

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Theses, Dissertations, and Student Creative Activity,
School of Art, Art History and Design

Art, Art History and Design, School of

4-18-2019

This is Just to Say

Iren Tete

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, iren.tete@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/artstudents>

Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), [Ceramic Arts Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Sculpture Commons](#)

Tete, Iren, "This is Just to Say" (2019). *Theses, Dissertations, and Student Creative Activity, School of Art, Art History and Design*. 140.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/artstudents/140>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Art, Art History and Design, School of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Student Creative Activity, School of Art, Art History and Design by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

by

Iren Tete

A THESIS

Presented to the faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Margaret Bohls

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2019

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

Iren Tete, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2019

Advisor: Margaret Bohls

My memories are marked by the desire to evade logic. At a young age I became a proficient player of the “What If” game.

What if I could hold light in my hands?

What if shadows had form that could be touched?

What if I could see through structures?

These mental exercises affected my relationship with reason and validity. Aware of the threat of the ordinary, I embraced the inherent magic in the notion of possibility. I understand possibility as the limitless potential of object, thought, or scenario. This potential extends beyond the apparent and prompts more questions than it provides answers.

With this in mind, I construct ceramic assemblages that offer the potential for discovery and present varying modes of interpretation rather than directly illustrating a fact. The resulting works are solid monuments that capture and solidify the transient. Although they are lasting physical objects that occupy space in time, their interpretation is fluid and susceptible to change.

Bridging language and poetic suggestion, my work functions as visual poems of communication. Each element -

a sculptural skein drawing

a precariously balanced structure

a lattice serving as a screen

– is a stanza, a necessary part to understanding the full sculptural poem. These compositions of repeated elements are driven by my desire to address visual and emotional notions of memory, time, and fragility.

Memory and time are inextricably linked. Memories act as the shadows of human experience. Their intensity, meaning, and form transform as a result of time. My work captures and solidifies a moment, transforming a memory into a solid monument. Over time my memories of the architectural topography of my childhood have altered. My initial interest in the ornamented historical Bulgarian buildings of the sixth to tenth century CE has shifted to the strong, geometric forms of Brutalist architecture.

Communist Brutalist apartment blocks mark the urban landscape of Sofia. With the passage of time my understanding, and consequently my memory, of these monolithic buildings has transitioned from that of symbols of oppression to monuments of structural integrity and material honesty.

The power, strength, and material integrity of Brutalism are undeniable. The construction process marked by repeated modular elements is apparent. Seams between concrete slabs are markers of the history of a building's fabrication. Ostensibly it appears as if my work is honestly depicting the construction process. Although I use clay rather than concrete, I employ it in a way that highlights the forms and seemingly reveals the

construction of a piece. The monolithic structures that I fabricate show the evidence of my fingers repeatedly touching and forming the clay. The lattice structures that accompany them are made incrementally. Built piece by piece, they are metronomes that record their time.

Simultaneously, the appearance of transparency in my construction process conceals a carefully constructed reality. There is an element of deception or trickery that creates visual tension and leads to questions of what is real and what is not. The speckled porcelain that I use references both concrete composite materials and Formica surfaces. It is fabricated to appear as something that it is not. The intrinsic color of the clay is presented alongside glazed, waxed, and painted surfaces that are hard to distinguish from one another. This veiling of the truth mimics how time alters memory. It causes memories to be shadows of the truth, combinations of fact and fiction.

I utilize a primarily monochromatic color palette in my sculptural assemblages. I have established my own peculiar theory of colors that affects my conceptual and formal decisions.

White is emptiness.

It is a beginning, waiting patiently to uncover the endless possibilities that await it.

Black is strength.

It's the end of the day, a journey fulfilled.

Desaturated pinks and yellows suggest the memory of a feeling or thought.

Bleached by the sun's rays, the vibrancy of their color is now a memory.

