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Room with a View

Anderson Ranch ceramicist Louise Deroualle's quarantine project comes to fruition

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From Louise Deroualle's new series "Coberta de Nuvens." Courtesy Anderson Ranch Arts Center



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In the early days of the novel coronavirus stay-home period in spring 2020, the artist Louise Deroualle revisited an early work of hers titled “In solitude there is consolation.”

She’d made these ceramic landscapes in graduate school, inspired by views of the flatlands of Lincoln, Nebraska. Now in lockdown in her apartment on the campus of Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, where Deroualle is ceramic studio coordinator, she found comfort in looking out of her window, across the Roaring Fork Valley to the forest above Woody Creek, and especially in the clouds and moving overhead. She has photographed the view almost daily, capturing it in all seasons and all weather in hundreds of images since 2018.

Spending so much time alone through the pandemic, she sought to make new ceramic landscapes that might capture that view and speak to the comfort it provided through the grief and uncertainty of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

She had aimed to complete this new body of work by September 2020, when she was among the featured artists in the Red Brick Center for the Arts “Resilience” group show.

But Deroualle didn’t get the conceptual and physical pieces of the project together before then. That experience taught Deroualle a valuable lesson so many Americans have learned in the past year about letting go of pre-pandemic notions of productivity and achievement, going easy on herself and letting the work take its time to ripen.

“I feel pressure, like I need to be producing all the time,” said Deroualle, who balances her artistic practice with her administrative role at the Ranch, which has called on her to lead through the pandemic’s multitude of new protocols and program changes. “It took me a few months until I was just like, ‘It’s not time yet. It will come and things will evolve.’ Sometimes things have to be on hold.”

The original body of “In solitude” work was born out of Deroualle’s jarring move to Nebraska from her native Sao Paulo, Brazil. This follow-up would instead be about a journey inward during the public health crisis.

As she made tiles for the new work, she found it needed to be physically more rigid in form than the earlier iteration. She pressed them into frames to shape them, and made them very thick – about an inch – shaping bulky forms. They’re literally substantive and weighty works, matching their emotional heft of their subject and, Deroualle suggested, the resilience this historical moment has demanded.

“It has something to do with COVID, too, like how we’re feeling so constrained and how we’re being pushed to adapt to this new thing,” Deroualle explained. “It was not a freeing thing, it was very contained.”

It took much exploration to figure out how to finish them. The original “In solitude” pieces had used slips and glazes, but that wasn’t working for Deroualle anymore.

“I did a lot of trials with glazes and I was just very unhappy because they were not communications what I wanted,” she explained.

Frustrated over the summer, she put it on hold for awhile and turned to other projects, in hopes that some new creative solutions would germinate in her mind during the time away.

Eventually, in December – nine months after she’d begun – Deroualle tried using watercolor. The paint, with all its gauzy impressionistic properties, turned out to be just the right way for Deroualle to represent her perspective and the view from her room and the dreamy sense of calm it provided.

On top of the paint she put a layer of encaustic, further fogging up the view.

“The work is personal to me,” she said. “Looking at the view of the sky was my way of finding peace, a way to reconnect with myself. ... It was my way of coping with COVID.”

In the end, the title of the work changed to “Coberta de Nuvens,” Portuguese for “Cloud Covered,” inspired by the blanket-like emotional warmth that the view has provided the artist. And the public will get to see it soon. Deroualle recently landed the new work an April exhibition at the Carbondale Clay Center in a dual show with the ceramicist Molly Peacock titled “Nas Nuvens – Perspectives of Two.”

“I find connection and a sense of belonging by looking out and up to these ever-changing formations,” she wrote in an artist statement. “Touched by light, they constantly change colors; touched by wind they are always moving and transforming. These clouds give me peace and perspective. They make the uncertain more bearable.”

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