

AW: What are your associations with West Coast art? Is there anything West Coast that influenced you both, even as a rejection?

JL: Definitely. I mean my background is slightly different than Kathy's in that I grew up in LA and I think that maybe because of the architecture, it was a whole culture that was really on board with modernism. And it actually has a really good museum that is dedicated to 20th c art, and that is definitely part of my background. And if you were cool, you listened to jazz and you had groovy modernist furniture, you have an Eames chair and it was pervasive.

And also the influence of Mexico. The mixing of Mexican culture- murals and plenty of references to Mexican art. But that's separate from Northern California. I don't know about the deep history, but when I came on the scene I was aware of it in the 50s, it was very dominated by figurative artists that had had the experience of being abstract painters and then coming back to figuration. There was already a built in influence, really a lot of it coming from Matisse. So it's not like the west coast was ever incredibly pure in any sense, but the whole place is less historic than the east coast, and less indebted to an art historical hierarchy. And it's the land of permissiveness. You go there because you're jettisoning more conventional ways of living and thinking and being. And my family, which was four generations of Californians, was very into the fantasy of surviving in nature. My grandfather would go into the high sierras and not take anything but his fox terrier and his fishing pole. So it's a projection of a fantasy and utopia that has to do with nature.

AW: So you think of this lack of anxiety of history or tradition as a virtue? Liberating?

JL: I didn't know anything else. I didn't see a Courbet until I was 35. History began in 1949 in my brain.

AW: Do you think permissiveness and this freedom from indebtedness to history factors within your work Kathy?

KG: Well I'm third generation Californian. My grandparents on my mother's side were survivors of wars in Russia. They were immigrants and then they left New York. They were children working in the factories. My grandfather was a hatter and made hats for a lot of Hollywood movie stars until the Great Depression and then hats were out.

When I think of the difference between the west coast and east coast in the 70s, I think of the sexual revolution, the cross over with Beat poets., the underground cartoonists and experimental film. And then there were the second generation Abstract Expressionists who were our teachers. And that was weird because they weren't very permissive. I remember they had a Diego Rivera in the student gallery and they built a wall around it and we used to climb a ladder to look down on it through this crack, because they were afraid we'd be influenced by social realism.

JL: I feel we both grew up in the American west in the nineteen sixties and seventies, you more in the nineteen seventies, when the desire to escape the academic frame of European culture and to value and prioritize personal experience over the traditional academic concerns was by then a norm. Progressive education was our norm. Black Mountain (the experimental art college in Ashland North Carolina) had already come and gone and many of the artists and instructors at the schools and on the scene had been nurtured in this environment.

AW: I associate west coast with a strategic permissiveness, is there anything else you think of that presented itself as gauche to a west coast sensibility?

KG: They were Puritanical in a lot of ways. Especially about careers. All of the teachers at the Art Institute didn't have commercial careers- San Francisco didn't offer that. They were so appalled by self-promotion.

JL: Right it was something Californians didn't do. Those East Coast people did that.

KG: And it still rings in my ears.

JL: That's true that there was this whole faction at the San Francisco Art Institute that was very authoritarian and really misogynistic.

KG: I stopped painting basically because of all of the teachers at the Art Institute were so macho and kept telling me "You can't do that" when I cut a whole in the middle of the canvas and put a found textile" and built appendages coming off of the rectangle. Again-"You can't do that.!" So i stopped and made sculpture.

JL: That's interesting- I did the same thing. I have the same trajectory. I stopped painting because I didn't know anything about the history of sculpture. It seemed more fun!

AW: It's making me think too- I'm from Chicago and once heard it described as "Third place in a race of two." And that Chicago's art culture was really defined through it's lack of visibility, that allowed for and created subversion. Like the younger sibling left at home while the older siblings all go away for college and travel. The funk and grooviness of the Hairy Who and the Imagists was really precipitated by this "well if you're not going to notice us, we're going to get really weird with it." I feel like the way you're both talking about with San Francisco and its relationship to visibility almost produced the opposite situation- Chicago got weird, San Francisco tried to self-regulate and create strict rules for conduct. Both are cultures of outliers.

