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HELLO DARKNESS

The poetic and melancholy mood of the Nordic soul

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THE ART OF ATTACHMENT

It takes months to achieve the fragile shape that defines Sandra Davolio's creations. She becomes so attached to each piece that she misses them when they leave her studio. And if something goes wrong in the crafting process, she destroys the piece with a hammer.

SANDRA DAVOLIO earned a degree as a ceramist in 1985, but the vocation was in her blood long before that. As a child in Italy she was drawn to Greek vases and Etruscan artefacts; she would stand in museums for hours, admiring the classic shapes sculpted by anonymous creators. Today, she creates fragile yet resilient porcelain vases which she misses dearly when they leave her workshop in an old Copenhagen warehouse.

I WAS AN ADULT when I first realised, to my joy, that being a ceramist was a real profession and that I, too, could be like one of those ancient and anonymous makers. A friend who worked with ceramics in a centre for refugees opened my eyes to the craft. It was back in the 1970s when Chilean refugees were helped to assimilate by the local community. As I stepped into the ceramics workshop, I instantly fell in love. I became a regular visitor and also discovered a tremendously generous aspect of my new country, Denmark, to which I had recently moved from Italy.

IT TOOK ME SEVERAL YEARS to build up the courage to apply to the Royal Academy's School of Design. My years at the school were wonderful; every day felt like a new pearl on a string that became longer and more beautiful over time.

ON A RECENT FIELD TRIP to London, I visited the Sir Percival David Collection at the British Museum, a treasure trove of Chinese ceramics. They looked good enough to eat. When I arrived back home, I was eager to test the techniques and materials I saw: the glazing, the shapes, the firing processes. It's hard to describe the happiness and excitement I feel when I open the kiln to view the results of an extensive work process.

WAKING UP EARLY in the morning or working late at night to finish a project has never felt like a chore. In theory, I can work anywhere, at any time. When I was on maternity leave I installed a pottery wheel in the bathroom and transported the results in a pram.

MY CURRENT FOCUS is on creating a wall relief for a project in Australia. I've had the idea for a long time, and my dream is for it to cover an entire wall – or preferably an entire room.

RELOCATING from the countryside to the city in 2000 marked a turning point in my work. In the city, I could no longer practise my passion for firing with wood and gas, which forced me to rethink my process. I came up with the concept of city ceramics, which I have been refining ever since. Tall, slender skyscraper silhouettes or small, plump balloon-like shapes are covered with concentric slats that both blur and enhance the inner core.

AT THE MOMENT, I only work in porcelain and the slats of my designs have become softer, friendlier. Everything is more clean, organic, white, ethereal… I like the fact that the material is fragile yet strong, even in the thinnest possible version, and that it resists and challenges me. The process is always unpredictable and two months' work can end catastrophically in the kiln. If even the smallest error occurs, a large hammer is the only way forward.

I MISS MY OBJECTS when they're sold. I feel like creating a twin, which is a bad idea. The only thing to do is to try to make something even better next time. I still feel that I haven't yet made my best vase.

A PHONE CALL BACK IN 2008 was a career milestone. The gallerist Joern Lohmann called me from New York; my English was only good enough to understand the importance of the conversation, which led to my international breakthrough. My first exhibition in New York was an epiphany: seeing the customers lean in to get a better look at my work and subsequently buying it without knowing the creator behind is the greatest compliment. My relationship to Joern has since evolved into a beautiful friendship.

I REALLY FEEL the responsibility that goes with using Earth's natural resources to create objects that have no other function than to make the world a more beautiful place.

After hand-shaping the undulating layers of each piece, Sandra Davolio carefully files and smoothens them to an almost translucent finish.

It's easy to feel like a bull in a china shop when visiting Sandra Davolio's studio, which is filled with expressive works she calls 'city ceramics.' Her layered silhouettes are often tall and slender and short and plump.