



LOCAL

## IN THE STUDIO WITH NUR CERAMICS

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*"Many of these cultures have an understanding of art that is deeply intrinsic and metaphysical that we can learn much from."*

**NUR Ceramics** was birthed not out of consumer demand for the latest trends, but of the thoughtful and deliberate personal journey of Dina Satti. Having been raised with family still in the African Sahara region, Dina's ceramics represent a pilgrimage back to her Sudanese and Somali family culture and rituals. Having experienced the transformative beauty of these ceramic pieces that represent everyday life in the desert, Dina wanted to share it with those around her. Having no real formal ceramic background to speak of, she took a single ceramic arts class and decided that this was what she was meant to do. This meant taking a huge leap of faith, leaving her job of 7 years in development at a non-profit, and forging her own path. Since then, after moving to California and back, she has begun to work full-time out of her studio, **Sculpture Space NYC** in Long Island City, Queens. Her oversized clay beads, ergonomic bowls, and large incense burners (known as *mabkhars*) all evoke not just beauty in form, but also functionality, ritual, and history. Dina taps into her heritage and family legacy to inspire and propel her work via cultural memory, both in tangible and, at times, seemingly transcendent ways.

We got a chance to visit Dina in her shared studio space and chat about what it's like to be a ceramicist day-to-day, as well as what challenges and inspires her. Read on below!





Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

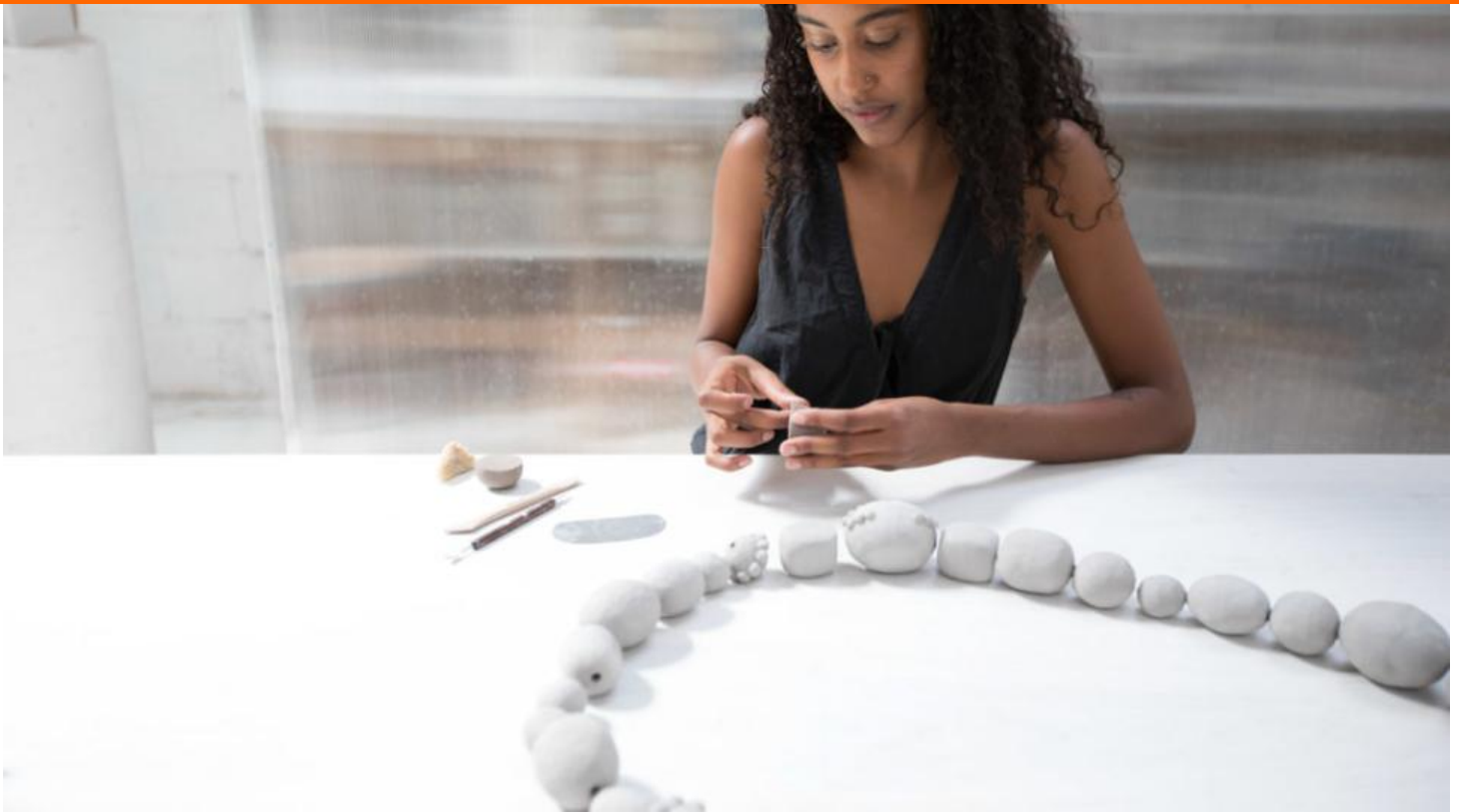
I grew up between Europe and Africa since my father's work required our family to move around quite a bit. I was born in Chad in central Africa and was in Belgium until the age of about 4, then moved to Paris and eventually to Nairobi, Kenya when I was 11 years old. Kenya has an incredibly rich artisanal culture as well as thriving contemporary art and home decor scene, which influence me to this day.

