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Turkish artist Zeynep Boyan's clay sculptures elide the boundaries between art and design, celebrating this humble material's endless potential



Zeynep Boyan in her Montreal studio, standing on the Side Table No.1. Her pieces are fashioned using the ancient coiling technique

Foto: courtesy Gucci

Watching Zeynep Boyan work is mesmerising. As she cuts, moulds and coils clay to form abstract and biomorphic sculptures, you realise what a responsive, sensual material it can be. It retains that character after firing, her softly curved designs bearing the traces of their maker's hands.

Boyan's discovery of her signature material was instinctive. Her degree was in cinema and photography, but afterwards she found herself craving something more immediate. Remarkably, her skills as a ceramicist are entirely self-taught. "I was looking for a material that I could engage with," she explains. "I chose clay for its inviting nature, its durability and recyclability. Whether it's the plasticity it offers during the production process or the texture it acquires after firing, each clay has different potential. It feels like both the material and I contribute to the final piece."

Creativity is in Boyan's DNA; she grew up in Adana, southern Turkey, where her design-loving parents encouraged her to explore various art forms. "My interest in one-of-a-kind objects is definitely fuelled by them," she explains, "but my work is influenced by various aspects of life. Above all, I consider myself a keen observer. City walks are a significant source of inspiration, with many things waiting to catch my eye. I am fascinated by the historical and architectural artifacts that surround us. Observing the harmony between the new and the old is an inspiration that I try to channel into my work."

Boyan is now based in Montreal, where she feels able to "relax and get inspired". She still uses her photography and art skills, documenting her work on camera and making sketches (these sometimes evolve into linocut prints). With clay, she mainly uses the millennia-old coiling technique; sometimes her pieces have a functional element, sometimes not. "I recently launched a stoneware storage solution called Units, inspired by a wooden pencil case I had as a kid," she says. "I don't strictly define my objects, which allows me to navigate the boundary between art and design." Each work is a one-off – even those produced in editions are made individually by hand.

Boyan's newest designs include Horizon, a play on form and perspective. "From one angle, it may embody the line where the sky meets the earth, while from another, it might evoke the meeting of land and sea," she explains. She's also working on a lighting collection, launching later this year, as part of her artist's residency at Canadian lighting brand Luminaire Authentik. Naturally, it will be made of clay, but in future, she's keen to explore combining this with other materials.

"One of the reasons I started working with clay is my passion for hands-on sculpting; feeling the material, its texture and its potential excites me," she says. "Looking ahead, I'd like to continue pushing boundaries and challenging conventional perceptions of sculpture and functional art."

zeynepboyan.com – AMY BRADFORD



From left: the Units stoneware storage solution, inspired by a wooden pencil case with a sliding lid; one of Boyan's signature abstract sculptures,

Horizon 1, 2023; the P Series of sculptures features biomorphic figurines; Double Unit, 2023, an evolution of the storage concept