

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

Theses

12-2018

Infinite Edges

Yagmur Akarsu
yxa1675@rit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Akarsu, Yagmur, "Infinite Edges" (2018). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact repository@rit.edu.

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Art & Design

School for American Crafts

In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

CERAMICS

Infinite Edges

by

Yagmur Akarsu

December, 2018

Thesis Approval

Thesis Title

Thesis Author

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
The School
Rochester Institute of Technology | Rochester, New York

Name

Title

Electronic Signature: Use Adobe Acrobat

Name

Title

Electronic Signature: Use Adobe Acrobat

Name

Title

Electronic Signature: Use Adobe Acrobat

Name (Optional for some programs)

Title (Optional for some programs)

Electronic Signature: Use Adobe Acrobat (Optional for some programs)

Acknowledgment

Through my years here, there are many I would like to thank.

I want to give special thanks to my advisor Jane Shellenbarger, and my committee members, Luvon Sheppard, and Peter Pincus for their constant support and guidance.

I am grateful for the opportunity of be a part of College of Imaging Arts and Sciences at Rochester Institute of Technology. Thank you to all my colleagues.

Dan Yitzhak Gabber and Rachel Gu, thank you for feedback and guidance.

Dilan Koç, Burçin Çelik and Celal Şavur, thank you so much for your help during my difficult days and always being next to me.

I would like to thank my family for always supporting me.

Finally, I would like to thank my Turkish friends who live in Rochester. Since I have been here, they have always supported and helped me.

For the rest not mentioned, I thank you all.

Abstract

This thesis work focusses on an experimental approach to ceramic sculptures that uses everyday disposable materials as a basis and are incorporated with clay to sculpt abstract forms. Materials used for the sculptures were napkins, textured paper, bread, different kinds of sponges and recyclable paper plates.

The supplies that people use and take for granted, without realizing how important they are, refer symbolically to a variety of cultural traditions. Traditions create a structure that makes life easier. However, people are so used to them they forget how integrated they are in our lives and ways of thinking and reacting. These essential, yet disposable materials become a metaphor for tradition as I try to show reverence through an exploration of ceramic material, material transformation, and the discovery of organic surfaces, they manifest as sculptural objects with infinite edges.

The objective of this study is to show relationship between tradition and daily disposable supplies by using them in my sculpture. The similarities have helped me to develop a new artistic expression based on the perception of these materials. My work is an expression of my own personal perspective of the relationship between modernism and tradition. Each work represents, through abstraction, my interpretation of the traditional processes used in making Turkish rugs.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgment...	3
Abstract.....	4
I. Context.....	6
Personal Background.....	6
Discussion of Sources and Research.....	7
Influences... ..	7
II. Evolution... ..	12
III. The Body of Work... ..	14
1. Tired... ..	14
2. Effect... ..	15
3. First Discovery... ..	16
4. Memorial... ..	17
5. Reverse... ..	18
6. White... ..	19
7. Alteration... ..	20
8. Free... ..	21
9. Blessing... ..	22
10. First & Last... ..	23
Conclusion... ..	24
Bibliography... ..	25

Section I: Context

Personal Background

Through making a series of sculptures, I am interested in the Traditional Turkish Rugs that are used to ornament floors, cover surfaces and walls. The traditional rugs are akin to wine, they don't lose their value over time, conversely, they become more precious and valuable.

While researching the history of rugs, I came across contemporary types; however, they were all industrially made, to my disappointment. This revelational research made me more curious about the comparison of traditional and modern rugs. Because as technology improves, the perception of the techniques and quality changes and yet, the potential and possibility creates new expectations. But, I believe, that as people move away from their tradition, they are in peril of forgetting their roots and identifying with their culture.

For this reason, I have chosen to combine two disparate and contrasting elements. Tradition as it relates to Turkish culture and my specific history is my subject matter. I make modern sculptures that transform contemporary disposable objects into vintage artifacts. Throughout my working process I wanted to capture the duality and dichotomy in my sculpture. While creating them I think about the past and the present, new and old, ugliness and beauty, greatness and insignificance, depth and superficiality, complexity and simplicity, regularity and irregularity, what is structured and unstructured.

The main reason that I am influenced by traditional Turkish rugs and their construction is that they are a reflection of my cultural heritage and also my contemplations. I like to think how carpet weavers knit their designs while I am working. My process is similar to what carpet weavers do: to create aesthetic line by line. I also remember my parents using the Turkish idiom “*hayatı ilmek ilmek örmek*” which means ‘*knitting life line by line*’. Which I now understand

means ‘*create your life slowly and be sure, as the most important thing is patience*’ like hand made rugs.