The clay's color is prominent in compositional elements such as the sculptural knots that I refer to as skeins. The skeins are pink, yellow, black, and white moments that fill the lattices. Their amorphous silhouettes introduce a nonlinear element that challenges the visual cadence of the structured groupings. They are three-dimensional drawings. Drawings of memory. Drawings of time. Their forms are curving, folding, stretching and retreating. I place the skeins one by one in the lattice structures. Although seemingly intuitive, the arrangement is controlled. My specificity when composing elements stems from my desire to control a moment, thought, or memory while accepting the inevitable loss of control that defines existence.

My strategy of making and displaying utilizes the numbers 2 and 3. I have always had an affinity for the number 2. I have 2 wonderful cousins. I have 2 dedicated parents. 2 is "Mario and Niki," "Mom and Dad," "Grandma and Grandpa." 2 is also time. It is "Now and Then," "Here and There," "America and Bulgaria." Although beside 2, 3 is different. 3 includes me. 3 is "Mario and Niki and Iren," "America, Bulgaria, and that which exists in between." These numbers are linked to the nature of proximity in various degrees. Proximity is a compelling concept because of its implications of time, space, and relationship. It is both a physical condition and a mental state. When assembling components I consider the relationship, the level of connectivity, established between the parts as well as to the entire piece. Some sculptures are placed on opposite ends of a pedestal, others are on the verge of touching, and some have been combined into one form. This range of proximity is evident in human relationships, cultural evolution, the composition of the built landscape, and the formation and subsequent disintegration of memories.

The works in *This is Just to Say* are an exploration of possibility and the transformative power of time. My fascination with the malleable nature of memory is translated into vignettes that reside in the liminal space between solidity and fragility. Their rigidity, structure, and stillness is directly linked to my desire to create monolithic forms that seem solid and lasting but that are as susceptible to changing understanding and interpretation as the cultural monuments that mark my upbringing.



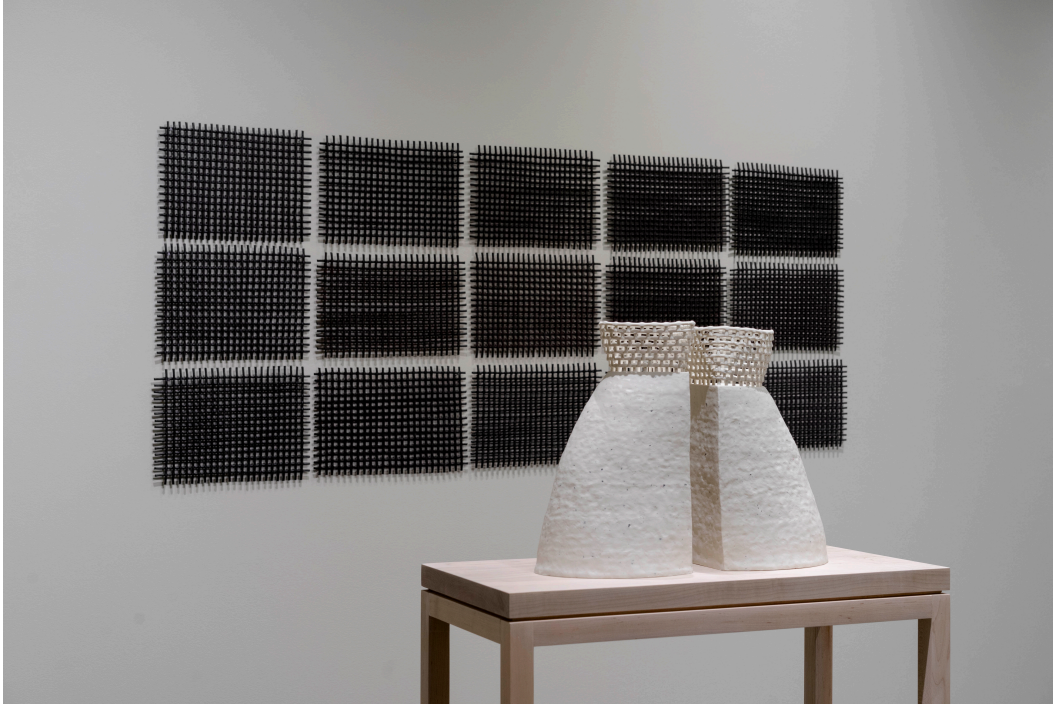
This is Just to Say - title wall



Searching for Lunette
 porcelain, glaze, stoneware, engobe, white maple
 63"(h) x 24"(w) x 34" (d)
 2019



