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## A Painter's Way Through Poetry

Thursday, May 20, 2010

by Eliza Ingle

"YOU GO WHERE your life takes you," mused artist **Kat Hastie** in a conversation we recently had about an upcoming show where visual art and poetry meet.

"Contemporary Charleston 2010: Influence" runs at the City Gallery at Waterfront Park from May 20 through July 3 with an exhibit that matches 10 poets with 10 painters who pulled names of the poets out of a hat. But in the end it was not as random as Kat Hastie originally thought.



A Kat Hastie piece based on a poem by Katherine Williams

The poet that she drew was **Katherine Williams**, the Charleston author of several chap books. "I began to read and absorb Katherine's poetry and the poem I landed on was *Hand* which was inspired by Wallace Stephen's poem, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*."

After many readings, Kat began to visualize the structure, colors, and materials she would use. She considered the rhythm and activity of the poem and related the images to her composition. "I collected things like blue wood, roofing

material, graphite, oil paint, and gold leaf—they all became part of a building process." She also related the size of the painting to poetry—which you hold in your hand as you read—thereby providing a sense of intimacy between reader and poet. Parts of the composition even came to resemble an open book.

## Hand

My body and your body and our body.  
The two-fingered hand.

Tracer of love in the dust.  
Spike in the tree.  
Bringer of madness.

She never follows the four winds,  
only the fifth—the cyclone—  
wind of the fist.

Two hands interlace, not ours.  
It is a charcoal of my other hands.

The hand fumbles at cats cradle in sunlight:  
it takes far longer  
when there are eyes involved.

Key to the dialect of midnight:  
the vowels are always shaped  
like fingers.

Even borderlines hold their breath  
at the sound of those hand-shadows  
parting the air.

Morning seeped in under the door  
as blue fog. Four hands  
cradled the steam above one clay mug.

Marionettes danced  
*The Firebird* across the stage  
as though their souls had fingers.

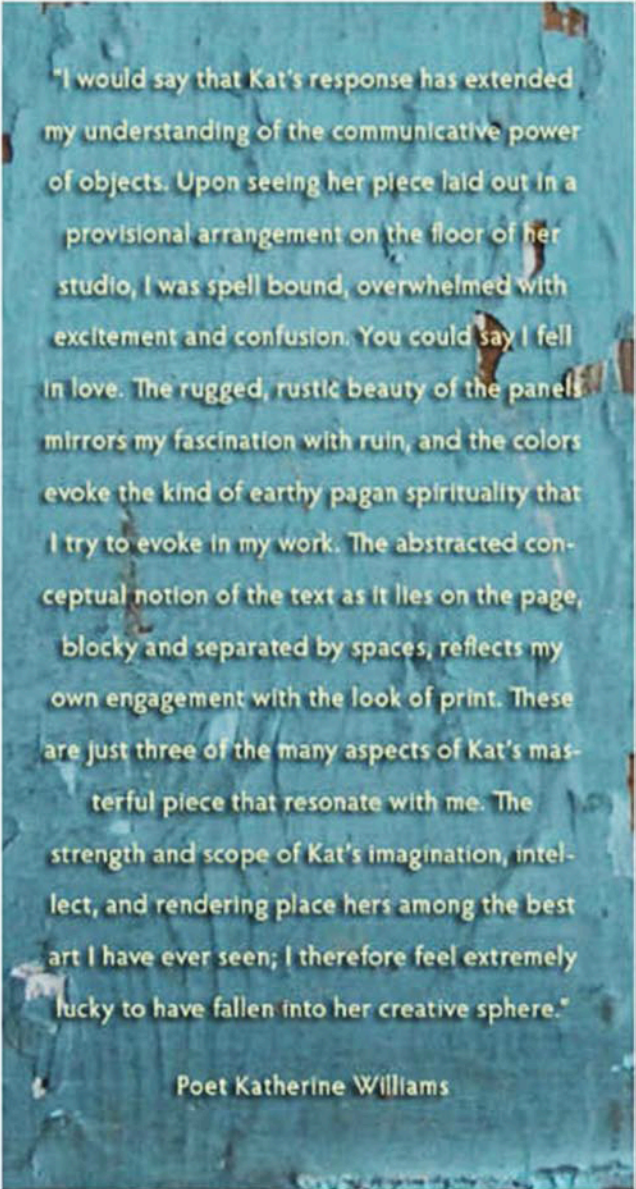
Not painting, but the act of painting:  
the presence of the absent hand.

How is the piano without hands  
unlike a painting without speech?

With a wave of the leader's hand,  
hundreds were lost.

One glimpse of the cosmos is forever.  
When read like braille,  
the stars sizzle in the hand.

~ Katherine Williams



"I would say that Kat's response has extended my understanding of the communicative power of objects. Upon seeing her piece laid out in a provisional arrangement on the floor of her studio, I was spell bound, overwhelmed with excitement and confusion. You could say I fell in love. The rugged, rustic beauty of the panels mirrors my fascination with ruin, and the colors evoke the kind of earthy pagan spirituality that I try to evoke in my work. The abstracted conceptual notion of the text as it lies on the page, blocky and separated by spaces, reflects my own engagement with the look of print. These are just three of the many aspects of Kat's masterful piece that resonate with me. The strength and scope of Kat's imagination, intellect, and rendering place hers among the best art I have ever seen; I therefore feel extremely lucky to have fallen into her creative sphere."

