maker or its essence, this is a process of self-knowledge for the artist, as well. Of course, such an approach not only prepares the artist for the new work to be created over the old work, but also develops them related to the future perspectives.

This view and reinterpretation of the old work can be defined as a deconstructive approach and reorganizing it, as a reconstructive approach. While Derrida discusses the polysemy of the structure -which may be a work of art- and the difficulty of expressing or understanding it in deconstruction (according to Glendinning, 2014 and Derrida, 1987), this leads him to question the existence of the structure itself. This polysemy consists of many factors. While one of these factors is time, another may be the artist themselves who create the artwork. Naturally, while deconstruction is constantly aiming to dig up the text/structure it deals with and reach its real meaning or possible meanings, it accepts from the very beginning that this is a never-ending process, as well. An explanation of the artist's own research, analysis and pointing out new meaning possibilities can be made through deconstruction.

In this case, the intervention in the old works is considered to possibly be carried out within the following scopes; (a) transforming only the material, completely destroying and reconstructing, (b) re-evaluating the emotion or theme that formed the work in the past, creating a different perception, (c) producing new meaning, etc. Ongoing personal artistic research has been carried out in the light of these concepts.

a) Transforming Only the Material, Completely Destroying and Reconstructing

The beginning of and the research theme of this series came out with the works titled "Fincandan Bir İz/ A Trace from the Cup". Due to reasons such as "A Trace on the Cup", one of the old works, in which forms that stood between art and design were produced, and some other works could not find a place for them in the following years, the quality of the work area and the skills that formed the works at that time were not found sufficient later on, the idea that the works waiting in the boxes may be reused as materials, at the point of sustainability. These works, which seem to be open to intervention as they are in small and plastic forms, glazed with white non-transparent glaze, are not only considered as recycling or upcycling of materials for this application, but also led to the idea of sustainability of art.

In this working process, the form, which was designed as a cup and saucer at that time, has been broken into pieces with the help of a hammer or separated into pieces without breaking. Aesthetic values were investigated in these pieces by intervening with permanent

phosphorescent or felt-tip pens, in order to allow rapid research in what these pieces can turn into and what potential they hold, and to reach quick results (Image 1) The verb to break/smash and the brightness of the pen colors used, found their place in pop-art patterns, and the interventions on the pieces were described in this way (Image 2 and 3).



Image 1. Şule Altay, photographs of the research and production process, 2019.



Image 2. Şule Altay, *"Fincandan Bir İz/ A Trace from the Cup"*, 2019, 50x50x10 cm.



Image 3. Şule Altay, “Fincandan Bir İz /A Trace from the Cup” detail photographs, 2019.

Another conclusion that can be drawn here is that the works, which were previously positioned between art and design, are brought closer to art. By eliminating the design/function aspect in the objects, the form has been reconstructed from the pieces with purely aesthetic concerns and turned into a means of expression for the sustainability and research of art.

b) Reevaluating the Emotion and Theme That Formed the Work in the Past and Creating a Different Perception

The “İncelik Üzerinde Yaşamak /Living on Fragility” series is a recent work of research on thinness. The masses expressing the earth fragments positioned on thin ceramic legs give an uneasy feeling in the balance-unbalance, strongness-fragility dichotomy (Image 4).

Another expression of these works is that, while leaving traces of what is human-made, human will, and human touch, making references to our personal spaces, our safe spaces and the fragile/unsafe nature of those spaces, through urban textures, ancient ruins and futuristic structures that are seen symbolically on parts of the earth.

When this series of works, which were built during 2017 and the following years as a part of academic work, were reviewed in order to write on them at the end, it is noticed that, the fragility, ability to stand, and that volatile balance, which are expressed like a general emotion, are actually all subjective expressions. The illusory images formed after a while related to these works have turned into the moss covering the abandoned living spaces and cities and parts of the earth covered with green, on golden legs.