JL: Permissiveness outside of the spotlight. That was the upside.

AW: Did you feel that in the moment?

JL: There was an antagonism between coasts. But that was beyond art: my family- "Why on earth would you leave paradise to live with those high bound people on the east coast"

AW: But also antagonism between LA and San Francisco.

KG: I went down to LA when I was a student with Robert Crumb and we met a lot of artists and I remember I was very judgmental about how purist and beautiful and not grungy their artwork was. And now I look back and it looks really good to me. People immigrated from the East to California for gold mining or films-they were pioneers, and entrepreneurs. In my work, I took it to the extreme of not using any art materials. It was a kind of rebellion against the status quo.

JL: Oh, and that was a reaction to the polish and finish of LA. That's really interesting!

KG:I was more influenced by the European artists and Arte Povera, I also liked the idea that if I made sculpture it had to come from a real source so I just haunted the surplus shops for my materials.

JL: Certainly, your sculpture is very improvisational in the use of nontraditional materials found at the surplus store, hardware store and flea markets. This kind of improvisation has become part of the history

of Art in California as exemplified by the work of Bruce Connor, Ed Kienholz, and George Herms. Your work extends this tradition with a major difference being your non-interest in narrative.

AW: Do you see any shift in your work after you left?

JL: I really don't think so. Kathy's recent switch from sculpture to painting is the most surprising. I've seen it along the way because I've always seen that she's made drawings. And loved what she did. Because it was always grounded in the material. It was never corrupted by traditional ideas of how to make space or what the rectangle was for or any of that. It's always the rightness of the material and the way it comes about. It's the material and it's the process. And it has to be in sync with something that's very basic.

AW: I've always felt the same thing. That Kathy's drawing practice is really important to understanding all of the different shifts in her work. It's the through line and the key or armature. Her initial steps into painting felt like the steps of a sculptor- material exploration, color was chosen the same way a sculptor chooses it- its secondary and the result of process rather than formal decision making. And drawing is the thing that has allowed her to step into painting, because its allowed her to not think of it through the lens of the dense history of paintings and its conventions.

KG: I used to really be suspicious of using the conscious mind to make decisions.

AW: That's sculptor talk!

JL: Yeah! And I think that's very wise.

KG: But something shifted and now I make so many decisions. But it's more muscle memory or intuitive. I am still suspicious of making calculated choices and am looking for a sense of freedom from conventions.

JL: In a funny way it seems to be at the core of the work you're doing now, this idea of being suspicious of using the mind. It's sort of like you're looking for the sweet spot between something that comes from instinct and intuition, but something that coheres magically and engages the viewer. Because the viewer is the missing part- there's an amorphous quality to the image and it requires the viewer's participation to form it. But it's not tied to modernism.

KG: No it's tied to movement, how things shift and change before our eyes. That's also why I made sculptures that were suspended and moved- so it wasn't a static image but was experiential.

JL: And I think about gravity with your work too. Gravity plays a big part in many of your sculptural works, also touch. Your interests appear to engage the viewer on how the proximity of various materials can deliver a message directed to the body.

KG: I'm trying to escape gravity.

JL: That's so interesting! That's the whole reason I went from sculpture to painting.

KG: I didn't like the restriction! How do I get this damn thing up in the air, how do I keep it from falling...? I remember in 1981 I made this sculpture and I chose the wrong substance to patina it and it came back from the show and then it went ping ping ping, and each wire broke and it disintegrated in front of my eyes. The death of a sculpture.

But my initial search for materials with sculpture was unconscious and just governed by a strong attraction. I didn't know why I chose them. But years later I realized. I was using blood and salt adhered to glass, and I realized years later- my father was an accountant but he worked in a factory that cured hides in a warehouse in San Francisco, and cowboys were there, and blood was on the floor, and salt everywhere, and it was very primal. And I remember as a kid I loved going there because of how exciting it was- sexy guys and lots of critters.

