

FROM LINDIG'S APPRENTICE TO SAGGAR MAESTRO: THE ARTISTIC ODYSSEY OF MEHMET TÜZÜM KIZILCAN

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the profound contributions of Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan to the field of contemporary ceramics, focusing on his innovative use of the saggar firing technique. Born in 1941 in Yukarıkızılca, İzmir, Kızılcan's early exposure to art and his subsequent education at İstanbul Technical University laid the foundation for his artistic journey. A pivotal period of study at Werkkunstschule Offenbach in Germany, under the mentorship of Otto Lindig, significantly shaped his approach to ceramics. Kızılcan's work is characterized by the integration of Bauhaus principles and his unique adaptation of the saggar technique, which involves the use of organic materials and controlled firing atmospheres to produce distinctive visual effects. This study examines Kızılcan's methodological innovations, emphasizing his contributions to both the aesthetic and technical dimensions of ceramic art. Additionally, his role as an educator at Dokuz Eylül University and his influence on a new generation of ceramicists are discussed. The research highlights the enduring impact of Kızılcan's work, which continues to be celebrated in international exhibitions and collections, solidifying his legacy in the contemporary ceramics field.

Keywords: Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan, Ceramic, Bauhaus, Artist, Maestro, educator, Saggar

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Introduction

In the vast tapestry of life, there are moments that forever alter the trajectory of our existence. These pivotal encounters, like the gentle ripple of a pebble in a tranquil pond, send reverberations through our souls, awakening dormant passions and igniting an unyielding fire within. For me, such a moment occurred when I crossed paths with the remarkable Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan. It was the last year of his teaching, and serendipity had bestowed upon my fellow students and me the privilege of becoming the last recipients of his wisdom and creativity. Little did we know that this chance encounter would lead us on an unforgettable journey into the mesmerizing world of ceramics, guided by the masterful hands of a true artist.

As if touched by magic, Kızılcan effortlessly transformed clay from the wheel into enchanting works of art during our wheel-throwing lesson. Each fluid movement of his skilled hands seemed to infuse life into the inert clay, and in that moment, our perspectives shifted forever. With a single spoken word and the artistry of his hands, he bestowed upon us the gift of a new lens through which to view the world—an artist's lens. And so, the captivating tale of Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's extraordinary life began, a journey woven intricately with clay, passion, and the timeless allure of the saggar works.

Early Life and Passion for Production

Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's journey began in 1941 in the enchanting town of Yukarıkızılca, nestled within the İzmir Kemalpaşa district, where he was born into a family engaged in farming. From an early age, Kızılcan's inquisitive mind and love for creation set the stage for his artistic character. His childhood was marked by a relentless curiosity, and this innate passion for production and artistic exploration played a significant role in shaping his creative identity. After completing his studies at İzmir Atatürk High School, he embarked on an engineering education at İstanbul Technical University's Electric Department in 1957, guided by his family's wishes. The years spent in the bustling city of İstanbul provided him with the opportunity to immerse himself in the city's artistic scene. It was during this time that he had the fortune of meeting Turkey's first woman in ceramics, the esteemed artist Fureya Koral. This encounter ignited an intense passion for ceramics within Kızılcan, steering the course of his artistic journey.

Kızılcan's interactions with influential figures in Turkish art and literature, such as Aliye Berger, Fahrünnisa Zeyd, Şirin Devrim, Cavit Sakir (The Fisherman of Halicarnassus), Cem Kabaagaç, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Eren Eyüboğlu, Ulvi Uraz, Selçuk Uraz, and Yaşar Kemal, further enriched his intellectual characteristics and shaped his artistic sensibilities.

Early Endeavors and Academic Pursuits

In 1960, driven by a desire to create original ceramic works, he joined the art department of Eczacıbaşı's ceramics factory in İstanbul. This period marked the beginning of a transformative phase in his artistic journey. Collaborations with prominent artists like Alev Ebüzziya, Erdoğan Ersen, Cevdet Altuğ, Alev İlker, Hasan Togay, and Nasip İyem further fueled his creative spirit. The close-knit group provided a nurturing environment for generous information interchange and artistic growth.

Kızılcan's exposure to the art scene and interactions with artists from the Government Fine Arts Academy, including Filiz Galatalı, Alev İlker, and Candeğer Furtun, kindled his desire for academic education in ceramics. His artistic prowess was recognized when he won a silver medal in an international ceramic competition in Prague in 1962, reinforcing his resolve to seek academic education.

