

## Artist's Statement

In my work I pay homage to the functional roots of ceramics while elaborating on historical and decorative elements. The influences seen in my work come from life experiences as well as travels and readings.

The confluence of Eastern and Western cultures are celebrated in my recent artwork with the elaborately crafted and richly decorated art, architecture, and literature of Azerbaijan intertwined with images and symbols familiar to my native California.

This work, in clay and hand-woven textiles, is largely inspired by a 15-day journey through Azerbaijan in May 2006, after receiving a Culture Connect Envoy Grant through the United States Department of State, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Baku.

The installation of "47 Vessels from Sheki," is arranged in the ancient Asian symbol of a buta (paisley pattern), referencing historic burial sites from the Sheki region. Pottery filled with food and drink accompanied the dead. I use these vessels to trace a history of Azerbaijan and have introduced oil and madder root into various containers. Oil is an abundant natural resource in Azerbaijan and has given this small country a great importance through the ages. Carpet weaving is another notable industry and madder root provided the natural dye for the deep red color. The color red also symbolizes the blood that was shed through the centuries as Azerbaijan fought with neighboring Persia, Russia and Armenia.

My series of ceramic wall pieces: "Prose and Khan," "Nino Has Laughing Eyes," "Shirvan Shah's Delight" and "The Nectar of Baku," blend ornamental elements discovered in the opulently painted interiors of the Azeri 18th Century Khan's Summer Palace and the ornately carved limestone on the exterior of the Shirvan Shah's Palace. The center of each relief contains a convex vessel in which appear passages from the renowned Azerbaijani novel, "Ali and Nino" (1937), a love story by Kurban Said which takes place at the outbreak of the First World War and introduces the reader to the cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic city of Baku.

I collaborated with Abilova Qanira on a series of four hand-woven carpets. I was introduced to Qanira, a skilled weaver, during my sojourn in Baku. Looking closely on two of the carpets one can discern a small bird in flight, a swallow, which Qanira has woven into the design as a symbol of hope that one day she will follow it to America.

I teamed-up with Iranian born graphic designer, Negar Nowar, to include calligraphic designs on two of the carpets. On the carpet titled, "Leili's Secret," Nowar has designed a series of butterflies, shaped by calligraphic Farsi script, that flutter in a lush garden of calla lilies, morning glories, and blooming strawberries. These butterflies contain selected passages from the romantic Azeri-Turkish poem, "Leili and Medjnun." On a fourth carpet, "Tears for the Black Garden (Nagorno-Karabakh)," Nowar produced a calligraphic tear bottle shape employing Azerbaijani script and a line from Khurshid-Banu Natavan's 19th Century poem, "To My Son Abbas." These bottles were created to hold tears of bereavement and Natavan's poem is a mournful ode to the loss of her son. Natavan's native city of Shusha is in Nagorno-Karabakh, a region recently mired in conflict between the countries of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries mourn the loss of their native sons.

My interest in Islamic Art has evolved from my studies of the Italian Renaissance during a study abroad program my junior year of college in Florence, Italy. Since 1989, I have enjoyed a successful relationship as a designer of ceramics with the renowned Grazia Maiolica Factory in Deruta, Italy. Maiolica pieces of the Italian Renaissance reveal the impact of Islamic Art on the Italian ceramics industry. Islamic forms, techniques and surface patterns came into Italy on ceramic pieces, designed and created by Moorish craftsmen, from trade with Southern Spain. This connection was documented in a 2004 exhibition, "Arts of Fire," at the J. Paul Getty Museum, curated by Catherine Hess.

Past series of work also include various cultural connections. "My Obsession" and "Globalization" series feature images of contemporary collectible objects within the context of historical shapes and surface designs. My objective was to elevate these images of popular culture to the high-end decorative arts. Popular collectible images appear among Chinese floral patterns and the arabesques and blue and white palette of Islamic Art.