I also travelled extensively throughout North and East Africa and the Middle East with my family, and spent summers with my paternal grandparents in Khartoum, Sudan. That time in my life informed a lot of my interest in culture and art, and resulted in my decision to study International and Intercultural Studies with a focus on Africa and the Middle East at Fordham University. I took courses in subjects such as African Art History and Post-Colonial Literature and travelled to Morocco to study Moroccan culture and society.

I had an incredible mentor, John Entelis, who was the head of the Middle Eastern Studies department at Fordham. His specialty was the region of the Maghreb (i.e. Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lybia, Mauritania, Western Sahara) which was one of the regions of the Sahara I felt very drawn to.

After college, I worked at the [Robin Hood Foundation](#) for 7 years as part of their development team and lived in downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn where I connected to inspiring communities of artists in both New York and California. The artists I met during that time in my life became like family and encouraged me to find a medium through which to express my ideas. I came into ceramics very unexpectedly—I woke up one morning with ceramics on my mind and after weeks of it coming up again and again, I enrolled in an intro course at Supermud Pottery in the Upper West Side and was hooked right away.

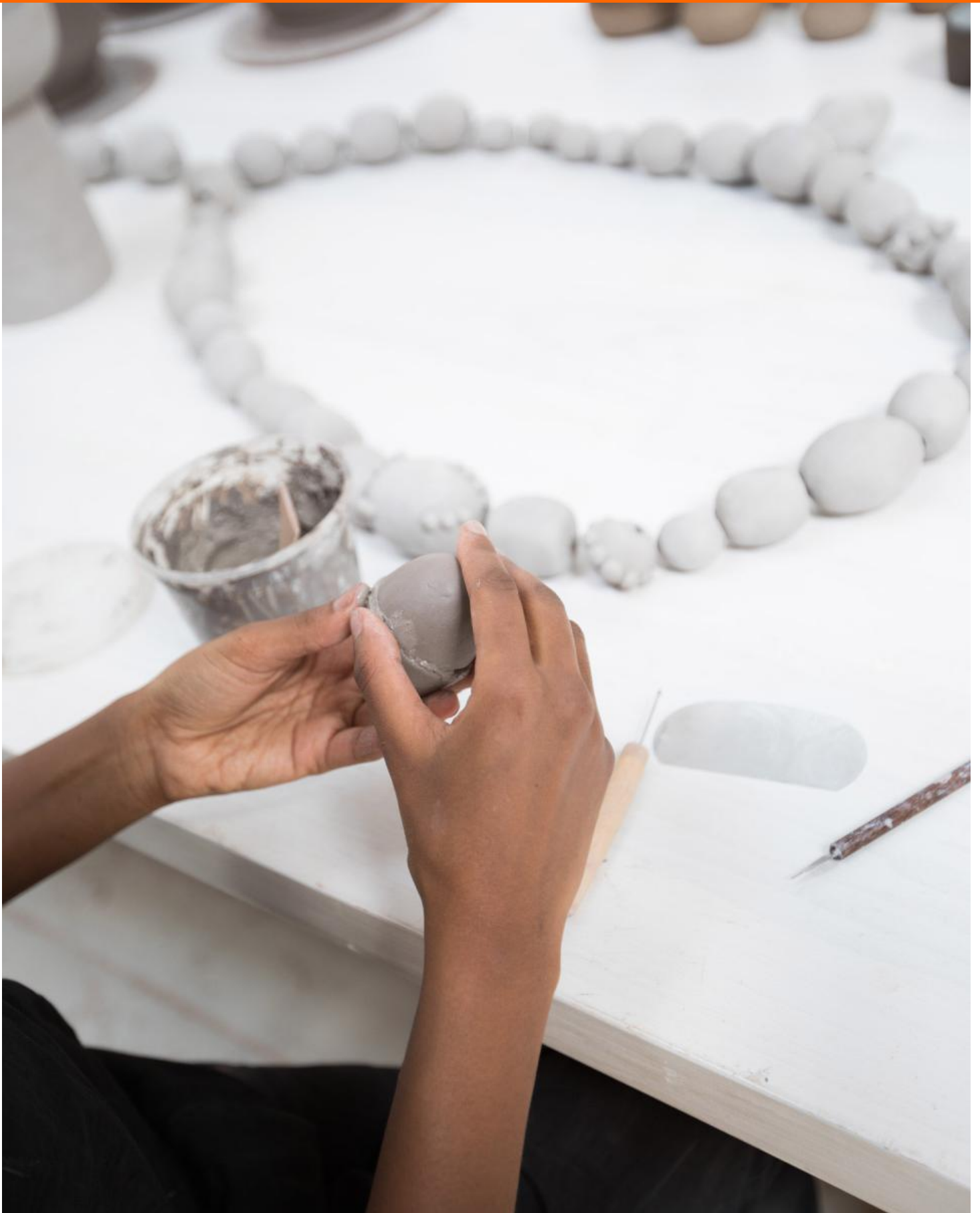


















Ceramics is close to home for you, with it being central to the Somali and Sudanese cultures you grew up around. What do you hope to convey by sharing this art form with others?