With the support of Eczacıbaşı, Kızılcan embarked on a transformative journey in 1962, enrolling at Werkkunstschule Offenbach, an esteemed art school renowned for its association with Bauhaus in Germany. Under the mentorship of Otto Lindig, a distinguished ceramic artist, his artistic expression flourished, and he gained invaluable insights into the nuances of ceramics. Attending exhibitions and competitions across Europe during this period allowed him to closely observe the artistic activities and techniques of renowned ceramicists, enriching his artistic repertoire.

His graduation in 1965 was marked by receiving the Offenbach Municipality Award, a testament to the remarkable growth and development he achieved during his academic years. Although he was offered a teaching position at the same school, Kızılcan decided to return to his homeland with his wife in 1966, carrying with him the artistic wisdom garnered during his time in Germany.

Pursuit of Artistic Excellence and Professional Accomplishments

Upon his return to Turkey, Kızılcan delved into the world of textile and fashion, exploring diverse artistic endeavors. However, his passion for ceramics remained steadfast. In 1969, he settled in İstanbul, where he briefly worked for Gorbon ceramics before moving to İzmir in 1970. Establishing his own studio in İzmir, he emerged as a trailblazer for ceramics in the region, sharing his artistic experiences and knowledge gained from Germany and İstanbul.

Kızılcan's innovative approach to ceramics was especially evident in his architectural ceramic works. At a time when traditional murals dominated architectural constructions, Kızılcan fearlessly experimented

with contemporary ceramics wall panels, paving the way for a new artistic expression that captivated the public and fellow artists alike.

Drawing from the principles of Bauhaus that he imbibed during his studies in Germany, his works exuded a unique blend of aesthetics and functionality. His studio, aptly named Sersa, became a hub for creativity, where he generously shared his experiences with aspiring ceramicists, guiding them on their artistic journey.

In 1988, Kızılcan briefly served as an academician at Ege University, receiving an honorable award from Ceramics Occupational High School that year. Subsequently, he joined Dokuz Eylül University's Faculty of Fine Arts, where he taught at the Department of Ceramics and the Department of Turkish Traditional Arts in 1989. As an educator, Kızılcan emphasized the importance of understanding traditional techniques while encouraging his students to push the boundaries of contemporary interpretations.

In 2004, Kızılcan retired as an educator but continued to impart his knowledge and wisdom to his students at his studio, nurturing a new generation of ceramic artists. Simultaneously, he remained dedicated to his artistic pursuits, producing captivating works that demonstrated his unwavering commitment to ceramics as an expressive medium.

The Enchanting World of Saggar Technique

Among the many facets of Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's artistic journey, the saggar technique stands as one of the most captivating and distinctive aspects of his work. It is through this technique that he unleashes the full potential of ceramics, transforming them into breathtaking pieces of art that leave viewers entranced.



Figure 1. Saggar Stones, hand-building, various sizes
(Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)

The origin of the saggar technique dates back to centuries ago when ceramic artists sought ways to protect their delicate creations during the firing process. Historically, wood or coal firing environments posed challenges, as these materials often produced soot and debris that could mar the ceramics' surfaces. Saggars were introduced as a solution to safeguard ceramics from such impurities, ensuring a cleaner firing process (Başkıran, 2002, p.2).

Traditionally, saggars were made from fireclay and designed as protective containers for ceramics during firing. This simple yet ingenious concept involved placing the ceramics inside a larger ceramic container, which was then sealed before being subjected to the firing process. The enclosed space created a protective barrier, shielding the ceramics from direct contact with combustible materials while allowing heat and gases to circulate freely.

While the traditional use of saggars primarily focused on protection, Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan redefined the technique by imbuing it with a new artistic dimension. Instead of using saggars solely for protection, he saw them as a canvas for creative expression. Kızılcan harnessed the potential of saggars to introduce organic materials and chemicals that interacted with the ceramics during firing, resulting in captivating visual effects.

One of the defining features of his approach to the saggar technique is his preference for unglazed surfaces. Embracing the raw, natural beauty of clay, he believed that glazes could mask the material's inherent

character. By leaving the surfaces unglazed, he allowed the ceramics' true essence to shine through, celebrating the inherent qualities of clay.

