

## EARTH TONES

I selected 'Earth Tones' as the title for this exhibition as it encompasses the many themes related in the body of work on display. "Earth" is suggestive of clay and the word "tone" can be defined in relationship to musical sound, color quality and value and the healthy function of the state of a living body.

In May 2006 I had the extraordinary opportunity to visit the country of Azerbaijan as the guest of the American Ambassador and Embassy of the United States. Located in the exotic crossroads of the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea, I was captivated with the culture and history of Azerbaijan. Experiences from my Azeri travels provided the inspiration for my solo exhibition, "Facing East," which was presented at L2kontemporary Gallery in September 2007.

For my current exhibit, "Earth Tones," Azerbaijan again is muse for the work included in this show.

A 2008/2009 University of Southern California Advancing Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences Grant allowed me to return to Azerbaijan in September 2008. I had a specific research agenda in the planning of this trip that was to learn more about the use of pottery vessels in ancient burial practices and for sound resonance in early temples.

While the idea of a relationship between embedded pottery vessels in the domes of early temples for sound resonance was appealing, it was the deep reverberating sounds of the Gaval Dashy (tambourine rock) that provided the impetus for my creation of the "California Gaval Dashy."



Gaval Dashy, Qobustan, Azerbaijan

The Azeri Gaval Dashy is located on the ancient site of Qobustan (translated to mean ravine land), which is situated in a semi-desert area 60 kilometers south of the capitol city of Baku. Qobustan's numerous petroglyphs, carved with stone tools into the native rock formations, represent diverse themes of ritual, labor processes, scenes of daily life, and human and animal representation. These engravings date from 10,000 B.C. to the Middle Ages.

One of the more engaging petroglyphs at Qobustan features a group of figures in a circular formation with arms on each other's shoulders. This image is thought to represent the "Yalla" or "food dance" ("yalla" is cognate to "yal" which means "food"). It is believed that this engraving signifies this magical dance, performed to the rhythmic beat of the "Gaval Dashy," a ritual performed to provide luck for an upcoming hunt.



*Yalla Dance* Petroglyphs, Qobustan, Azerbaijan

The unique and resonating sound of the Gaval Dashy, a stone with deep symbolic meaning, captured my imagination and upon returning to Los Angeles I decided to create my own version of this stone. With the collaboration of Dakota Witzenburg of To Do Something, the “California Gaval Dashy” was created.



California Gaval Dashy, In Progress, *To Do Something Studio*, Highland Park, CA

I invited percussion musicians, Robert Fernandez, M.B. Gordy and Art Jarvinen of the Antenna Repairmen to play in an improvisational session on my stone, which provides the soundtrack to the exhibition. Their performance took place on April 17, 2009 at To Do Something Studio in Highland Park, California.



*The Antenna Repairmen*: from left to right, M.B. Gordy, Art Jarvinen and Robert Fernandez.

*To Do Something Studio*, Highland Park, CA



The symbols on the walls surrounding the California Gaval Dashy are painted with terra cotta clay slip and are taken from a variety of cultures. I selected them for their meaning in relation to the exhibit's theme as well as universal shapes that have a similar aesthetic to the works included in the show.



Installation of California Gaval Dashy, L2kontemporary Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

The colorful ceramic wall installations, "Life Cycles #1 and #2, are created by a series of butas, or tear shaped tiles. In Azerbaijan, the "buta" is a powerful symbol that represents life and eternity. When two butas are joined together they become the circle of life. If one examines the buta shape it conforms to the contour of a fetus in the womb, a simple bacteria, the brain and a flower bud to name a few visual associations.

Ancient pottery pieces and archaeological drawings viewed in the Sheki Ceramics Museum are referenced in the "Tattoo Vessel Series." During my recent stay in Azerbaijan I spent five days in the small city of Sheki in the company of noted Azerbaijani archaeologist, Nesib Muxtarov. This was a unique opportunity to research a variety of vessels that Muxtarov unearthed in his archaeological expeditions.

Specific forms have explicit use in burial practices. I became intrigued by the archaeological drawings of the individual vessels. One type of drawing was especially engaging in that it faithfully mapped the surface markings on the three dimensional object turning them into a flat pattern on a sheet of paper.



Vessel and Mapping of Vessel Surface Patterns, Sheki Ceramics Museum, Azerbaijan

The contours of the vessels created for “Earth Tones” resemble shapes observed in the Sheki Museum and Muxtarov’s expedition burial sites of the Kurgan at Oguz and the Labyrinth in Fazil.

Three vessels: “Mayan Cat,” “Red Creek Valley” and “Fly 28” include symbols that my sister, niece and I have engraved on our bodies in the personal expression of the body tattoo.

Astrological and Chinese symbology are featured on the “Bull and Hare Vessel.” The famous Persian epic love story,

“Leili and Medjnun,” provides the theme for “Leili’s Secret,” as the lover imparts her secret to a butterfly fluttering in the garden.

“Abilova’s Swallow, Inshallah” (God willing) presents the bird that has deep meaning to my dear friend and weaver, Abilova Qanira. She wove my designs into a series of carpets for my previous exhibition, “Facing East.” Qanira added an image of a swallow to two of my carpet designs. When I asked why she had inserted this swallow into my carpet she responded that she felt great disappointment in not being able to travel to Los Angeles for the opening of “Facing East,” so she sent her swallow to open a way for her to eventually travel to America. It was such a beautiful thought and image that I decided to keep her dream alive by including it on one of my vessel forms.

I would like to acknowledge the following persons in assisting me in the research, fabrication, written materials and installation of “Earth Tones”.

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The collaboration with Dakota Witzenberg and assistance of Chad Petersen of To Do Something.

The Antenna Repairmen: Robert Fernandez, M.B. Gordy and Art Jarvinen.

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