JL: Actually that piece with blood, you must've been working on that when I first met you. The coils- Twister Sister, I wish so much you still had that piece. And it was shown at the Berkeley Museum and I still remember seeing it on the wall- it was such a good piece. The rags soaked in cow blood. Stiff in texture, deep maroon in color and bound with bright and shiny copper weir made into long curls. The shaped curls, hung at eye level on the wall took on the overall form of a target.

KG: It might be in storage.

JL: Oh God! Rags soaked in blood. Bound with copper wire. I wonder how it's doing.

KG: I'm sure it's doing fine. Blood doesn't decay. They make tiles out of blood in Mexico.

JL: That's interesting because in Mexico I remember this floor, which was cow flanges- the spine, all smashed down in blood-soaked mud, dried and polished. Unbelievable!

KG: It's very beautiful

JL: I didn't know they made tiles.

KG: Now as a Vegan I'm appalled. But I used to go to slaughterhouses and I couldn't take that anymore and then I went to Polish butchers and then i couldn't take that anymore either. .

AW: Have you seen Fasssbinder's In A Year of Thirteen Moons? There's a scene that takes place at an actual slaughterhouse and the main character is talking to someone chopping up a pig. Its so jarring. And the actors stay perfectly composed and deliver their lines in a way that makes it even worse. It's so material and visceral. But Kathy, that materialist investigation doesn't wrestle away all meaning- how does spiritualism play a role within your practice?

KG: My father was an atheist, because he was in an orphanage and abused by nuns. And my mother wasn't religious. I remember when I was 8 I realized I needed something, so I asked them to let me go to Sunday school and I tried out all of these different religions. And I was really uncomfortable with the structure- I didn't respond to it. And so I came home and invented my own religion.

JL: I think lots of kids invent their own religions.

AW: And artists.

JL: And I think especially with Catholicism teaching children they are sinners and needing to be brought into order, this was not an idea I was brought up with.

AW: I've always thought of spiritualism, at least when artists discuss it, as a love of aesthetic that doesn't have the dogma behind it. And maybe that definition is in danger of just becoming a description of what a

studio practice is. But it's articulating the world through this language of symbols. And the symbols seem specific, but as to what its specific to, that is something that isn't revealed.

JL: There does seem to be a proliferation of artists with those concerns that gravitate towards the west coast. Artists that are very frank about these qualities and own up to them which isn't as prevalent on the east coast.

AW: Why do you think that is?

KG: That people (artists) don't want to own up to spiritual concerns? It has almost been taboo. Maybe the last taboo.

JL: Because it's anti-rational. And I think we are in for another round of anti-rational.

AW: But I think artists are sensing that now too. Rather than bemoaning being the victims of anti-rationalism and the right wing's erotic desire of undoing the Enlightenment, it makes sense that artists are trying to repurpose non-rationalism and anti-intellectualism into something that is maybe more humanist or empowering. Judith when you think about Kathy's work do you think it has any type of lineage to mystic or spiritualist painters?

JL: There's a line that goes back to probably the end of World War I and the beginning of Surrealism and the appreciation of things that are automatic- automatic writing. And there are really interesting people in California that have that connection.

KG: Did you know Gordon Onslow Ford?

JL: I was going to ask you that! Yes, actually. I didn't know him personally- Whitney knew him. But I met him because Amanda went to a free school and one of the kids at the free school said "Oh, my family has this property in Inverness on top of this hill and we can go there and camp. And so, we went there and camped with these completely wild kids and built fires and the rangers came and the kids started chanting "Off the pigs!" and then later that evening Gordon Onslow Ford whose property abutted this came out and said "Oh my God, what are you doing?" And there was a little hubbub and they put out the fires, but the next morning he delivered breakfast for everyone. I thought that was so cool. And he's a direct connection to that lineage.

It's funny that he ended up there. He was British and spent most of his adult life in Europe and he was part of Breton's circle.