When this illusory image is evaluated, it is the superiority of time over human structure and human, but not the superiority nature like the living spaces people abandon in disaster movies or old ancient cities, when nature takes over the buildings again. Sometimes the events that affect us deeply and our vulnerabilities are expressed unconsciously, and we can overcome them and become stronger in this way, that is, with the images generated unconsciously.



Image 4. Şule Altay, *“İncelik Üzerinde Yaşamak /Living on Fragility”*, 2017.

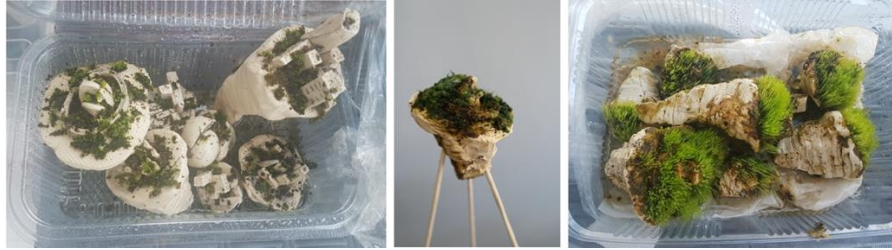


Image 5. Şule Altay, Process photographs of May, August and November, 2021

When the making process of the project was started, a small group from the series was chosen first. The process was started in May by washing the moss collected from the nature and waiting for it to produce new buds for a day or two, and then these parts were cut (Amateur moss cultivation, 2:10-4:35 min) and left on a thin layer of soil sprinkled on the works. In order to create a humid environment, it was placed in a transparent plastic, lidded box and some water was added. On an intuitive decision, a small amount of soil was sprinkled on the moss and sprayed with water and it was checked if it had water at the bottom. During the process, a well-known fact was rediscovered and it was noticed that the moss adhered and developed better in the parts facing north. For this reason, all parts were rearranged to face

north, and the process development continued positively (Image 5). The work was completed in August and photographed (Image 6).



Image 6. Şule Altay, “*After Fragility*”, August 2021.



Image 7. Şule Altay, Detail photographs, November, Kasım 2021.

In the works that were kept in their transparent boxes as before, it has been observed that the moss gradually revived and grew, both with the arrival of autumn and with the effect of paper towels, which were probably placed randomly (cellulose may have been effective). Detail photographs of the pieces were taken as above in November and recorded in the

process (Image 7). Afterwards, the moss started to lose their green and lively appearance gradually.

Reconsidering the old works, criticizing the feelings and approaches of that period can also be a method to realize the material and spiritual change of the artist. Considering that, the spaces on the parts of the earth are also described as personal living spaces, this can also be considered as a personal improvement or change.

c) Creating New Meanings While Transforming, Destroying, and Rebuilding Materials

In these works, which are produced in a similar way to the first application, but by adding a new material and working technique, the process started with the investigation of the combination of ceramic forms and new material again. While ceramic pieces are still tiles/separator pieces that were industrially worked in three dimensions in the past, the new technique the association of which with ceramics has been desired to be investigated was 3d filament pens, since we encounter them frequently today and they allow personal intervention.

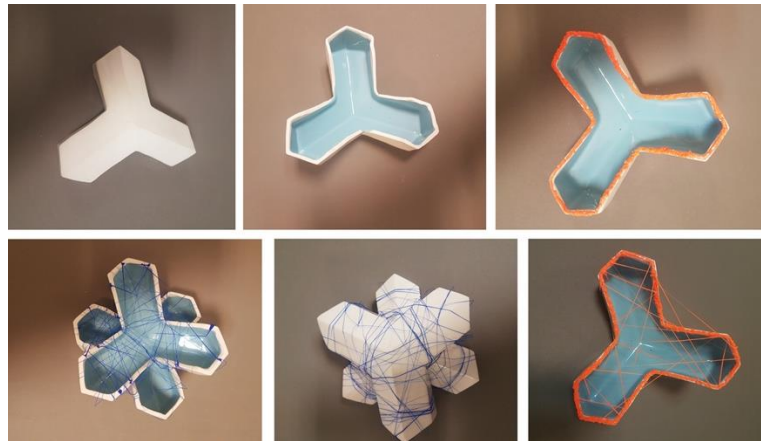


Image 8. Şule Altay, Photographs of the research process, 2021.