Poet Katherine Williams

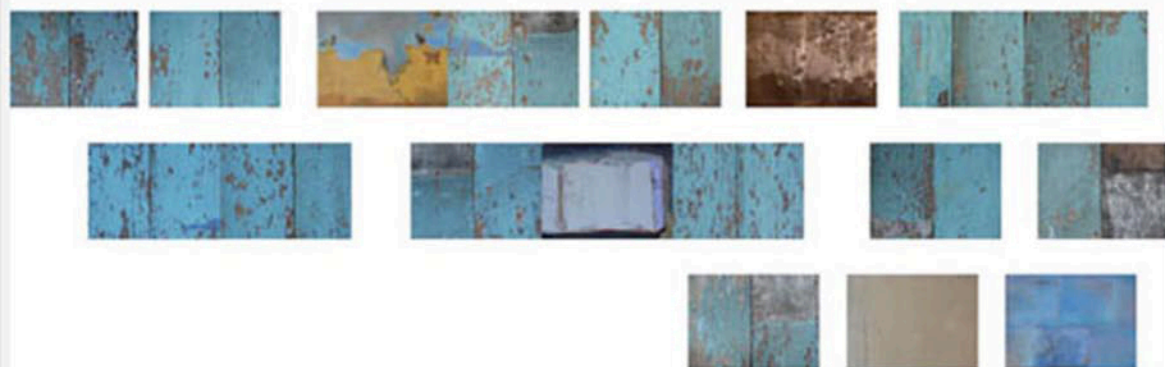
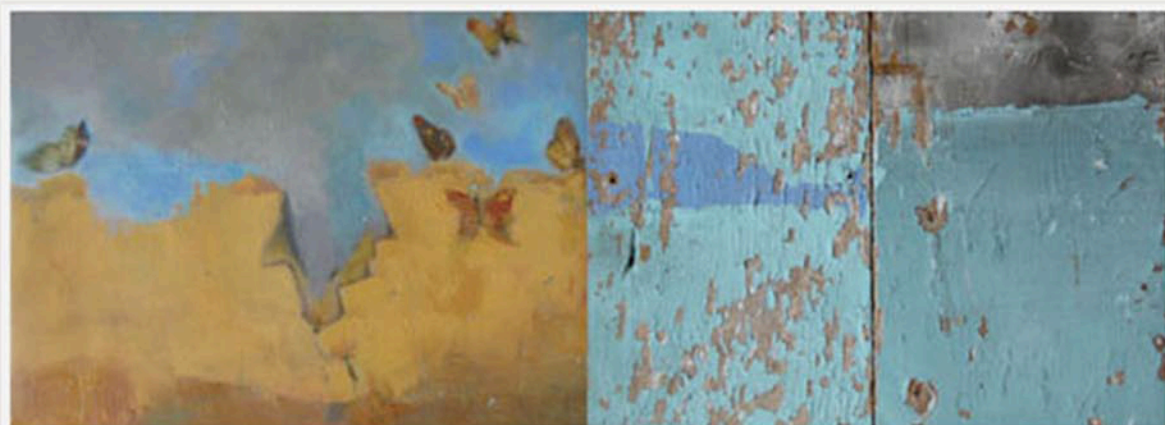


In particular, Kat became interested in how the poem evolves from images of darkness to light. "Softness happens almost unnoticed and has to do with opening, awareness, and realization." This idea became pivotal for "that business of the collective unconscious—how we are all interconnected became clear to me." And she realized there had been nothing random about the match of Katherine's poem and her own artistic vision.

Poet and painter had a few general conversations; not a true collaboration, but with a result of art and poetry that inform one another. As Katherine Williams states in her poem, *Hand...*

Not painting, but the act of painting:  
the presence of the absent hand.

Serving as that absent "hand" also gave Kat Hastie a new appreciation for poetry. "Doing this work opened up a whole new pathway and made me understand that words hold not only meaning, but feelings."



Parts of the larger collage work by Kat Hastie

*Special thanks to curators **Max Miller** and **Erin Leigh Glaze** who organized this exhibit.*

*Also featured are artists Jocelyn Chateauvert, Juilio Cotto, Scott Debus, Sarah Haynes, Benjamin Hollingsworth, Hirona Matsuda, Max Miller, Timothy Parker, and Lynne Riding; and poets Carol Peters, Jonathan Sanchez, Bryan Penberthy, Dennis Ward Stiles, Paul Allen, Marcus Amaker, Morrow Dowdle, Carol Ann Davis, and Ellie Davis.*

## Contemporary Charleston 2010: Influence

Thu, May 20 – Thu, July 3

Poets will read from their works • Friday May 28

City Gallery at Waterfront Park • 34 Pringleau Street

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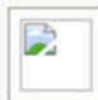
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### 2 Responses to “A Painter’s Way Through Poetry”



Stephanie

May 21, 2010 at 6:41 am

The absent hand, love that image/concept. Very present indeed. Beautiful show, great article. thanks for covering it.



Robert Payne

May 21, 2010 at 7:28 am

Love that the “absent hand” pulled together so many interesting and complementary materials.



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