And then there was Matt Mullican's father Lee Mullican. Total Mystic. And now his mother has come to prominence, Luchita Hurtado. She's from Venezuela and does figuration and was in a show at Matthew Marks last year. And then there was Bruce Conner, who did some variation of that. He was hugely influential to everybody in California and still is.

KG: I'll never forget when I curated him into an exhibition at Wakeforest University in 2003, that I did on Rorschachs, inkblot works by painters and sculptors. He used to like to drive curators and museum directors nuts with the lighting "You have to have a certain light bulb." It was black ink! Not a very perishable material but he just loved to torture gallerists. When I was a student I saw him picketing his own gallery.

JL: And he was involved in the punk scene too! His movies extended his use of collage in surprising ways . I was thinking when Kathy was talking about the history of assemblage how influential Kienholz, George Herms were. Nicole Klagsbrun showed many of these seminal California artists such as Wally Berman.

AW: And that also has a connection to artists like Thornton Dial and the sculptors and self-taught artists of the Rural American South that seem rooted into place and experience that Kathy has an interest in.

KG: I was just lazy. I didn't want to do the processes like chiseling! I just wanted to put things together. It felt more honest. But I think I was also just not wanting to make anything that came out of history. Maybe it was the arrogance of youth to a certain extent. Also I didn't want to be tied to something I wouldn't be able to do my whole life. Like swinging an axe.

AW: The two of you have so much similarity, and you're great friends, but your work is very different. Are there any commonalities you sense or feel between your works?

JL: Naw, I ate the whole art history book.

KG: I think that there is something. You can do anything as a painter, and there's a clarity to your work, but I think about the gesture in your painting, and the way you layer it is about making it not as instantaneously graspable.

JL: No there is a connection. When you were saying you didn't want to commit to a life of using a hatchet I thought "In a way, I have committed my life to that." It's very physical. And in a way I want the physicality to be part of my content. I want the vitality of the body to be the thing.

KG: It also gives a sense of flux. It engages the viewer.

JL: Right, it's part of a language. But part of my admiration as a friend, and I remember this from the beginning, because all my friends were painters. So just like going somewhere with you and seeing what you noticed was so different- I loved it. Like your awareness of the walls and the space you were standing in was noticeably different. Rather than hanging out with a painter where you're imagining the space and you have all of this history laden language to deal with the space.

KG: Well I think I have a neurological affliction.

JL: We all do

KG: Because I see space. Like when I teach painting, sometimes it will be a figurative painting and I can't see the figure at first, but I see the negative space first.

JL: That's good too. You see it as whole first. There was this interest in experimental education. There was this woman Rhoda Kellogg, she was around the Bay Area, and they did a show at White Columns in the past year that was about her . And she had this theory about the brain and children and one of the theories is kids before the age of 8 see the rectangle, they are capable of seeing the whole page all at once. And that's why their art is so good. Because everything they do is relational to the format always. Isn't that good? And then they want to be more realistic and the drawing or painting becomes about "the thing" rather than this great sense of a relationship from the image to the page.

KG: I probably never grew out of that.

JL: Which is amazing. And that is the big lesson of art school. Is its all about the relationship to the whole.

AW: To make something that is completely anti-discursive and just “is” without definition. Just something we see and feel and don’t need to understand? Are there any rules within your work?

JL: I have a lot of rules for example I’m not going to use any lines. I had that rule for about 20 years. And then one day I thought “What?” Lines are great!

KG: I remember when Howard Fried made the rule that he wouldn’t make any decisions without the I Ching.

JL: That’s pretty good. Do you think he’s still doing that?

KG: I don’t know.

AW: Kathy are there any rules within your work?

KG: Don’t aim to please others. Trust that my uniqueness will interact with others’ because we all have this thing in common with our brains. That’s it.

AW: That trust is important. And it’s a real skill- understanding and trusting your audience. So much art feels like good comedy.

JL: There are a lot of great female comedians now too.

KG: Well we’ve talked before how you think that female comedians are helping female artists.