Searching for Lunette
 porcelain, glaze, stoneware, engobe, white maple
 63"(h) x 24"(w) x 34" (d)
 2019



Words are Like Ghosts
 porcelain, stoneware, engobe, white maple
 72"(h) x 60"(w) x 45"(d)
 2019



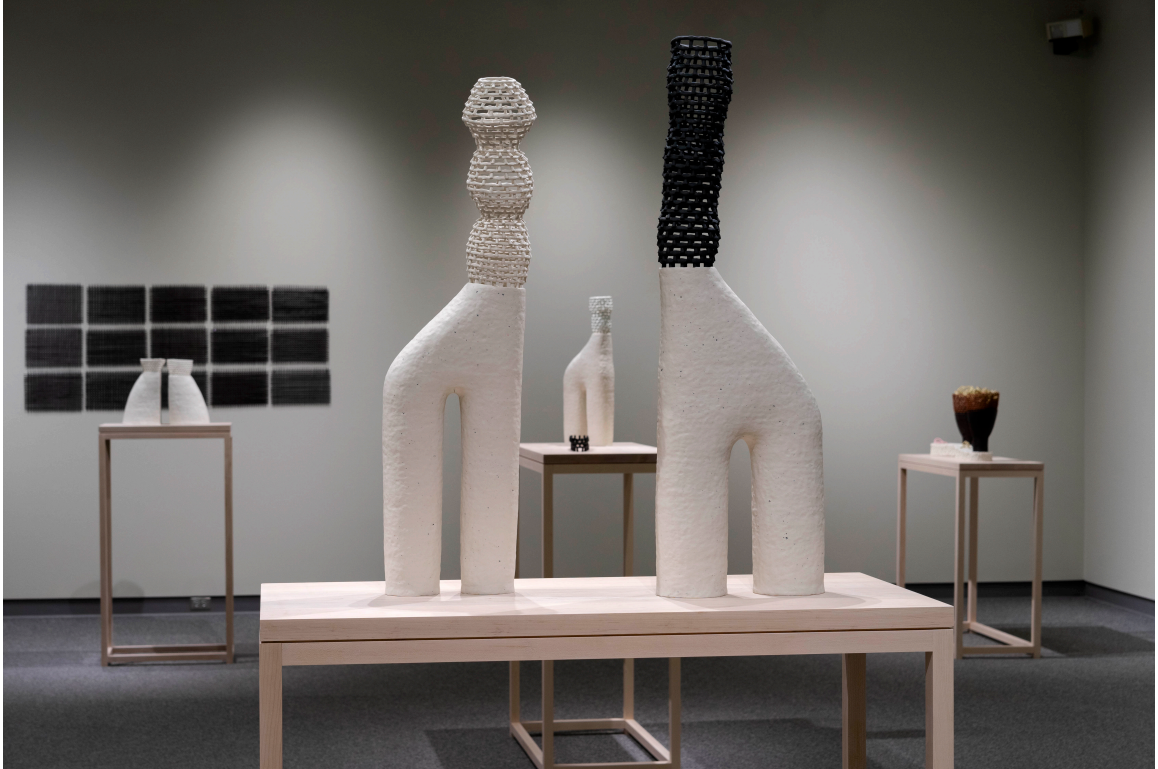
40.8189, -96.7070
 porcelain, stoneware, engobe, lead, white maple
 60"(h) x 26"(w) x 12"(d)
 2019



Here
stoneware, engobe, white maple
46"(h) x 16"(w) x 15" (d)
2019



This is Just to Say
installation view
various dimensions



This is Just to Say
installation view
various dimensions