Discussion of Sources and Research

What does tradition mean? According to American heritage dictionary (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company 2018), the meaning is “*A mode of thought or behavior followed by a people continuously from generation to generation; a custom or usage*”. While traditions are important and adds structure to life, in some cases making it easier, there are some people that do not follow them as much as others. Some people recognize the value of traditions and they appreciate what they have in their cultures. On the other hand, others take them for granted.

What about essential daily mundane materials? As human beings we tend to forget what we use during each day, because they become routine. As a result, we forget how important they are and tend to overlook their importance. According to ‘*The Statistics Portal*’ (U.S. Census data and Simmons National Consumer Survey (NHCS) 2018) *approximately 73 percent of* 329.26 million people used napkins in the USA in 2018. This number is including people who use only one time a day, as well. If we assume each person uses at least three napkins a day (actually we use more than three), 1095 napkins per person will be consumed each year. 241 million people will consume approximately 264 billion napkins in the United States of America alone. Can you imagine napkin usage for rest of the world? The problem is, few know about this fact and care about it! People use and discard napkins without appreciating them.

Influences

I believe Turkish people see their culture as the roots of a tree. Traditions spread far and wide, but are still strongly connected to each other, tracing back to the origin. In light of this, I use the oldest rug (5th C. B.C. Knotted Linen Carpet from Pazyryk Valley, Pazyryk Carpet,

Pazyryk Rug. Place: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh (Russia).

https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001378452 (Figure 1) in Turkish history as an inspiration. Moreover, I grew up seeing these kinds of decorative rugs in my parents' home. Although we had different kind of traditional heirlooms, the red wall rug was the one that I admired the most.



Figure 1. Known as the oldest (4th – 5th Century BC) hand-made rug in the world. Woven using a technique known as the symmetrical double knot, the so-called “Turkish knot”, The State Hermitage Museum, 183 x 200 cm

It is well known that hand-made rugs need patience, time and effort (Hereke İpek Hali Dokuma, Dügüm Atma Tekniği 2013). To finish 1 to 2-meter square rug, one needs to spend at least a month. I relate to this patient weaving, and believe I am weaving my life like a hand-made rug. This metaphor of myself is what I attempt to show in my sculpture. With passion and self-belief, layer by layer, I create my way and my life. My sculpture reveal to their audience that life is full of small mundane details and life is knitted through the knots and challenges in life that everyone faces!

As I am growing as an artist I have been finding myself interested in visceral and ephemeral surfaces, antique objects, and artifacts. So, I chose to apply these things to my work to explore a natural aesthetic for my clay body. Therefore, I have researched various combinations to identify and achieve the desired texture. While researching I came across many ceramicists who also use unconventional materials.

Artist Gillian Lowndes is the first potter to use fiberglass tissue dipped in porcelain slip (Standen 2013, 11). In addition, she uses nichrome wire, broken tableware, curled bus tickets, granite chips, bulldog clips, horse hair, sand, metal, grog and loofah. (See Figure 2 and Figure 3)



Figure 2. Gillian Lowndes, Tail of the Dog, 1983. 1999, slip on fiberglass, nichrome wire, granite Chippings, Egyptian paste, (30x21cm)



Figure 3. Gillian Lowndes, Folded Off Cuts, Slip dipped and fired fiberglass matting (12x20x20cm)

Another artist whose style interested me is Mette Maya Gregersen, a Danish ceramicist. She adds molochite, paper pulp, acrylic fibers, bentonite and sand in soft stoneware clay (Standen 2013, 66). She applies this clay body on the bamboo which she gives a shape with cuts and ties. I was fascinated by the way she portrays her inspiration and thinking of her work. She says *“I work in two quite different ways. One is the making of waves (Figure 4) and the other is constructing (Figure 5). One is loose and wild, the other is fine and measured – similar to how I live my life, drifting off and trying to disappear in response to staying strong and building my home.”* (Gregersen 2017)

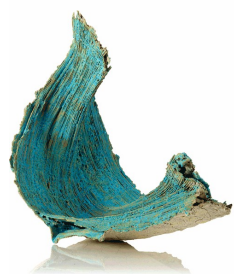


Figure 4.
Mette Maya Gregersen, *Making Waves 2*, 2013,
Stoneware paper clay, bamboo sections, multiple firing
(30x30cm)
Photo: Courtesy of the artist



Figure 5.
Mette Maya Gregersen,
Constructions, 2011,
Stoneware
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Of most significance for me is Spanish artist Rafa Perez, who likes to see surprises when he opens the kiln. In his artist statement, he said that he tries to transform his works and he wants to see different piece that he put in kiln rather than the same (Perez n.d.). He uses two different types of clay, earthenware and low temperature porcelain. He also takes advantage of the altered tension of the clay bodies thereby capturing the diversity of clay.



