

*italy, texas*

There's an old saying in Texas: "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes."

This adage about Texas's mercurial nature – the big skies and endless horizon that bring all manner of pressurized and sudden combinations of heat or cold or rain or drought or wind – is a hopeful reassurance when speaking to non-natives, who unfailingly complain about the weather.

And like most regional adages, this description of Texan meteorology is also a metaphor for its mythology. While weird things happen everywhere, Texas's stereotypes are so sunbaked into the American psyche that when one encounters a particularly cinematic scene there – a cowboy on horseback inside a Target supercenter; a gas station pumping Tejano music through an amped sound system, while longhorn cattle and burros roam the grass; a man in a camouflage jacket, smoking cigarettes with the windows rolled up in his truck, which bears the bumper sticker 'I ♥ being naked,' (true stories) – it's hard to question the state's irascible rap.

The work of Texan artist Sam Linguist hovers in this windy landscape of threatening weather and charming local eccentricity. In fact, his ceramic paintings look windblown. The rectangular, square or crescent forms are slightly skewed, as if torqued by the bipolar currents of a tornado and then thrown, only to be discovered later, lodged in the dirt, yards away from where they started. And like something archaeologically found, the images on the surface of these works are a random cohort of both abstract and representational things, sometimes painted in spare, loose strokes and other times clearly indicating some reality, like the artist's driver's license. Also like something unearthed, Linguist's sculptural paintings are marked on all sides. Often the glaze has leaked from the painting's flat surface onto the deep sides of the object, which is meant to look like an inverted casserole dish, and then baked there, memorializing an errant stream of pigment. Sometimes he dry brushes the sides just a little, making them look a bit used and forlorn, like the dish that has migrated from neighbor to neighbor. Other times, he paints wobbly stripes or dabs the sides with hazy bloopers of color, like a scene out the window of a fast car.

The backs of the paintings are not excluded from the artist's mark. Linguist often scrawls out the name of the work there – 'the trees look like skeletons in the winter,' 'our town or Akhenaten' are some gems – as well as his own signature, perhaps embracing the random gift of having a name meaning 'adept at language.' He's also reminding us that these works are ceramic, and so his name serves as a potter's backstamp on the bottom of a piece, aiding some future archeologist by indicating the work's maker. Like a dish or a cup, if you discover it, these are paintings to be picked up.

Lately, Linguist has deployed a series of crudely-welded metal armatures – reminiscent of antiquated moon towers used to light public spaces from the late 19th century into the mid-20th – to hold some of his paintings at jutting angles away from the wall, allowing people to see the backstamp and titles that would otherwise be hidden if the works were hung on the wall. One

feels an imminent sense of danger and responsibility around these fragile pieces, which precariously dangle on small metal pegs at the end of the skeletal structures. Bodies move more slowly and with greater care around these delicate objects, so as not to jostle them, because every body is its own place, and each makes its own weather.

- Lucia Arbery Simek