

# ABSTRACT REPRESENTATION

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Louise  
Deroualle

by Angela Youngman



Time, space, and identity dominate the work of ceramic artist Louise Deroualle. Her aim is to make people stop, think, and contemplate the subtlety of the surface, and the layers that helped create it. “The contemporary world is flooded with excess information. We go through information fast and don’t give time to interact with it,” Deroualle says. “My work is a counterpoint to this contemporary speed: I intend my work to be revealed through a quiet and introspective moment of interaction between the viewer and the piece. Through careful observation, the work unfolds itself and allows the viewer to access the many different layers of material and meaning, rewarding them for their engagement.”

Her work is undoubtedly different and thought provoking, utilizing cracked surfaces inlaid one on top of another with fluid colors that merge and contrast. Each piece includes a variety of materials and is fired several times until the right surface is achieved. It’s abstract, innovative, and introspective.

“My work is a reflection of how I perceive, understand, and assimilate the culture I am inserted into,” Deroualle explains. “Each individual filters the world through their own lenses, and my lenses are focused on the natural world and landscape, in material and process,” she adds. “The physical nature of the ceramic materials gives my work a present sense of the real, while the surfaces invite the viewer to create their own interpretation of an imagined place. This dual perception of my work creates a conceptual overlap between object and image, reality and imagination, physicality and emotion. It is a place of reflection and understanding.”

### The Beginning of a Career

It is a ceramic style that reflects a variety of different traditions, ideas, and influences. Deroualle began her career working as an apprentice to Brazilian ceramic artist, Lucia Ramenzoni.

She then moved to the US in 2014 to complete a masters degree in ceramics at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, culminating in her thesis exhibition entitled “Substrao para Devaneios.” This was followed by a residency at the Roswell Artist-in-Residence program in Roswell, New Mexico, during which she held two exhibitions of her work: “Between the Shadow and the Soul,” and “Dancing Along the Way,” reflecting the way cultural and language barriers can generate emotional reactions.

The work of other artists like Yasuhisa Kohyama, Takuro Kuwata, Anna Maria Maiolino, Aneta Regel, and Brian Rochefort have also provided Deroualle with room for thought due to the way these artists allow the ceramic materials to retain their character, while imbuing incredible energy into each piece. Like these artists, Deroualle focuses on material exploration and introspection, exploring how the process of making becomes part of the work of art.

### A Sense of Discovery

No two pieces created by Deroualle are ever the same. She uses lots of different materials, depending on what she is seeking to achieve each time. Terra-cotta clays are her favorite as she loves the rich, warm shades that give greater depth when layering the materials. She also uses porcelain, white stoneware, and a special dark-maroon-chocolate clay body that she developed during her



**Opposite:** *Telling the Wind My Gratitude*, 18 in. (46 cm) in length, stoneware, slip, glazes, 2018. **1** *Shadows and Reflections*, 22 in. (56 cm) in height, brick clay, slip, glaze, volcanic rock, 2016. **2** *Untitled*, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, brick clay, slip, glaze, volcanic rock, 2016. **1, 2** Photos: John David Richardson.

studies at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. In addition, there are many different slips and glazes used to create the varied surface textures such as leather-hard slips, casting slip, crackle slip, and cone 04 glazes including satin, crawling, and sugary. The resultant works allow varying layers of colors and shades to appear, encouraging viewers to look closely at the piece so that the final impact is much deeper than the initial impression.

“I am driven by curiosity and a sense of discovery that develops as I investigate materials, their properties, and the way they react when layered on top of each other and subjected to heat,” Deroualle says. “I also utilize rocks and minerals found in nature, such as lava rocks and mica flakes. These materials become an abstract representation of myself. The lava rock is porous and light, yet



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**3** *Self Portrait as a Train*, 6 ft. 8 in. (2 m) in length, brick clay, slip, glaze, volcanic rock, 2016. *Photo: John David Richardson.* **4** *Veiled Emotions*, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, stoneware, slip, glazes, 2018. **5** *The Secret Hidden Within Each Being*, 16 in. (41 cm) in height, stoneware, slip, glazes, 2018.



strong and hard, and simultaneously solid and permeable. When subjected to heat, it can retain its shape, start to melt, or can melt completely, fusing to the layer underneath it and behaving differently according to its environment.” This creates some superb color effects, with shades almost bleeding into one another.

Deroualle continues, “Mica is an abundant mineral, and consists of many sheets of sediments layered on top of each other. I peel off these layers as a reflection on the idea of identity construction through successive overlapping of information.” The resultant layering effect helps to encourage viewers to think about how personal views can change and adapt as new information is added, creating graceful transitions from one to another.

Deroualle likes the surfaces of her pieces to be similar to her own skin. “They are thin and fragile barriers between the internal and external world,” she describes. “And like skin, the cracks, blisters, and wrinkles that texture the surfaces of my works record time and stories, veiling and yet revealing who we are. By subverting the traditional order of layering glazes over slips, I utilize the fluidity of the glaze layer underneath with stress between the fluid and dry layers as a symbol of my inner world of emotions as well as my cultural identity.”

The blue-and-white pieces exemplify this action of change, of layering and symbolism. Viewers become very responsive to the varying textures.

Other compositions involve modular elements, all of which are thin layers cut from the same block of clay. Deroualle uses these layers to explore the concept of identity through successive overlapping of information as a reflection on her journey of self-discovery.

All the pieces relate closely to each other, with the negative space between used to influence the way viewers see the works. She comments, “In *Self Portrait as a Train*, each of the seven thin slabs are set apart the same distance, intended to create a rhythm, a steady pace. Its spacing relates to the train wagon and the train itself: the vehicle that transports goods from point A to B, and never stops, is always on the move, bringing, leaving and receiving, allowing and being part of the exchange.”

### Stop, Observe, and Ponder

The combination of whites and blues found in the work shown in her Roswell exhibitions is contemplative, echoing traditional

blue-and-white Chinese color schemes with a contemporary twist. Deroualle says that the choice of blue and white represents cultural exchange between different people and cultures: from China to the Middle East, and then to Europe and ultimately Brazil, which was a colony of Portugal. A distinctive style of blue-and-white tiles was developed in Portugal and made its way to Brazil. Studying the designs from her homeland resulted in the use of blue and white in her work to imply cultural exchange and interchange, how cultures are formed and transformed, influenced, adapted, and become fluid.

The concept of cultural exchange and development was developed further in Deroualle’s *Seedpod* series of sculptures in which the surfaces envelope anthropomorphic vessels that carry the potential for life inside. Each piece is tactile and beautiful, encouraging viewers to stop, observe, and ponder their meaning. There are no flat surfaces in any of her creations, as all the work is layered, and designed with organic shapes, curves, and colors—particularly blues, browns, and whites. The small size of the pieces communicates a sense of intimacy.

Yet more new influences are set to affect the development of her future work. Deroualle has joined the staff at Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, Colorado, as the studio coordinator of ceramics. She says, “Alongside being in charge of their ceramics facilities, I will have my own studio where I’ll keep making my own artwork. There are so many amazing artists from all over the world and across media that come through Anderson Ranch, that I’m already excited to see how this new experience will influence my work and way of thinking.”

Unlike her other studio apprenticeships and residency experiences, her position at Anderson Ranch is a full-time job. It is also very demanding but it has made her start considering how to create a balance in her life, seeking to understand her role and what it means.

With explorations of identity and culture very much at the heart of her artistic endeavors, it will be interesting to see how these new experiences impact on her work.

**the author** *Angela Youngman is a freelance journalist and author. She writes for a wide range of publications and websites, and has written numerous books.*