*Figure 6. Rafa Perez, Untitled. No Date
Photo: Courtesy of the artist*



*Figure 7. Rafa Perez, Untitled. N.d.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist*



*Figure 8. Rafa Perez, Untitled, No date
Photo: Courtesy of the artist*



*Figure 9. Rafa Perez, Untitled, N.D.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist*

Figure 10. Rafa Perez, Untitled, N.D
Photo: Courtesy of the artist



All these artists use unique textures that provoke the audience to think about integral structure. Seeing their work fascinated me and triggered a desire to explore more and use unconventional material additions. I want to stimulate the curiosity of my audience to make them consider my underlying concepts, materials, and how I integrate the two.

It is worthwhile to study the methods that these artists are using. However, I want to find my own ways to express my ideas by adding and using unusual and personal materials which would make my ceramic journey exceptional.

Section II: Evolution

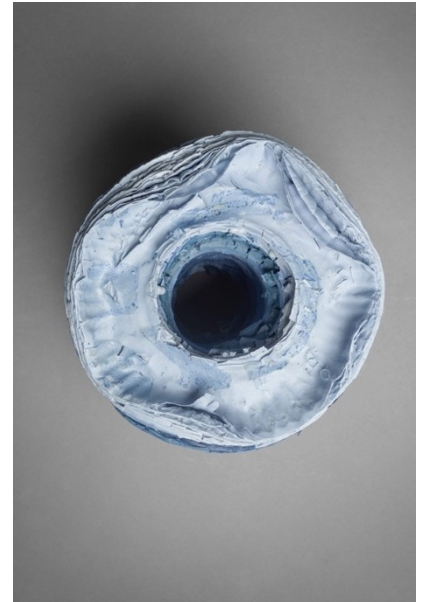
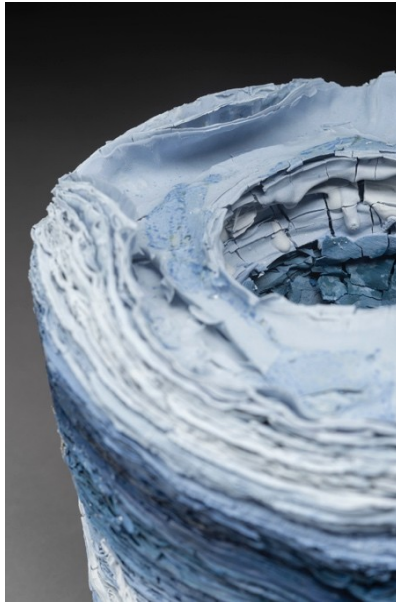
In the beginning my thoughts were very broad about my subject. The material options were numerous and I wanted to experiment with all of them. Thus, working with so many different materials was overwhelming and I felt a bit lost and confused. But then I just selected a couple of materials that I liked more than the others. I could then focus more specifically on representing, my concept of the forgotten traditions.

In my thesis, I focused on exploring common disposable things that people use in their daily lives such as napkins, sponges and paper plates; things that people don't realize how

important of a role they play. Imagine what would happen to our lives without napkins, sponges or paper plates. When I came to the USA, I became aware of paper plate consumption as being excessive, and used everywhere. It makes life easy during picnics, parties, meetings, and sometimes even at home. I also used bread as a material for my sculpture. Bread is the primary food source for people in many countries. It has special meaning for each and every culture. For example, bread is seen as a blessing and it is very respected food in Turkey. Thus, napkins, sponges, paper plates and bread are very essential in daily life so, I want to emphasize them and give them a sense of permanence.

I have utilized clay, molded around napkins, sponges, paper plates, and bread to convey characteristics such as fragility, reflection, solidity and eternity. These materials that we use and don't realize how crucial they are, remind me of customs and traditions.