Controlling the Atmosphere for Stunning Effects

Central to Kızılcan's saggar technique is the meticulous control of the firing atmosphere. By introducing organic materials such as wood shavings, sawdust, pine needles, leaves, or even salts and sugars inside the saggars, he creates unique environments that interact with the ceramics during firing. This controlled atmosphere causes the organic materials to release gases and compounds that react with the clay's surface, resulting in striking visual effects.

The choice of organic materials and their placement within the saggar determine the nature of the effects. Wet leaves, for example, yield different results than dry leaves. Kızılcan leveraged this knowledge to orchestrate the firing process, carefully planning the positioning of ceramics and organic materials within the saggars to achieve the desired outcomes.



Figure 2. Placing the forms inside of the Saggar Boxes with Pine Needles, Saw Dust and Sand
(Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)



Figure 3. Inside of Saggar Boxes after firing
(Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)

Achieving Metallic Effects and Beyond

One of the most captivating aspects of Kızılcan's saggar works is the striking metallic effects he achieves on the ceramics' surfaces. By introducing copper and iron compounds and manipulating their interactions through chemical knowledge, he masterfully produces copper reds, shades of green, browns, and purples. These metallic effects infuse his ceramics with a mesmerizing allure that captivates the eye and evokes a sense of wonder.

Beyond the metallic effects, his saggar technique also embraces other artistic possibilities. His works showcase a spectrum of colors, textures, and patterns, each a reflection of his creative ingenuity and unwavering dedication to his craft. He continuously explores new combinations of organic materials and chemicals, uncovering fresh avenues for artistic expression within the saggar firing process.



Figure 4. Saggar Bottles, hand-building, casting, h:50 cm d: 13cm
(Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)

The artist utilizes saggar boxes, meticulously crafted to complement the ambiance, specifically tailored in terms of material, size, and shape to accommodate the forms within. Kızılcan elucidates that the dimensions of these saggar boxes significantly influence the resultant effects, exhibiting a preference for cylindrical containers over angular ones. This preference is attributed to the phenomenon where air within angular boxes becomes entrapped in corners, leading to uneven circulation around the contained form. Conversely, cylindrical boxes facilitate uniform air circulation along the surface. Given the durability of these containers, the artist repurposes them multiple times, employing the same materials as in previous uses. Consequently, the artist avoids combining disparate materials within the same container, such as placing titanium in a box previously used for iron, or vice versa. This method ensures precise control over the effects on the surfaces. While unexpected outcomes are valued, the artist prioritizes maintaining control over the process.

The artist employs the saggar technique initially to generate smoke, subsequently utilizing it to produce varied effects. The composition of the clay, the initial firing temperature, surface details, and both organic and chemical constituents within the box are critical factors to consider. When the sole objective is to achieve smoke effects, organic materials like wood shavings, sawdust, both wet and dry leaves, and oily seeds are strategically employed. The selection of these materials is contingent upon the specific effect desired; for instance, the impact of wet leaves diverges significantly from that of dry leaves. To intensify the smoke effect on the pieces, the artist leverages wet materials such as wet leaves. Conversely, for lesser smoke effects, dry materials like sawdust or dry leaves are utilized. The placement of the form within the boxes is meticulously oriented towards the desired smoke concentration area, with all aspects meticulously preplanned.



Figure 5. Saggar Stones, hand-building, various sizes
(Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)

The artist strategically assembles forms with diverse materials, placing these forms into sealed containers crafted from chamotte clay, subsequently securing the containers before initiating the firing process in electric kilns. Saggar firing is executed with precision, tailored to achieve specific outcomes; forms targeted for enhanced smoke effects are fired at 1000°C, whereas alternative conditions necessitate firing at 1100°C.

Predominantly, the artist employs water-soluble salts on saggars to generate effects on the surfaces. Following their liquefaction, these salts are meticulously applied to the surface. Salt constitutes a fundamental material in his repertoire, with the artist elucidating the potential for the sodium in salt and the silicate in clay to react, forming sodium silicate—a reaction that significantly alters the effects on the surfaces. To augment this process, certain forms are immersed in salty water before the application of desired chemicals, thereby enhancing the efficacy of the surface treatment.