JL: We were part of a consciousness raising group that met for 10 years. And it was a lot of different kinds of artists, what we had in common was feminism. In California in those days no one was talking about art so the monthly meetings provided a way to see and be seen talk about political realities and be supportive.

KG: Anti-intellectual. Remember when everyone from the group came over and helped me finish gluing the beans on the sheets? It got eaten by moths.

JL: I remember the accumulation of the large whitish beans glued row by row on a flexible pale muslin cloth delivers a sense of purpose, intensity and an intricate beauty that changes with the random folds and drapes of the cloth. I can’t help thinking you might have been influenced by the feminist movement of our time that embraced women’s work and encouraged the reconsideration of the esthetic value of hand crafts. I know you would identify yourself as a feminist, I have however never seen your work as any kind of reflection of domesticity.

AW: Completely. It’s always been too externalized- addressing the macro and spiritual and human which couldn’t be further from interiority or domesticity. But also there’s this mystery that I don’t associate with interiority or the domestic. Kathy, is there anything that you are consciously withholding from your audience?

KG: I try to withhold being too easily identifiable. I like mystery and the enigmatic.

AW: Painting is so embarrassingly revealing. I like keeping some things back for myself.

JL: People can see right through you when you paint.

AW: What strikes you as mysterious in each others' work?

JL: I don't question it. But it's the fact that Kathy does not engage with any known academic veins in history is totally mysterious to me. But yet the work has a sense of completion and they aren't missing anything.

AW: I think that's the sculptural thing too. There's something about Kathy's work that it just seems like it's arrived. Not made, but...

JL: It just grew somehow

AW: Exactly. And that's process based sculpture. It's just this object that we are presented with that's here now that we have to respond to.

JL: I remember all the world around us when you were making your work. There was a big interest in anthropology. There was a book Architecture without Architects

KG: That was a big influence to me. And animal architecture.

JL: So that is part of that mysterious arrival out of pure instinct. And I can't read it coming out of Rodin in that it's three dimensional and I need to see it from every angle. Your work doesn't ask me to do that.

KG: it's weird because I love art history. And I still know what page things are on in the Jansen book and I'm a fan of a lot of artists. But I don't know how to access that. And put it through my system. When I just start to work I can't access that.

JL: I'm starting to think that a lot of us growing up in that place thought of ourselves as little savages. And we are busy practicing our own religions.

KG: Little Shamans. Shamanistas.

AW: I had a professor who had done a Sabbatical to South America, and visited a mission church set up by the Jesuits. And he said that inside they had all of the statues of saints, but Mary's head was covered in a garbage bag, and one of the saints had tires piled in front of him. And the guide said that the village blamed Mary for a flood, so they put her in a kind of time out by taking away her ability to see. It's a perversion of Christianity into animism, and paganism, and it's this coinciding knowledge "this is a god, but it's in this object that I have control over. And when gods behave badly, they deserve to be punished"

JL: That's very funny.

AW: What's the context you feel Kathy is developing in her work? Or is there one?

JL: I think it's an old lineage, that's related to Surrealism. She's not formal, she's not a formalist. It is about a subjectivity, but it doesn't feel autobiographical. It's a tough one.

AW: There's been a shift in the way we all think of art from finding context to making context.

JL: I remember when that happened. In the 90s. All of a sudden it was a buzzword. And something you had to be prepared to answer. Either the context was something you would let the gallery system do. History changes art the context is never static.

KG: Judy, I don't think of you as a figurative artist. I think of you more as a painter. That its more about the process and a feeling. I think the painting, the process, seems like theater but not theatrical. It's not a lot of flourish but it is theater. The theater of having the bravery to just do it and get it done and trust herself.

AW: What's your relationship to representation? The final image- is it something you're battling against. It is the marks and the physicality of the paint that you're really involved with, and then the image comes together at the end, or is it all being built together. Where's the maintenance of the image for you?