Section III: The Body of Work



1. Tired

Paper Plate, Colored Porcelain Slip, 2018

This piece is made out of porcelain casting slip. Firstly, I cut a circular shape by hand in the middle of the paper plates, one by one. Then, I brushed paper plates with colored porcelain and put them on top of each other. I used 775 paper plates to build this sculpture. It was very tall in the beginning. However, after firing, the bottom was unstable and wobbly. Then, I decided to take it out and give it a new shape by cutting out surfaces. But, the sculpture's bottom middle part was very fragile, so it did not work as I expected. Then, I fired the top side of the sculpture a second time in the electric kiln with *cone 10 (2340°F)*, it shrank more than the first firing. Having gone through so many iterations of the process, much more than usual, I was compelled to name this work '*Tired*'. It has the endurance to stay standing even though it has gone through many hardships, just like other traditions.



2. Effect

Porcelain Slip, Napkins, 2018

I made this piece out of porcelain slip. I brushed a cross-shape onto 600 napkins with pure and colored porcelain and fired until cone 6 (2228°F) in a gas kiln. In the gas kiln, the unbrushed parts burned away, leaving the brushed parts as the porcelain shape that I envisioned. After firing, I used a brick saw to make the edges clear. In order to leave a clue to my audience, I intentionally left some saw marks at the edges. The symmetry of the shape reflects one Turkish idiom that says “*Yaptıkların senin karakterinin aynasıdır*” means “*Whatever you do, it reflects your personality*”. This idiom also reminds me of the virtue of patience of the carpet weavers when they are knitting rugs or facing their life challenges. So, the view of life reflects personal character just like how one side of this piece reflects the other. For this reason, it is named “*Effect*”.



3. First Discovery

Corrugated Paper, Colored Porcelain, 2018

This is made with 32 layers of corrugated paper. First of all, I brushed each layer with different colored porcelain slip and put on top of each other. Then it was fired until cone 10 in a gas kiln. Papers burned and porcelain body remained. The edges have a really nice corrugated texture that comes from the paper; thus, I did not want to cut off the edges for this piece.

This art piece has really nice line textures on it just like yarn of hand-knotted carpet. Also, the old appearance of the art work refers to the legacy of old carpets.

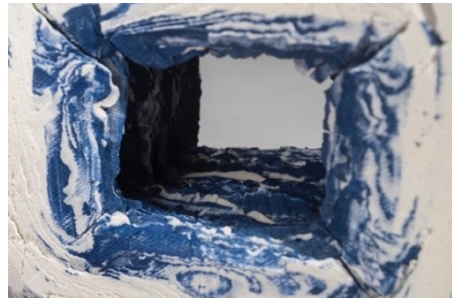


4. Memorial

Paper Towel, Colored Porcelain Slip, 2018

I made this piece out of brushed porcelain slip on 250 paper towels. I brushed some parts that I wanted solidified. I used two mason stain colors to have colored porcelain. After first gas firing, I cut the four edges, and then fired second time in an electric kiln until cone 10.

Memorial means “*a statue or structure established to remind people of a person or event*” (Oxford University 2018). This work represents that same durability in existing traditional Turkish rugs that have lasted throughout the centuries. Grey color is consciously selected because so many monuments are of this color in Turkey. Also, the shape of the sculpture is like the most famous monument “*Canakkale Sehitler Abidesi*” which was made to commemorate the sacrifices of World War I. Thus, the color and the shape of this work symbolize the longevity of Turkish rugs over the centuries. Yellow represents achievement, one of them being the preservation of Turkish traditions for over 2000 years.



5. Reverse

Colored Porcelain Slip, Napkin, 2018

This piece made out of brushed porcelain slip on napkins layers. Fired until cone 6 in the gas kiln. After that, I cut six surfaces with circular electric saw and fired it again in the electric kiln until cone 10.

Cutting off surfaces allows audience to clearly see the layers and the texture. On the top and the back audience can see the evidence of napkins. This piece has some spontaneous cracks on it. These happened in the first kiln.

This piece also allows the audience to see the layers in the middle of work which includes two different colors that bled together when brushing. Additionally, this piece criticizes the contrast between integrity and emptiness that follows two ways of life: one with tradition and one without. Either way of life can be represented here. The solid part could represent the life for some people who believe customs are valuable and meaningful in their lives, and the empty part

is the meaninglessness of a life without customs. It could be exactly the opposite for other people whose lives are meaningful without customs—the solid part refers to the stability in their lives, while the hole reflects how empty a life would be if it was restricted by customs. It all depends on what is valuable to a person, which is different for everyone. However, some values of life erode with time, so the scratches on this piece refer to that erosion.