Initially, both the ceramic forms were reconsidered in all their forms and the 3d pen, which was used for the first time, was tried. Ceramic pieces are designed to be modularly combined with each other in different ways, their inner surfaces are glazed with blue covering glaze and outer surfaces are glazed with transparent glaze. Placing the colored interior parts on

a glossy surface, it is aimed to arouse a sense of curiosity in the viewer with the colored reflection formed on the surface. In other words, the colored interior parts are created not to be shown, but to be hidden and perceived by the viewer (Image 8).

In the current research, however, these forms were broken with the help of a hammer in the following process and started to be colored randomly by allowing the associations of the areas, with colored, permanent and highlighter pens (Image 9).



Image 9. Şule Altay, Photographs of the process, 2021.

While the form, which basically consists of three arms, is broken with a hammer, it tends to break into pieces again. The form of the piece eventually produced is a concave, angular space. Probably with the effect of this area, the interior surfaces have created an urge to draw patterns that will give the appearance of a room. Since the non-glazed surfaces of the ceramic are the most suitable and permissive areas to paint with a highlighter, these areas on the side wall are painted in a phosphorescent and bright color. Furnish-like objects produced with a 3d pen have been added to the form, which was decided to transform into an interior space with the interventions on the interior surface.

These created spaces are very colorful and almost like imaginary, unreal and toy-like things. Through this state of being imaginary, the design process has been shaped as a metaphor of longing for a place or a life of its own, and these pieces have been completed in a way to express the dreams that 'suspend' in our minds, carrying the metaphors of different rooms and lives.

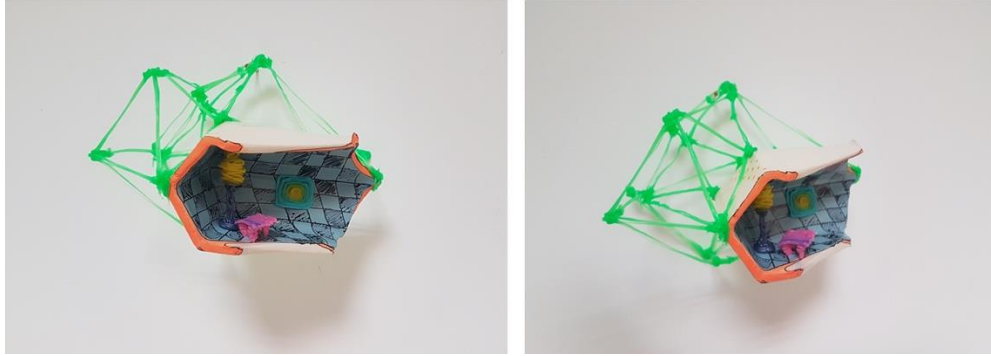


Image 10. Şule Altay, Detail photographs from “*Suspended Series*”, 2021.

At the back of the part decorative drawings are applied on the outer surface of which in harmony with the inner surface, a structural construction was added with a 3d filament pen in a way to be continuing from the wall. Following the creation, the outline and conceptual structure of the design through the first example, the work has been diversified (Image 10, 11 and 12).

