



Ottoman Chair by Fulden Wissinger.

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: **Life Progresses One Day at a Time**
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through April 20, 2017
Hours: 1-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat
Contact: (956) 230-2859

Istanbul meets South Texas

This exhibition blends Eastern and Western cultures through drawings and whimsical ceramics.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Mixing motifs from cultural references through her art and graphic design background, Fulden Wissinger's exhibition, "Life Progresses One Day at a Time", at Beyond Arts Gallery, combines a strong sense of graphic style with the fluidity of malleable materials. Living in Kingsville, but originally from Istanbul, Wissinger's cultural blendings are fascinating. The exhibition is arranged into five sections: the Cappadocia-inspired ceramics, "The Tortilla Series" ceramics, the ceramic wall platters, a series of graphite drawings, and "The Arabesque Series" installation of small drawings. Throughout this show, As Turkish motifs and influences have establish their importance in this artist's work, her efforts to merge them into a contemporary expression has successfully matured.

Luring viewers into the gallery space, the Cappadocia Series of ceramics re-Imagine the rough rock structures of Cappadocia as whimsical and elegant creations. These works are outstanding, with each form emitting a firmly independent presence. Conically shaped, each is topped with a minaret-referencing finial and sits proudly upon wing-nut washers. These ceramics speak of the unique landscape of Cappadocia around the town of Göreme, and within a national park, where ancient volcanic activity and subsequent erosion have created clusters of rock pinnacles. For millennia, they have

been used for dwellings and early Christian churches. Wissinger reflects the human encroachment on the rock structures through graphic embellishments in unexpected patterns. The patterns hug the surfaces of her ceramics, offering traditional themes in contemporary designs.

The Tortilla Series shift to a South Texas influence, yet the surface designs frequently reflect mid-Eastern geometric repetition with lush, decorative, surfaces. "As a person of mixed culture," Wissinger declared, "I am fascinated by other cultures just as I am my own. It is this desire and yearning for the uniqueness of people's varying ways of life that is reflected in my work, and I make this evident by fusing together visual elements that have opposing qualities, thus creating harmony out of dissonance." Tortillas, an unassuming food, takes on the gloriousness of tostados supremos in this series. Slabs of clay, pushed and stamped, are bedazzled with coloration and glittering embellishment, imparting a very comfortable aesthetic union.

The graphite drawings play with embellishment as a basic theme. Graphite, a powdery dry medium, has been applied to the paper in a way as luscious as graphite can be. Rich tonal contrasts often flow into each other as though the compositions were fluid entities. Although they initially may be perceived as abstract drawings in their ambiguous shapes, patterns, and repetitions, they also harbor symbolism and cultural identities. "Letter Matters II" contains imaginative and rhythmic riffs off of traditional Turkish calligraphy - with the number nine suddenly appearing. Bits of color minimally invade some drawings causing one to wonder whether the graphite matrix perceives color to be friend or foe. Tucked into all these drawings is the Turkish eye, protecting against potentially evil forces.

After a decade working as a graphic designer, Wissinger transitioned into exploring how her heritage and past could form a change in her art. During her MFA studies, she gravitated towards clay, and now believes that clay most directly captures fluid energy while also requiring patient and methodical manipulation. For Wissinger, this in itself stands as a metaphor for the East and West, the push and pull of the cultural paradox of Istanbul.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgv.rr.com