As a self-proclaimed cultural anthropology geek, I really enjoy learning about the intersection of culture and art. I think in Western culture, we tend to extract art from our day-to-day experience and not see it as an integral and defining part of our culture. What I think we could learn from traditional cultures is that language, art, oral history and literature, music, adornment, and architecture are all interwoven and come together to create an almost transcendental experience by engaging all of the senses. To truly understand each medium we need to experience it within this wider context.

Growing up around the cultures of my parents, I was immersed in two cultures that had retained elements of these aspects. I say elements, because outside influences and cultural colonization resulted in the extinction of indigenous Sudanese languages and animist rites in both cultures. Interacting with the remaining tangible art from these precolonial periods is a way for me to connect to those elements that have been lost.

What I aspire to do through my art is to create a window through which my audience is invited to peek into the artistic genius of cultures that are often overlooked. There is a sophistication and aesthetic refinement that comes from generations of passed down knowledge that often go unacknowledged. Many of these cultures have an understanding of art that is deeply intrinsic and metaphysical that we can learn much from.

Where do you seek inspiration for each of your designs?



art around the world have a name for that feeling you receive. For instance, from listening to an exceptional piece of music, Portuguese has “saudade” and Arabic, “tarab.” When it comes to lifestyle, the Danish have the concept of “hygge,” which has become very popular lately—that intangible quality of conscious appreciation and pleasure.

The desert has been an endless source of inspiration for me. Desert cultures have some of the most stunning color palettes and patterns in my opinion. I find my inspiration in traditional jewelry, rugs, and ceramics, as well as shapes and colors in nature.





















# FRONT + MAIN

A blog from west elm