6. White

Porcelain Slip, Paper Towel, 2018

I used 330 paper towels for this art work. Porcelain slip was brushed and put on top of each other also, I put some glass mosaic pieces and cardboard between layers. During gas firing, glass pieces melted and cardboard burned. When the cardboard burned it left a void in the sculpture. I also used blue porcelain slip for some of the layers. On the top, the napkin texture could still be seen.

This sculpture as a whole signifies forgotten traditions as its basic shape. Forgotten traditions can be looked as ways that were ignored because they were a burden to follow.



7. Alteration

Porcelain Slip, Sponges, 2018

This art work series represent traditions, and how they are changed and molded by people, depending on the generation and the needs to adapt to the changing world. This is represented by the sponge and its malleability and ability to absorb. For example, in Turkish culture serving Turkish coffee is very important and it has to be served with a glass of water by host. If the guest first drinks water it means that guest is hungry and the host should offer some food. If the guest drinks coffee first, it means that guest is full, so host does not have to serve food. Unfortunately, this tradition is changed. In the present time, hosts usually serve Turkish tea instead of Turkish coffee. Because to make the tea is easier than making Turkish coffee .

This series made out of sponges dipped in porcelain slip. I used different kinds of sponges with uncolored porcelain and no additional material. Sponges dipped in porcelain and shaped by hand, then waited until it dried, finally firing them in a gas kiln until cone 6.



8. Free

Colored Porcelain, Napkin, 2018

My journey of using napkins started when I saw stacks of napkins in the market, at that time, I imagined how nice would be to use them with clay. Then I bought 3000 napkins, and came to the studio to work with this unusual supply. I was so excited to use them and I started working with them right away. I simply brushed napkins with colored porcelain slip and loosely put them on each other. This art displays my excitement and my first experience with napkin. The freedom to experiment and make something without thinking, is what this work represents. Hence, I named it “*Free*”.

