



EVOCATIONS: THE ART OF LOUANNE LAROCHE

April Showers

By Michele Roldán-Shaw

EDITORS NOTE:

I have always admired Louanne LaRoche's work every time I would walk into Four Corners Fine Art and Framing. I was always greeted by Charlene Gardner's endearing smile. Louanne's work is always so colorful, free and unencumbered strokes, and expressive in many ways. Well, this month I asked Michele to interview her for The Breeze. Enjoy!

Louanne LaRoche, a fixture of the local art scene since the 1980s, will unveil new pieces this month at Four Corners Gallery in downtown Bluffton. "Evocations" opens March 21st with a reception from 4 to 7 p.m. and runs through April 30th. LaRoche's finely colored depictions of Lowcountry life—oystermen in bateaux, ladies in church hats, hunting dogs, marsh tackies and deer—capture everyday moments with a subtle, poignant beauty. Her latest collection promises rich feeling thanks to the Caribbean influences LaRoche sought by traveling to Belize.

"The community there is very reflective of how the Lowcountry was, and how it can be today in certain niches," says LaRoche, who has spent quite a bit of time in Belize but returned recently for the first time in 17 years. "The roots of both communities go back to Africa, which we see in Gullah traditions such as blue doors and certain foods etc. I saw a lot of changes this time in Belize, but life on the porches and in the marketplaces was still the same, and it translates clearly to this area."

LaRoche works in acrylic, charcoal and pencil on paper and canvas, and paints primarily from photographs that she takes, finds, or is given. "I love looking through people's family albums," she confesses. "I'm always searching for a little gem—the way somebody's postured, the activity itself, how spaces are blocked out in the image, or just the subjects interacting. I'm interested in light, form, color and line. But my focus is on documenting community by depicting how people relate to one another, as well as events and a lifestyle that's diminishing."



Meetup



Julie

In addition to LaRoche's recent work, the show celebrates her friendship with the late Hilton Head artist Danielle De Mers, whose drawings and prints will be on display and sold to benefit a nonprofit reflective of De Mer's spirit. Her father was a successful artist and illustrator who opened a gallery in Harbour Town during the early years of development, and the summers Danielle spent here were the occasion for an enduring friendship to spring up between her and LaRoche. Together they were instrumental in nurturing the budding local art scene. At one point LaRoche owned the famous Red Piano Gallery on Hilton Head, where she represented and was influenced by many local artists including De Mers, who passed away suddenly from a rare form of cancer several years ago.

"She was always super supportive of anything I was doing," said LaRoche, who often joined De Mers' printmaking classes. "She was intelligent, knowledgeable and totally present. And her

beautiful eye! Almost all of Danielle's work is figurative. It's all about the essence, the stroke, the wash. I guess I think of it as the haiku of painting. There's a lot of heart there. It's like asking what you can say in the minimum amount of words—what can you say in the minimum amount of illustration? How do you get to the essence?"

LaRoche's constant exploration of her craft was fueled and her imagination emboldened by the recent time in Belize. She describes her visit to a little community untouched by tourism and founded by ancestors from Sierra Leone, which reminded LaRoche so vividly of her time on St. Helena Island in the '80s. Spending the day at a public park on the beach, she watched Belizeans swimming, picnicking, boating, playing soccer, fishing off the dock, making baskets and nets, and enjoying all the facets of traditional coastal life. The photos she shot that day served as references to capture the heart of life here in the Lowcountry.





Hemlock Still

"I'm very respectful of where I point my camera," says LaRoche. "Often it starts by just striking up a conversation, and sometimes it involves being vulnerable with your subjects. I think with anybody, if you are really present and you look them in the eye and care—which I do; like if they look tired, I am interested in why—then any connection you make goes deeper. There is this bonding between the subject matter and my heart, a connecting cord. If I can communicate that in my painting then it doesn't matter where it is, people will say 'This reminds me of when I would sit on my grandmother's porch shelling peas.' If it evokes a response like that, a spiritual connection, I have succeeded. I want my paintings to be alive with emotional content."



Just Looking

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LOUANNE LaROCHE
DANIELLE DeMERS
Evocations
Paintings / Drawings / Monotypes

OPENING RECEPTION: **THURSDAY, MARCH 21ST**

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