



Interview With Dorland Resident, Debra

On a chill-filled, windy, Saturday, February 18th, 2023, I interviewed Debra Thomas-Zasadzinski, a third time resident of Dorland Mountain Arts. We were seated at a little table in front of the actively crackling woodstove in Markham. It was a pleasure to spend time with Debra, she exudes positivity and possibility. Her love of life and art, her attention to details and focus give her work an extra touch of magic, a sense of joy.

Debra, what does art mean to you?

Art is a way of more fully experiencing what I see in my environment. If I see a beautiful flower, I draw it there or photograph it to draw at home. It's a way of expressing myself and I need to do that.

What would you like to say to Dorland...

Dorland gave me a first sense of my own legitimacy as an artist; that I could come and find focus and fulfill my need to create as a professional. But on a personal level, it has become a part of my story and I feel like I am now a part of the Dorland family of artists.

How did you hear of Dorland?

I first learned of Dorland when I was surfing online for art residencies and discovered that Dorland was close by, a perfect-for-me location, and it was the 1st residency that I ever applied to, I was so excited! I discovered the importance of having time away from everyday family life, sometimes we just need to not be needed.

What is it about Dorland that brings you back?

I've realized that it is actually possible to return again and again and find the same peace that I found the first time I visited, that's why I keep coming back. Natural environment is the draw. I'm obsessed with nature at a micro level. Especially coming in a new season, this time in February... it's so rich! I love the privacy, the way everything is laid out. You can be in your own world or take advantage of opportunities to socialize, such as the resident social hours. Art can be isolating, it's a nice balance to meet with other artists, or not. As an art residency, Dorland is very doable for me.

Describe your current project...

My project now and for the last year and a half is drawing. I am letting go of painting to focus on drawing.

I started drawing the Danced series first. "I Danced at the Party." It was the beginning of the greeting cards and came from a real life experience.



Work in progress "Succulent Collection" © 2023



"I Danced at the Party, No.3" © 2021

My Florals started during Covid, I planted a flower garden and made flower arrangements to bring to people, it was a bunch of varieties of cosmos, wildflowers and herbs, and I'm drawing a series of Farmer's market foods. But it was my series, "I Danced at the Party," that began – me – doing my art for me, not commissioned.

I have done work for invitational exhibitions at galleries, themed gallery shows, a lot of commissioned work for clients, but drawing for me means that I can disappear and relax into a meditative state and create. I like to work in series and I know I'm finished with a

series when I feel that I've covered the subject, the Dancers series is about twenty pieces or so. When I first approached the owner of Crème, I envisioned food, pastry greeting cards for her bakery. She accepted, but asked me to do florals... I could do that!

My cards have been selling well!
And my card business is growing for me, mostly my Florals and my Love Letters to Montsoreau, (Lettres d'Amour à Montsoreau), drawings of the buildings and environment of Montsoreau in France. I fell in love with the town. And again this year, friends have offered to let me stay at their home in France; a winery is interested in selling my greeting cards in the Love Letters series and has suggested possible exhibition venues.



"Summer Garden" © 2022

My work is well received in France, there is just such a live daily appreciation of art. Epicurean – art is a part of life, not just an enrichment. It's inspiring to me!

Where does your focus come from?

I've always been a very focused person regardless of what I'm doing – now, doing art that makes me happy – joyful, if I know that I am going to make something that brings me joy, it's easy to focus on art that makes me happy and what I find is that it makes others happy, too.

Who are some artists that you love, and why?

The fearlessness of Frida Kahlo. John Singer Sargent for portraiture; if I painted portraits, I'd want to paint like him – I also love Van Gogh for the movement in his strokes, and I've stood in front of his painting, *The Irises*, the painting is so three dimensional and I was so moved by the linen canvas that showed through the paint, giving such a sense of his physical presence.

Debra, are there art supplies / Art Stores that you'd like to recommend?

I actually order from Jerry's Artarama – jerrysartarama.com, delivery is quick!
And in person, I visit Blick Art Materials in Fullerton 601 N Placentia Ave Fullerton CA.
I use Legion Stonehenge paper, smooth, bright white. I use the back of it, it's smoother,
and I also like Canson Bristol, smooth.

What is one thing that people might not know about you?

I want to live and make art in France!

Find Debra's work for sale:

Crème Bakery 116 Harvard Ave Claremont CA
Sherwood Florist 404 West Foothill Blvd Claremont CA 91711

Check these galleries for shows:

The Square i Gallery 110 Harvard Ave N. Claremont CA 91711
Ahmad Shariff Gallery 107 Harvard Ave N Claremont CA 91711

Debra is a member of The Art Mob Market, a group of artists with semi-annual shows and sales at different Claremont locations. To find out more, visit https://m.facebook.com/ArtMobMarket/?ref=br_rs

Contact Debra by email: debthomzas@msn.com



"Eucalyptus and Walnut," © 2018 colored pencil



"Miss Meeps," © 2021 oil on gesso board