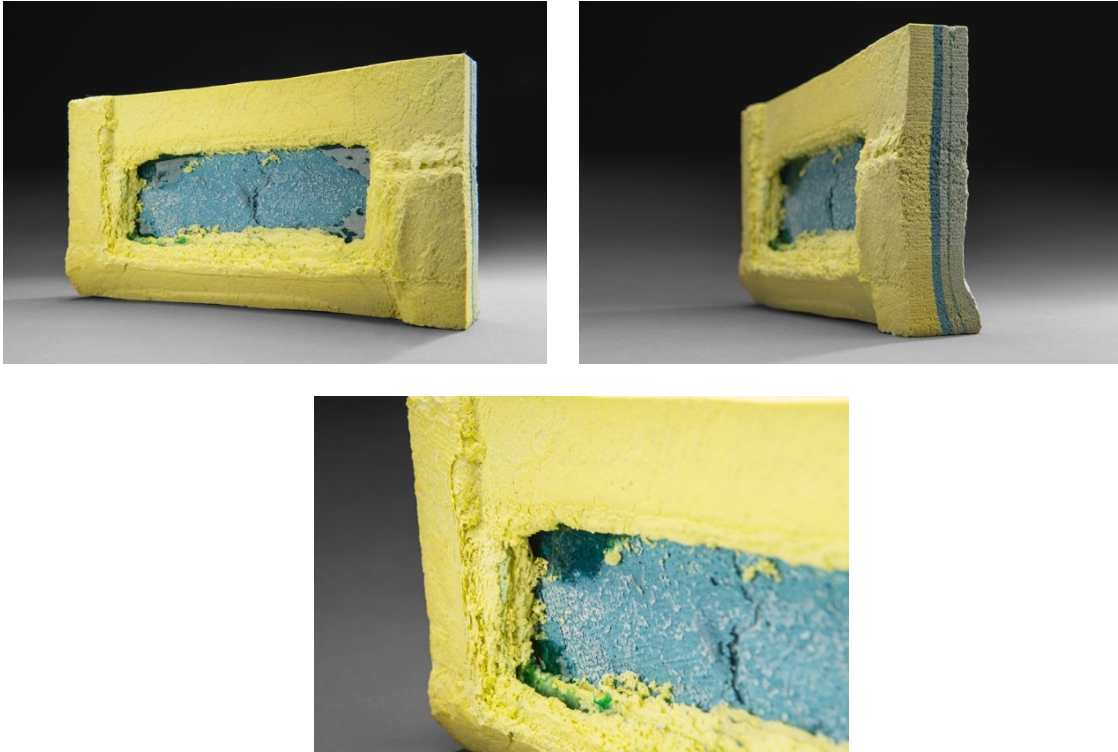


9. Blessing

Porcelain Slip, Bread, 2018

I used bread, because in Turkey and in many cultures, bread is seen as blessing. Proverbs and idioms give us great insight into the importance of bread. For example, “*Ekmek parası*” – “*Money for bread*” which means money for survival, another example is “*Ekmeğini taştan çıkartmak*” – “*Extract a bread from a stone*” means work hard even if it is difficult to do. Also, if a piece of bread falls to the ground accidentally, it should be picked up, kissed three times and placed on a high level to be respectful.

These pieces made out of different kinds of bread with porcelain slip. Firstly, I scooped the inside the bread to make it hollow, poured the porcelain slip in it and waited until it dried. After that, I poured colored porcelain in it and fired in the gas kiln. As the bread burned, the porcelain remained and was a bit distorted cause of the high temperature. The sculpture represents the essence of bread or should I say the inside of the bread, which is a “*Blessing*”.



10. First & Last

Porcelain Slip, Paper Towel, 2018

Traditions are followed and passed down from generations, and new traditions are made with each generation. So a tradition can be followed the very “First” time by someone who chooses to follow it, or be the “Last” time someone followed it. Just like an open window that looks to the outside of something new or the outside that looks to the inside to something old.

I used 90 paper towels for this art work which I brushed some parts with colored porcelain slip. I also used glass mosaics on the glazed parts. After first gas firing, I cut the edges, and then fired second time in an electric kiln until cone 10.

Conclusion

Through thinking and material exploration, I learned what kind of materials could be incorporated with the clay, how to tackle new challenges, how to create a solution when working with new materials, and how to express my ideas. All of these experiences help me to move forward, confidently with the goal of being a practicing artist.

During the pursuit of my Master of Fine Art degree, my perspective has evolved toward the ability to see the big picture. My confidence in expressing myself through art has improved and these thesis artworks have allowed me to develop patience like carpet weavers. As an international student in the USA, I often recall things from my culture and tradition differently than when I was in Turkey. Moving to a different country with a different culture and different traditions has pushed me to think and consider Turkish people and traditions. In time, I have grown to appreciate how old and deep my culture is.

In the future, I look forward to extending my artistic vision into different subjects and to dive deeper into the art field. I also want to continue to my PhD degree within the study of Art and my cultural heritage. I believe that I cannot be myself without art and culture. Ataturk who is the founder of Republic of Turkey says “*Sanatsız kalan bir milletin hayat damarlarından biri kopmuş demektir*” that means “*A nation without art has lost one of its vital veins*”. Ataturk’s statement shows us importance of art in the culture and society. I plan to gain more experience in different cultures so as to create artworks that bridge between culture for mutual and universal understanding.

Bibliography

- 5th C. B.C. Knotted Linen Carpet from Pazyryk Valley, Pazyryk Carpet, Pazyryk Rug.
Place: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh (Russia).
https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001378452.
- Gregersen, Mette Maya. 2017. *Mette Maya Ceramics*. February 5. Accessed March 29, 2018.
<http://www.mettemayagregersen.com/wordpress/>.
2013. "Hereke İpek Halı Dokuma, Düğüm Atma Tekniği." Haluk Özözlü. February 25.
Accessed October 28, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKVvo_DdQ_0.
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. 2018. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Accessed 10 3, 2018.
<https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=tradition>.
- Oxford University. 2018. *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Edited by Oxford University Press. Accessed 2018. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/memorial>.
- Perez, Rafa. n.d. *Rafa Perez - Artist Statement*. Accessed April 1, 2018.
<https://rafaperez.es/about>.
- Standen, Kathleen. 2013. *The New Ceramics Additions to Clay Bodies*. Edited by Design and Patent Act Copyright. Cleveland, Ohio: The American Ceramic Society.
- U.S. Census data and Simmons National Consumer Survey (NHCS). 2018. *U.S. population: Do you use paper napkins?*. Accessed October 9, 2018.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/275713/us-households-use-of-paper-napkins/>.