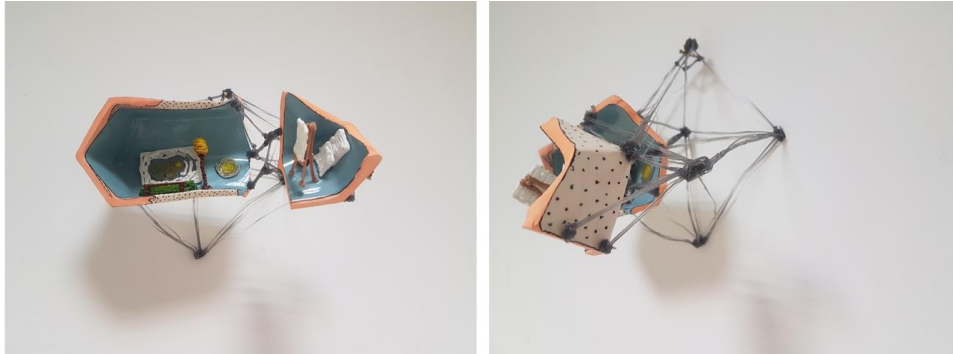
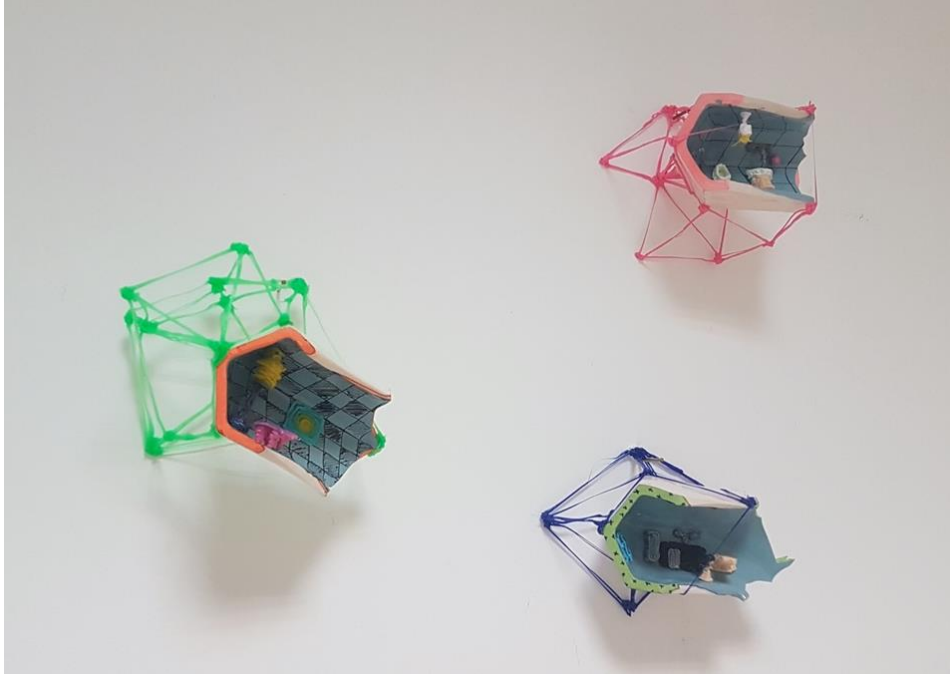


Image 11. Şule Altay, Detail photographs from “*Suspended Series*”, 2021.



Görsel 12. Şule Altay, A Group of "Suspended Series", 2021.

The colorful interior areas, which were designed to be hidden in the old work, were turned into the areas that were actually shown by excluding the interior. Again, while in the old work, modularly designed pieces that can be composed with each other, such as Seljuk patterns have a reference to the past, it is seen that contemporary materials and approaches are used in the current work. *The things* that were initially not mentioned, hidden and expected to be discovered by someone else, have now turned into things that are clearly expressed with a louder voice for self-actualization.

4. Conclusion

The study, in which the sustainability of art and the artwork is investigated, has been concluded with these examples to proceed with the writing process. As stated earlier, all the artistic expressions are like the diaries of artists. Whatever pushes a person to write a diary or to express their feelings in written form, and to hide or destroy those diaries, can also be the urge that pushes the artist to produce their work and then to destroy or alter them. The most important difference of this research from the practice of using ready-made objects is that, the artist/researcher is working on objects that they themselves have produced and it is specialized

on the material of ceramic. Although similarities can be established with genres such as Palemses, ready-made and pastiche, it is positioned in a separate place due to these privileges it focuses on.