Figure 6. Saggar Bowl, wheel throwing, casting, copper and iron-based materials h: 27 d:32cm
(Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)

The artist methodically applies chemicals, whose reactions are well-understood, in layers upon the surface, occasionally employing a cloth for this purpose. This technique involves either enveloping the form entirely with cloth or applying mixed, impregnated coatings to specific areas. Commonly utilized materials include leaves from various plants, sawdust, and sea sand. Utilizing sea sand as a masking agent, the artist embeds portions of the form he wishes to remain unreactive into the sand, leaving other parts exposed. A distinctive practice involves placing resinous pine pieces combined with salt and sugar at the center of the form, a method heralded for generating markedly unique effects. With a focus on achieving deliberate results, the artist selects materials with precision and places them into the box with meticulous care.

Copper and iron compounds are the chemicals most frequently employed by the artist, who combines them with various materials using his knowledge of chemistry. This approach, refined through extensive experimentation over time, yields increasingly effective outcomes.

The artist employs a variety of methods to apply chemicals to the surface, including the use of cloths and spraying with a pump, each technique yielding distinct outcomes. At times, different chemicals are layered upon one another, with the results varying based on the thickness and fineness of the applied layer. Preference is given to materials that possess colorant properties, such as copper wires, iron wires, iron shreds, and both copper and iron sulfates and chlorides.

Typically, the results exhibit metallic effects when the materials create reduction environments in metal oxides, carbonates, and metal salts. Shades such as copper red or variations of green emerge from red copper oxide; brownish effects are derived from iron, while purplish brown is achieved with manganese. Factors like the thickness of the copper wire, the placement of the copper sheet, and the thickness or density of the sawdust significantly impact the final results. These effects underscore the vital role of chemical knowledge in the artist's work.

Every detail in Kızılcan's series, which encompasses pottery, stone, and bottle forms, reflects masterful touches and profound technical knowledge. His meticulous approach, a manifestation of his detail-oriented nature, stands as a critical element across all his creations, including his saggar works. This careful attention to detail and an in-depth understanding of materials and their interactions highlight the intersection of artistry and science in his practice.



Figure 7. Saggar Bowl, wheel throwing, casting, iron and copper-based materials h: 27 d:32cm (Mehmet Tüzüm KIZILCAN)

The Artist's Legacy

Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's artistic journey has left an indelible mark on the world of ceramics. His passion for his craft, coupled with a deep appreciation for tradition and a relentless pursuit of artistic excellence, sets him apart as a luminary in the field. As an educator, he generously shared his knowledge, nurturing the talents of countless aspiring ceramicists. His dedication to preserving tradition while fostering innovation serves as an inspiration to all who encounter his remarkable works.

Even today, his artistic legacy thrives, as he continues to produce captivating ceramics and actively participates in international exhibitions and symposiums. His works, cherished in museum collections across several countries, including Finland, Malaysia, Hungary, India, Korea, and China, stand as testaments to his artistic brilliance and enduring impact on the world of ceramics.

Conclusion

Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's life is an extraordinary tale of artistic passion, perseverance, and unyielding dedication to the craft of ceramics. From his humble beginnings in a small town to his transformative education in Germany, Kızılcan's journey exemplifies the transformative power of art and the profound impact of influential mentors.

His remarkable artistic contributions, especially in pioneering the saggar technique, have left an indelible mark on the world of ceramics. Through meticulous craftsmanship and a profound understanding of chemical interactions, he has created a unique and enchanting body of work that continues to captivate and inspire art enthusiasts worldwide.

Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's saggar technique is a profound manifestation of his artistic brilliance and

technical prowess. Through meticulous control of firing atmospheres and the innovative use of organic materials, he elevates ceramics to a realm of unparalleled enchantment. His saggar works stand as testament to the transformative power of art and the boundless possibilities of ceramics as a medium of creative expression.

As viewers immerse themselves in the mesmerizing world of his saggar technique, they are invited to experience the harmonious interplay of clay, fire, and organic materials, resulting in artworks that transcend the traditional boundaries of ceramics. The allure of his saggar works lies not only in their breathtaking visual effects but also in the profound sense of wonder they evoke—wonder at the brilliance of artistic experimentation, wonder at the beauty of raw, unglazed clay, and wonder at the enduring legacy of an artist who reshaped the world of ceramics with his saggar technique.

Mehmet Tüzüm Kızılcan's artistic journey, spanning over decades, serves as a beacon of inspiration for all aspiring artists. His unwavering passion for ceramics, profound understanding of chemistry, and creative ingenuity have secured his place among the most celebrated ceramicists in the world. As we marvel at the brilliance of his saggar works and reflect on the profound impact of his teachings, we celebrate the life and artistry of this extraordinary visionary.

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