MI TIERRA ARTIST DANIELA EDBURG REVISITS DU TO DISCUSS COLLABORATIVE ART PROCESS

By Camila Navarrette, Senior Journalism Major

This article by Camila Navarrette (DU ’17) first ran in The Denver Post’s YourHub on February 6, 2017. Navarette wrote it while serving as a Communications Intern at the Denver Art Museum.

Daniela Edburg, a mixed media artist working out of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, spent five weeks throughout October and November 2016 collaborating with students at the University of Denver to prepare for Uprooted, her contribution to the Denver Art Museum (DAM) exhibition Mi Tierra: Contemporary Artists Explore Place. Edburg revisited her time with the university at a January 19 lecture to discuss the artistic processes and collaborations of her installation.

In Mi Tierra, 13 Latino artists express personalized narratives of contemporary life in the American West. The site-specific installations tackle issues of displacement, adaptation, migration and cultural intersection. For Uprooted, Edburg converted seven Colorado elements—lichen, cheat grass, river rock, red rock, alpaca, grassland and tornadoes—into large textile objects to emphasize each object’s unique timeline and journey.

Edburg explained to the lecture audience that she began her creative process by examining the story of each of her chosen materials. Progressing from concepts of place to time and timelines, Edburg asked herself root questions from the perspectives of her objects: "If I were a rock, what would be my story?"

The purposeful inclusion of local resources led Edburg to explore the biology and story of each object. She soon realized that each component had its own migratory narrative unique to the Front Range. As the elements’ journeys took Edburg from continental Europe to the Rocky Mountains, these transformations between place emphasized her theme of the "absurdity" of preservation. When confronted with broader narratives from nature, she felt the personal stories that people value lose their impact.
"When I think of things like rock, our ethnicities and nationalities seem absurd," said Edburg.

Uprooted embodies Edburg's artistic aesthetic as a "laboratory where fiction and reality mix."

Working with yarn and felt sourced from local alpaca farms, Edburg crocheted and knit small-and large-scale representations of each natural resource. Set up like a traditional family room, Edburg's objects overtake and incorporate themselves into the Uprooted space. Felted red rocks sit in the center like bean bags while a wooden cabinet stays against the wall, housing small crocheted replicas of the natural components. Photographed portraits, each subject with their own migration story and stylized element, hang on a wall with the drama of traditional European painted portraits. Photographs of DAM staff and DU students in the Pawnee grasslands—"one of my favorite places on Earth," Edburg said—fill the opposite wall.

One factor consistent throughout Edburg's Mi Tierra installation is participation. Speaking to the DU community, Edburg acknowledged that participation, the "connection through materials, teaching of skill and conversation," is an integral aspect of her work. During her residency, moss-making sessions were open to the public at the School of Art and Art History and at the Museo de las Americas.

"The intention of the crochet sessions was to create community and teach a useful skill," said Sabrina Yagman, a BFA Studio Art student and one of the Hamilton Grant interns who worked with Edburg.

Yagman asserted that Edburg's process was "very exciting and always interesting, although quite laborious." Throughout the residency, Yagman said it became clear that "everyone has roots in other places." Her experiences with Edburg (including witnessing an alpaca birth the first day working on Lazy Daze Ranch in Elisabeth, CO), helped Yagman "reevaluate [her] studio practice, to be intuitive and to be more sophisticated, conceptually and aesthetically."

Mi Tierra: Contemporary Artists Explore Place opened on Feb. 19 on level four of the Hamilton Building at the DAM and is included in the price of general admission. The exhibition is organized by the Denver Art Museum, and is curated by Rebecca Hart, curator of modern and contemporary art at the DAM. An exhibition catalog will be available in The Shops and online.

*Image credit: Daniela Edburg, Uprooted, 2017. Alpaca, archival inkjet prints, maple, and mixed media. © Daniela Edburg*