



HABITAT : Bloom

MELIS BUYRUK

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Front Cover Image: Detail of *Blooming Tales*, 2022
Inside Back Cover Image: Detail of *Habitat*, 2021
Back Cover Image: Detail of *Habitat Tower 1*, 2020 and *Habitat Tower 2*, 2020

MELIS BUYRUK

HABITAT: BLOOM - RECENT WORKS BY MELIS BUYRUK

written by David Ebony

The life of species on the planet is a constant metamorphosis. Metamorphosis is the boundary that separates and divides species from one another. This means that the relationship we have with different life forms is always metaphoric: we could become, we could have become, other. Metamorphosis is the kinship that simultaneously connects and divides all living beings.

— Emanuele Coccia, *Metamorphosis**

Visually alluring, technically dazzling, and conceptually audacious, recent works by Melis Buyruk feature monochromatic porcelain wall reliefs—sometimes accentuated with gold leaf, copper or platinum, and LED illumination along the sides—and free-standing sculptures also made of high-fired porcelain. Buyruk’s labor-intensive, ultra-refined compositions invariably consist of tightly compressed arrangements of countless small organic forms that fill each panel, or completely cover the sculptural supports. Tenderly pieced together, almost like ceramic tapestries, the conglomerations of elements seem to writhe, undulate and grow, as if in a perpetual state of flux.

An individual ceramic element in each one of her compositions alludes to a lifeform that may be found in nature—roses, peonies, leafy vines, coral, or sea urchins, for examples. Intentionally non-specific, however, the forms are all generic, born of the artist’s fertile imagination. She also aims at non-specificity in her subtle use of color, or rather, monochromatic palette of exclusively white, off-white, or black porcelain. For the artist, color often assigns an overly specific lexicon of meaning to the works, as she reaffirmed in a recent virtual visit and interview I made with her in her studio in Istanbul. Her work proposes a unique and unconventional “reading” that avoids the traditional assignments of color, with all of its incumbent expressive and symbolic rhetoric.

Most of the works on view in the exhibition were created during the pandemic. The visual and emotional intensity of these pieces grew out of the self-enforced isolation necessitated by the Covid lockdowns. While the resulting compositions are visually gorgeous and texturally sumptuous, they also suggest a rather provocative mediation on the extraordinary condition of disquietude in nature, as one life form (in this case the virus) is capable of inflicting physical as well as psychological damage on the whole of humanity.

In these compositions, plants appear to be in the process of metamorphosis—morphing into animals, and vice versa. Animal hybrids appear throughout the work, as in the form of plumed serpents. The coiled snake at the lower right in *Blooming Tales* (2022), the frog in the upper left of *Frog’s Copper Habitat* (2021), as well as the lizards that top the free-standing sculptures *Habitat Tower 3* (2021), and *The Iguana* (2020), all feature feathery textured skin. The animals and objects in the work sometimes appear as Surrealist objects, as dreamlike apparitions. Buyruk, however, always evokes nature, specific lifeforms, and environmental conditions of natural habitats in metaphorical terms as the French philosopher Emanuele Coccia suggests in his book, *Metamorphosis*. Apparent in her art, Buyruk affirms that the life of species on the planet is a constant metamorphosis.

A work such as *Habitat* (2021) is ambitious thematically as it addresses nature’s perpetual conflict with technology, not least exemplified by the process-oriented, expert craftsmanship that characterizes the artwork itself. *Habitat*’s elaborately encrusted surface hints at a forest floor, for instance, or perhaps a live coral bed at the bottom of the sea. On close inspection, life-size human lips appear, sometimes covered in gold leaf. To me, they appear emblematic of humanity’s crucial responsibility to speak for nature or else face catastrophic consequences. In their rather elliptical and poetic way, Buyruk’s works relay an urgent message to act in the face of the increasing onslaught of environmental calamity due to climate change and other human-generated disasters that threaten to eradicate all natural habitats.

In her work, Buyruk reveals a kinship with certain of her contemporaries working primarily in ceramics, such as the Dutch artist Bouke de Vries, and Danish artist Steen Ipsen, in their finely crafted and baroque compositions. Thematically, though, especially in her compositions with animals and animal parts, such as the meticulously rendered, centralized head in *The Gazelle* (2020), and the equally refined head at the center of *The Rabbit* (2020), Buyruk alludes to a work of ancient Arabic literature—the series of fables known as *Kalila wa-Dimna* (*Kalila and Dimna or The Fables of Bidpa*), dating from at least the 8th century or earlier.

It may help to illuminate the art to cite a passage from this arcane literary masterpiece in which animals are assigned human attributes, and whose stories are affecting morality and cautionary tales with universal themes today.

*“On a certain occasion the hen bird of a species of sea fowl, called Titawi, said to the cock, I wish we could find a secure place to hatch our young, for I am afraid that the genius of the sea will discover them, and take them away. The cock desired her to remain where she was, as there was plenty of food; upon which she reproached him with his inconsiderateness, but received the same answer, with some observations on the unreasonableness of her alarm.”***

One of Buyruk’s works, the tondo *Sparrow’s Habitat* (2021), resonates for me with a particularly strong attachment to this venerable literary source. Here, a precisely rendered small bird, gracefully perched near the lower edge of the composition, appears ensconced in its circular domain as it also commands it. With the elegant tondo format Buyruk has yielded to the animal’s aerial realm all of the inherent richness and abundance, as well as the fearful dissonances and foibles of a would-be earthly paradise.

