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Simone DeSousa

Founder/Director/Artist
Simone DeSousa Gallery
Detroit, Michigan

Gallery: www.simonedesousagallery.com

Studio: www.simonedesousa.com

Photo by Audrey Long

A Brazilian born artist and curator, Simone DeSousa is the founder and director of Simone DeSousa Gallery, a new gallery project in Cass Corridor, Midtown Detroit. The gallery, which launched in 2008, was originally known as Re:View Contemporary and represents national and international artists such as Adam Shirley, Cedric Tai, Ian Swanson, Kate Silvio, Marie T. Hermann, Matthew Zacharias, Megan Heeres, Melanie Manos, Sharon Que, and Timothy van Laar. As an abstract painter, Simone has maintained a studio practice at her Russell Industrial Center studio space since 1998. Her most recent solo exhibition *Calculating with Absence* opened at the Holding House art space in Southwest Detroit in April of this year. Simone has exhibited extensively in the Detroit area, as well as in New York and San Francisco. Her work is also part of several private and corporate collections, including the University of Michigan, Compuware, Bon Secours Hospital, Precision Capital in New York, and the Luciano Benetton Collection. Simone earned a bachelor's degree in architecture and urbanism from the University of Brasilia, Brazil. In her professional life, she has also bridged the fields of art and design, working as a designer and art director. Simone resides in Midtown Detroit.



FAVORITES

Book: *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki

Destination: Anywhere that inspires me to connect with what is happening now.

Motto: A quiet mind is all you need.

Artist: Agnes Martin

THE QUERY

Where were you born?

In a small town in the northeast region of Brazil, but I grew up in Brasilia, Brazil's iconic modern capital which has been my biggest default visual influence/reference.

What were some of the passions and pastimes of your earlier years?

Drawing and figurative drawing from an early age of just four years old throughout my teenage years. When I was four, my Mom recalls that I loved to tell strangers how excited I was that I was going to be five years old, and that I loved to draw pictures (faces and portraits arising from my mind, not a depiction of actual people). I also enjoyed dancing and martial arts in my teens; practicing Karate for a few years which is very popular in Brazil. Brazil is home to the largest Japanese population outside Japan.

What led to your decision to commit to painting in 1998?

I had experienced an exciting and layered background which included being an intuitive artist (growing up), and early academic training in architecture with parallel training as a graphic designer. In 1998, I joined an artist collective at the Russell Industrial Center in Detroit with students or recent graduates from the College for Creative Studies. Relationships developed through this collective and paved my experience as an artist in the city. I still hold my painting practice at that same studio to this date. Being in the right community, I finally found a sense of belonging which made the path clear.

How did this focus transition into your calling as an abstract painter?

For the longest time, I wanted to obscure the fact that I was academically trained as an architect because I just wanted to be a very good painter. Now, in the context of contemporary art practice, I see how valuable it is that I've had a very unique and layered education/experience.

Why does this form of artistic expression suit you?

I am certainly no longer interested in being defined just as a painter. My primary focus is with space - not only in its basic physical manifestation, but with investigations of psychological space or spiritual space, meaning the natural dimensions we are still unable to completely measure/explain that connect with our sense of self in the world. The painting process is very much in alignment with my natural inclination toward existential considerations.

Do you have a creative process or approach?

I always work at my studio whether I have a project deadline or not. I simply love to be in the space of uncertainty and experimentation where I know the transient nature of things (and ideas) is not only expected, but also appreciated. Anything that can be deeply observed can become a trigger for a new body of work.

How did you get your start in the art world?

I have shown my work extensively, beginning with submissions to local group shows in galleries and artist-run spaces. At the start, it was very much about taking any and all opportunities to present the work. Over time, you begin to discern which opportunities actually support the work. Contemporary practice is vast now with the introduction of the internet as both a tool in the creative process and in generating exposure for the works.

What led to the decision to launch Re:View, now known as Simone DeSousa Gallery?

I had been practicing in the city of Detroit as an artist for a few years and knew as an insider that, although we had a great supportive creative community and access to affordable studio space, we lacked an infrastructure of galleries/art spaces committed to supporting contemporary art practice. A gallery scene (including small and larger spaces with varied focuses) and a critical mass of buyers is essential to support the careers of artists who choose to practice here. My gallery emerged from that realization and a commitment to being here. Eight years ago, we were in fact the first small contemporary art gallery to open in Detroit proper. Now, with the city's "comeback," we are witnessing the phenomenon of galleries moving from the suburbs to Detroit, as well as outside galleries opening projects in the city. For me, as a creative in the community, it was very much a step in the organic evolution of my engagement with the city.

What typically goes into the selection of the artists that you'll work with?

I am interested in artists whose works combine conceptual depth with the consideration of the object execution as well. It is a specific focus, which again connects to an appreciation that comes from my layered background in fine art, design, and architecture. As our gallery reputation evolved over the years, I also started having access to more established artists, which brings a different dynamic into the project and exhibition programming.

How has your work evolved throughout the years?

In my painting practice the works have evolved from being lusciously layered and multicolored to more quiet, minimal, deconstructed paintings that exist as small installations as well. At the beginning, it was about the ability to express myself through the painting medium and allowing all to come through. This evolved into a more focused, self-reflective, and aware of the "why," practice. Each language extinguishes itself over time, allowing for something new to emerge.

Do you have a favorite artistic resource that you turn to?

I keep an eye on all the major art publications (print and online) regularly, but I primarily turn to non-art related publications for inspiration for my work. The more obscure, the better.

How would you describe your aesthetic?

My form of abstraction is very much anchored in my intuitive architectural language and Brazilian cultural heritage. It is a unique mix with an endless reservoir of references.

From where do you draw inspiration?

I am very interested in the Brazilian Neoconcretismo era and artists.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

To practice knowing myself, and that the answer to all things resides there. That focus keeps it always interesting, through good and challenging times.

How do you typically spend your downtime?

With my dapple dachshund Suzi-Moo chilling at the Willys Overland Lofts in Midtown Detroit (upstairs from our gallery) or at Belle Isle Park, my favorite urban nature sanctuary where I go to reconnect with myself, jog, and reflect on life. I particularly enjoy residing in a neighborhood where I know most of my neighbors, residents, and small business owners alike, and can find real quality of life through meaningful everyday connections.

What do you know for sure?

That life is intrinsically transient and that we cannot hold to things or situations. I believe it is good practice to remind myself that it is always ok, no matter what is there or not (smile).

Is there a book or film that has changed you?

Many books and films have affected me, and as exterior agents have been great triggers, but I would have to say meditation practice has been the most transformational element in my life.

What's on the horizon for the Simone DeSousa Gallery?

I am very excited about the latest evolution for our project: this summer's launch of our limited edition space EDITION. The Gallery and EDITION will be side by side in our current location in Cass Corridor, Midtown Detroit. On the gallery side we will continue our strong programming focused primarily on solo exhibitions by national and international artists; while the EDITION space will focus on presenting an ever-changing collection of accessible and collectible limited edition works that exist in the realms of both art and design. Our all-day launch party for EDITION will take place on Saturday, July, 16 from noon to 6 p.m. If you are in Detroit that day, we would love to share our new space with you!