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SUBSTRATO PARA DEVANEIOS

Louise Deroualle

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, louise_deroualle@hotmail.com

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SUBSTRATO PARA DEVANEIOS

by

Louise Deroualle

A THESIS

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For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

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SUBSTRATO PARA DEVANEIOS

Louise Deroualle, M.F.A.

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Advisor: Margaret Bohls

Clay is my *substrato para devaneios*, my *foundation for daydreams*. Clay is earth, a humble, common material that represents the possibility of growth and thus, life. As my *substrato*, clay gives me stability and nourishes me, allowing me to communicate with and relate to the world. It has the ability to register touch and gesture; it records a moment in time.

My work is an abstracted representation of me: my identity, the way in which I relate to others and understand the environment I am in. I use ceramic materials to create formal abstractions that reveal different facets—physical, experiential, emotional—of myself. Working with clay is my form of being.

The artwork I create with this clay is influenced by the different cultural experiences to which I have been exposed—from my upbringing in Brazil to my study here in Nebraska—and the way those interactions build my identity. Cultural and language barriers provoke a sense of displacement and generate a wide range of emotional reactions that shape my perception of and interaction with the outer world. These encounters can make me feel curious, allowing me to learn more about my own culture and my way of interacting with the environment around me, but other times frustration prevails, and I feel lonely and misunderstood. I translate these feelings into my objects through expressive surfaces created by the layering of ceramic materials. Like my own skin, the surfaces of my pieces are thin and fragile barriers between the internal and external world. 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.

Slips and glazes have endless possibilities of behavior, and respond differently when layered on top of particular clays and fired to different temperatures. Slips are made of clay, a dry and solid material, while glazes are primarily made out of glass, a liquid substance. I subvert the traditional order of layering glazes over slips and utilize the fluidity of the glaze layer underneath as a symbol of my inner world of emotions as well as my cultural identity. The stress between the fluid and dry layers of materials results in a partial glimpse into the emotional interior. The slips become an external barrier, while glazes turn into an extremely powerful emotion that always finds its way to the outer reality.

The lava rocks in some of my works provide another *substrato*—like clay, lava is a primal element in much of the environment around us. Porous and light, yet strong and hard, lava, like me, is simultaneously solid and permeable. Further, when subjected to heat, the rock can retain its shape, start to melt, or can melt completely, fusing to the layer underneath it. The lava rock behaves differently according to its environment, as do I.

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. My process of creating each work is a journey; intuition and intellect work in a dialectic manner and create a place for my own daydreams to emerge. As human beings we are constantly changing, so I welcome unexpected results and possibilities in my work. My intuitive approach to the making process keeps my studio practice alive and stimulating, while keeping me engaged and excited by new discoveries.

To explore the idea of identity construction through successive overlapping of information, I've created some pieces as thin and fragile slabs cut from the same block of clay, layers peeled from the same body as a reflection on my journey of self-discovery. Other pieces are thick and heavy, resembling ancient ceramic tablets. Like early cultures, the markings on my tablet forms record and communicate information, emotional states of feeling exposed and vulnerable through my process of self-discovery.

Ultimately, although my works are abstracted representations of me, they are structured and presented in a way that allows viewers to engage and enter the pieces. The concrete and 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. It is an invitation to *devaneios*—a reverie one indulges in while awake. This dual perception of my work creates a conceptual overlap between object and image, reality and imagination, physicality and emotion. The constant presence of opposites in my work creates a dialectic tension and allows my sculptures to be a place of reflection and understanding of the self. My work conceives meaning through the language of abstraction. Subtlety plays a veiling role in my sculptures; I intend the 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.