During the research process, rather than producing works that have been carefully designed and put into production, an intuitive process has been employed, and then designs have been developed considering the reasons for these tendencies and where they could develop. All the processes have also been considered as an artistic research method led on practiced.

In conventional research, making is generally regarded as consequent to thinking – at least in theory. Thus, a series of experiments, for example, are carried out in order to test a certain assumption, i.e. to solve a problem or answer a question. In the field of practice- led research, praxis has a more essential role: making is conceived as the driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice also the creator of ideas – such as, for example, painting (Scrivener and Chapman 2004: 7). In this way, invention comes before theory, i.e. the world of 'doing and making', is prior to understanding (Cross 1982: 225). (Mäkelä, 2007:159).

Of course, in personal practice, one of the reasons for this comes from using a ready-made and solid object rather than using a plastic material that is suitable to form from the very beginning. Since this object, which you have produced out of nothing and given meaning to, needs to be reconsidered both through an objective eye and a historical critique, some points of the object need to be alienated and some points perhaps need to be connected with a deeper bond. One of the best methods for this is to allow the flow and release the unconscious production, and then to criticize the process in order to develop a metacognitive awareness.

As the “not-quite-knowing” stage in art-making is usually disorderly, the artist does not have a clear direction and thus is unable to articulate the process clearly. Contemporary notions of artistic research require the artist to make artefacts with sensitivity and awareness, so that when this initial stage is over, the thought and process can be recapitulated and communicated. A similar process is followed in scientific research. When working at the interface between the known and the unknown, a researcher may not be guided by predetermined procedures and preconceived notions alone: “Being prepared to notice the unexpected often is the key” (Grinnell, 2009, p. 28). (Mäkelä, Nimkulrat, others 2011:6).

Therefore, it is important to allow the flow and then to trace that flow. The research method employed in the study includes both a critique of the work and process created in its own process, and an awareness and rediscovery of the past by reconsidering the old work. Unlike the artist, the artist/researcher has to produce information as well, through their own

production practice. For this reason, it is thought that, trying to employ this kind of an art practice can be a discovery field, especially for artists/researchers.

As an object made by an artist–researcher, the artefact can also be seen as a method for collecting and preserving information and understanding. However, the artefacts seem unable to pass on their knowledge, which is relevant for the research context. Thus, the crucial task to be carried out is to give a voice to the artefact. This means interpreting the artefact. During the process of interpretation, furthermore, the artefact has to be placed into a suitable theoretical context. In this process, the final products (the artefacts) can be seen as revealing their stories, i.e. the knowledge they embody. (Mäkelä, 2007:157).

The idea or practice of sustainability of art explored in this study can turn into a working method in which the artist/researcher updates by reviewing their personal art inventory at large intervals in order to get to know, shape and develop both themselves and their art practice. At the same time, as a ceramic artist, it can also enable the artist to use new techniques and materials as a method that makes them leave their comfort zone, where classical ceramic forming techniques cannot be used and must be replaced by others. At this point, it can also be an area of liberation without being bound to the material and its traditional form and methods. As a result, in this study, whether an action that is a part of art life, which many artists employ without consideration from time to time by revising their old and especially damaged works to be exhibitable, can also emerge as a working method with an intellectual approach developed on its own, has been investigated, applications performed and ideas developed.

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Image References

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Image 6. Şule Altay, " After Fragility", August 2021. Personal Archive.

Image 7. Şule Altay, Detail photograph, November, 2021. Personal Archive.

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Image 10. Şule Altay, Detail photographs from "Suspended Series", 2021. Personal Archive.

Image 11. Şule Altay, Detail photographs from "Suspended Series", 2021. Personal Archive.

Image 12. Şule Altay, A Group of "Suspended Series", 2021. Personal Archive.