*Emanuele Coccia, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Robin Mackay, Polity Cambridge, U.K., Medford, Mass., 2021, p. 82.

***Kalila wa-Dimna (Kalila and Dimna or The Fables of Bidpa)*, trans. Wyndham Knatchbull, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, in the public domain.

David Ebony is a Contributing Editor of *Art in America*, and the author of “David Ebony + Art Books,” an ongoing column for Yale University Press online. The author of numerous artist monographs, he lives and works in New York City.



Habitat, 2021
Porcelain, 18k gold
101H x 101W x 10D cm. / 39.76H x 39.76W x 3.94D in.



The Gazelle, 2020
Porcelain

90H x 90W x 12D cm. / 35.43H x 35.43W x 4.72D in.





The Rabbit, 2020
Porcelain, 18k gold, lightbox
124H x 124W x 12D cm. / 48.82H x 48.82W x 4.72D in.



Habitat Tower 1, 2020
 Porcelain, 18k gold, wood, epoxy clay
 140H x 27Ø cm. / 55.12H x 10.63Ø in.



Habitat Tower 2, 2020
 Porcelain, 18k gold, wood, epoxy clay
 127H x 28Ø cm. / 50H x 11.02Ø in.



Habitat Tower 3, 2021
Porcelain, 18k gold
109H x 31Ø cm. / 42.91H x 12.2Ø in.





Blooming Tales, 2022
 Porcelain, 22k gold decorated, lightbox
 120H x 120W x 12Dcm. / 47.24H x 47.24W x 4.72D in.



Blooming Light, 2022
 Porcelain, 18k gold decorated, lightbox
 100H x 100W x 12D cm. / 39.37H x 39.37W x 4.72D in.



Blooming Twins-1, 2022
 Porcelain, 18k gold decorated
 181H x 60W x 10D cm. / 71.26H x 23.62W x 3.94D in.



Blooming Twins-2, 2022
 Porcelain, 18k gold decorated
 181H x 60W x 10D cm. / 71.26H x 23.62W x 3.94D in.



Detail image of *Blooming Twins-1, 2022*



Frog's Copper Habitat, 2021
Porcelain and copper
66H x 66W x 15D cm. / 25.98H x 25.98W x 5.91D in.



Frog's Golden Habitat, 2021
Porcelain, 18k gold
71H x 71W x 15D cm. / 27.95H x 27.95W x 5.91D in.



Bearded Dragon's Habitat, 2022
Porcelain, platinum decorated
120H x 120W x 10D cm. / 47.22H x 47.22W x 3.94D in.



Sparrow's Habitat, 2021
Porcelain, 18k gold
100H x 100W x 15D cm. / 39.37H x 39.37W x 5.91D in.



Golden Bloom, 2022
Porcelain, 18k gold decorated
115H x 115W x 15D cm. / 45.28H x 45.28W x 5.91D in.



The Iguana, 2020
 Porcelain, 18k gold, epoxy clay, wood
 57H x 52Ø cm. / 22.44H x 20.47Ø in.



Detail image of *The Iguana*, 2020

MELIS BUYRUK

SOLO SHOWS

- 2020“Co-exist,” Pg Art Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2019“Habitat,” Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 2019“What is Weird and Who is Strange?” Istanbul
- 2016“Never Enough,” Pg Art Gallery, Istanbul
- 2014“You are Here,” Pg Art Gallery, Istanbul

GROUP SHOWS

- 2022“Maybe Later”, Sığınak, Ankara
- 2021“Sabırla Bekleyen Büyülü Şeyler,” Kalyon Kültür, Istanbul
- 2021“Summer Show,” Pg Art Gallery
- 2020“After Us,” Pg Art Gallery
- 2018“Alive,” Pg Art Gallery
- 2017“Cosmos”, Beymen Zorlu Centre, Istanbul
- 2017“Ah ”, Galeri Işık Teşvikiye, Istanbul
- 2017“Metamorphosis”, Ada Han, Istanbul
- 2017“Mediterranean Routes”, Palermo, Italy
- 2016“Holistic”, Pg Art Gallery, Istanbul
- 2016“Dream”, Hub Space, Istanbul
- 2015“Amusement Park”, Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey
- 2014“Anomaly”, Pg Art Gallery, Istanbul
- 2014“Genç Etkinlik”, UPSD, Istanbul

ART FAIRS

- 2021Art Dubai (Leila Heller Gallery)
- 2020Intersect Chicago Virtual Art Fair (Leila Heller Gallery)
- 2020Art Dubai Virtual Art Fair (Leila Heller Gallery)
- 2019Step Istanbul Art Fair (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2019Abu Dhabi Art Fair/ Abu Dhabi (Leila Heller Gallery)
- 2019Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2018Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2017Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2017Fresh Paint Art Fair, Tel Aviv (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2016Art-Thessaloniki International Contemporary Art Fair, Greece (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2016Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair (Pg Art Gallery)
- 2015Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair (Pg Art Gallery)





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