

CEREN MUFTUOGLU

About me:

I was born in Iskenderun, Turkey in 1979 and then raised in Izmir, Turkey. I spent most of my childhood with my maternal grandmother. My mom was a doctor and my dad was a lawyer, so they were very busy people. My bi-polar disorder started showing signs at 11 years old, but it was not recognized by my family, and so I didn't get a proper diagnosis until I was in my 20s. Having mental illness did not stop me from being functional. I got a degree in management in tourism, a bachelor's degree in Classical archaeology and some graduate school training in archaeology as well. After I dropped out of graduate school in 2007 I moved to NYC. I met my husband and got married in 2008 and we had our daughter in 2010. We moved to Istanbul temporarily in 2013 but when the political situation in Turkey got bad, we felt that we could not stay there anymore. I got hit by a severe depressive episode while living in Istanbul. We moved to Philadelphia in 2016 to settle down and get proper treatment.

I was introduced to clay for the first time 5 years ago in Istanbul during a depressive episode. I was in an isolated and suicidal state. Clay provided a distraction from thoughts that would otherwise exacerbate my bipolar behaviors. The process began to alleviate the pain and enabled a better sense of calmness. The transformation didn't happen immediately. I was able to engage in some social interactions although the depression was still there. When I was hospitalized for suicidal behavior, I realized that clay had become my motivation to get better. I felt a very strong urge to get out of the hospital so I could start the pottery class that I had signed up for. For the first time since my depressive episode started, I had something to look forward to.

About Kybele Dolls:

While still in college in 2002 I had a severe manic episode. I was delusional and paranoid about being attacked by dwarf demons. (Now I am thinking these creatures were an influence of the Islamic stories about Jinns that my grandmother used to tell me as a child.) The resonance of this episode stayed with me and I developed a phobia of midgets. I made my first Kybele doll 3 years ago in 2017 after I hallucinated/dreamed of Kybele telling me to sculpt her image and giving me her hand. That first sculpture was a depiction of a dwarf goddess with a confident and graceful look. I believed it was going to protect me from the evil dwarf demons. Next year I made another one, then I made a few more. Although I didn't exactly believe in their spiritual meaning, they made me feel safe. Last June I experienced a psychotic breakdown. While I was barely holding on to reality, I began sculpting lots of dolls compulsively. I believed that Kybele was telling me that these dolls would protect me from an upcoming demon attack on June 13th. I had to be hospitalized for a brief period. My doctor at the hospital allowed me to bring clay in, and so I was able to make them during my hospital stay. After I was released from the hospital I continued making them as they still helped me to feel better. They got other people's attention at the ceramic studio that I go to, but I wasn't ready to part with them until much later. When I started to feel safer my husband Dave contacted a few galleries. Then finally when I felt ready (getting back to being functional again) I contacted you.

Some facts about the Kybele Dolls:

She is part snake, part human, and her head piece is a coiled snake. When I shape her body from clay I see it like an empty canvas that must be adorned with tattoos which are her power source and represents wisdom. The more intricate the tattoos get, the more powerful the dolls become. (The dolls that were made before the psychotic breakdown have less tattoos.) She doesn't have eyes and a mouth because putting these on her face makes her resemble the enemy. (Recently I made 2 dolls with eyes but I don't know if I will be able to continue doing that. You have one of them at the gallery, other one is being fired at the studio.

Selected Exhibitions:

2021: Winter Spotlight: Gallery Choices, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY

PHOENIX! New Artists, New Works, New Cavin-Morris Gallery, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY

Publications:

Ellcock, Stephen. *The Book of Change: Images and Symbols to Inspire Revelations and Revolutions*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2021.