

Big Blue Dot - Santorini 2024  
**Clay Echoes: Unearthing Hidden Narratives**  
CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS BIENNALE

Shortlisted titles:

**35 Keys Have Two Ends**

**35 Keys For What Remains To Be Seen**

**Installation + Artist's statement**

Leonie Yagdjoglou presents the installation entitled '35 Keys', created for the Contemporary Ceramics Biennale to be held in Santorini from June to October 2024. The core idea behind the installation revolves around the collective trauma of uprooting, forced flights under the threat of death, and the utopian expectation of return. It aims to raise awareness of events that can deeply shake our being and prompts the question of connectivity: how are we associated with events that took place thousands of years ago?

The theme of individual or collective trauma is a central focus in Leonie's work, especially in the articulated *Totems*. Connectivity is also a recurring concept in her pieces, expressed through movable components, unexpected materials attached to them (such as screws, copper, springs, etc), through titles and the use of archetypal symbols that create the allusion and belief that we are all connected to everything.

But how does this connection happen exactly? How are we all linked to one another, despite our diversity and regardless of time and geographical distance? For Leonie, this connection occurs through the healing of trauma; it begins with but exceeds the emotional realm, culminating in the quantum entanglement of humanity.

Thirty-five keys, roughly the same number as the houses unearthed at the archaeological site of Akrotiri. Although keys were not used at that time, this object has been chosen as the most representative symbol to describe a life that came to a close through flight and the beginning of another one. A condition with which the artist identifies with, since the memory of her great-grandfathers who escaped the Asia Minor disaster still lives within her.

All the keys are hand-made with clay; some are also crafted with fragments of pumice from Santorini, establishing a direct connection with the place.

Linear A writing, still undeciphered to date, serves as inspiration for the keys' shapes and variance. Each key has a unique form, mirroring the uniqueness of its owner, and is painted in a way that captures their life path, their journey, each person's steps before and after the runaway. Their karma.

## Inspiration + Proposal

*35 houses, vibrant, full of life, full of people.*

*35 keys, guarding their stories.*

*These same keys, inspired by people's journey and by Linear A.*

*Symbols that look like letters, letters that form words.*

*Wishes spoken the day of the departure but never heard.*

*The experience becomes tangible.*

*It is made of earth, it is therefore visible.*

*Keys have two ends.*

*The one we hold firmly onto and the one we project to unlock the next step.*

*As with everything in life, there is a before and after.*

*All things have two sides. Two readings.*

*The 35 keys are a homage to those who left, an offering to those this place belongs to.*

*We may have brought this site to light out of the ashes and pumice,*

*but these are their belongings.*

*I tried to imagine these keys and give shape to the memories they keep.*

*They are made with clay, coming from the earth, the same material that people used to keep them safe and yet the one that caused them to leave their life behind.*

35 Keys, representing the number of houses discovered at the Akrotiri excavation, aim to unveil the 'non-visible' remnants of the lost city. They seek to evoke the dramatic experience of the day when people abandoned their homes and fled to save their lives. These keys symbolize the moment when the 'doors' of the houses closed forever.

The people of ancient Thera had to flee, facing the imminent threat of losing their lives, much like many other people who are still forced to do so today. Climate migrants and war refugees share a common trauma: leaving their land means closing the door on the past, the familiar *tópos*, and entering a danger zone.

We do not know where the Akrotiri refugees went, or whether they survived the volcanic explosion. What we do know is that they left in an organized manner, weeks before the catastrophic day in Spring 1613 BC when Thera was devastated and its outstanding civilization annihilated. They had time to take their valuables and abandon their homes, probably hoping for a future return. Though there were no keys at that time, the feeling of closing the door behind them, knowing it might be the last time, resonates with the experiences of countless migrants throughout history.

Refugees often mention keeping the keys to their houses in their accounts, expressing a wish to one day return. In the same geographic area, the Eastern Mediterranean, displaced Jews,

Armenians, Asia Minor Greeks, Cypriots, Syrians, and Palestinians pass down keys from one generation to another. While their houses may be destroyed, the keys remain. As long as they hold onto the keys, family memory remains alive. As does the aspiration to return — no matter how futile.

Thus, the key becomes a symbol of hope and resilience. From a simple practical item, it transforms to a relic and metonymy of the lost homeland.

This work pays tribute to all those people, from the time of Akrotiri to the present, who left their homes forever.

**Items, size, quantity, display**

The installation will consist of all 35 keys, symbolizing the collective abandonment of Akrotiri by its residents. The keys, sized 18-35 cm, will be suspended at varying heights, positioned at eye level (specific technical details to be determined at a later stage). This arrangement ensures visibility from all sides, allowing the keys the freedom to move and offering visitors the opportunity to interact with them. It would be preferable for the project to be installed at the exit of the archaeological site, emphasizing its overall significance.

The shapes of the keys also carry a secondary meaning, inviting the visitor's imagination to form words and phrases that echo the era, particularly the specific last day when the city's dwellers abandoned it, leaving it to be buried in the ashes that preserved it until our time.

The excavation of this hidden treasure allows us to attempt to narrate all that has been and symbolically consider the possibility of returning.

To one's home, to what each of us holds true.

The keys always seek a way to return to their owner.