JL: I mean I really want all of the great visual experience from abstract expressionism. I want the viewer to respond to it as an image and with their body. And I want monumental scale. So I'm thinking of my love affair with abstract painting- De Kooning, knowing that bus left the station.

AW: The best bus

JL: Darn! And narrative is so important to me. It's the way I talk to myself. And how I understand things. It's too irresistible.

AW: As someone who has appreciated your work for a long time, the painting is always flexing against the narrative image. De Kooning is definitely someone I'm thinking about. It's big juicy marks running into each other on the canvas and mixing in a way you can't map out. But I've never seen a purely abstract painting from you. It always comes together, sometimes almost at the last minute.

JL: Well I'm very interested in that foot being on the ground. But I started off as an abstract painter. And I see the virtue of abstract painting.

AW: And it's a really closed off community. There are abstract painting galleries, small scale usually, and I feel like the artists all know each other and kind of get on this circuit together.

JL: Schlehldajl talked about abstract painting being like jazz. We still like it, we still go there on special occasions but its ability to change your world view is difficult.

KG: Well do you think I'm an abstract painter? Am I over?

JL: That's a really good point Kathy, because I don't. I think your painting is so much about finding a wholeness from pure process that springs from intuition that you are not part of that historical endgame.

AW: Why do you think that is? That we have trouble thinking of Kathy's work in strict terms of abstraction?

JL: Well, take your new painting “Irradiated Spirits Dancing the Night Away.” It reminds me that your work has always come from a deep intuitive place. I have noticed over the many years of our friendship how many works start with small gestures made with unexpected materials like *Twister Sister*.

I have always admired your work for your commitment to process over any political or artistic ideologies.

The early sculpture demonstrates a keen interest in the use of materials in a very specific manner.

Contrasting dull and shiny, rigid and flexible, opaque and transparent in ways that resonate in the viewer’s own body down to the fingertips. Lately I have begun to realize how much we absorbed from the time we came of age in and how important it is to acknowledge this and at the same time evolve beyond it. Jazz, beat poetry, abstract expressionism.... all forms well established by the nineteen seventies.

AW: I think music and jazz are great connections for Kathy’s work. We’ve talked a lot about Burroughs as an influence as well.

JL: The idea of improvisation is and was part of the modernist cannon, but I think the desire to express spontaneity with the hope of finding a state of grace became much more important in American art from the nineteen fifties onward. Both of us were products of progressive forms of education and certainly Art School was a place of experimentation with tools, materials and methods. One was not expected to learn traditional crafts or skills, instead improvisation was encouraged and spontaneous gestures were admired.

AW: Do you see this improvisation extending from sculpture into her new paintings?

JL: Well, your new paintings employ a wide variety of materials with specific characteristics. They are fluid, reflective, transparent, opaque, all performing on a ground of dry and transparent paper mounted on silk. In your search for answers to aesthetic questions you are not looking to history to provide the answers to your inquiry, but rather towards the specific relationship between your chosen materials. Your current work continues your experimental use of materials. This work does not follow a written score but looks to rhyme or integrate small gestures, possibly made by the flick of the wrist. This non-scripted performance of repeating gestures continues across the surface of the paper, producing rhythmic glyphs held to the flatness of the surface by an implied grid. The result is a work that has a life of its own not ruled by the principles of design or reason and has a notable lack of self-consciousness, a kind of dance on paper.

That said, I think all art can be seen in contexts that are constantly changing the artworks themselves. Art can have a way of breaking loose from the maker/artist and resonate with other art of their time and even of earlier times. When I look at “Irradiated Spirits Dancing the Night Away” I think of the work of Jackson Pollock, the meaning of improvisation and use of materials and all the values that his work symbolizes; the power of the individual, a record of time, a break with the past, a search for freedom. While Pollock is very much the star of his own movie, I have however never known you to be interested in myth or the mythic. Your work, in all of its various forms, invites the viewer to look up and beyond the self, to experience perception and its freeing effects. Your interests lean more toward mathematics and the cosmos, ideas about the relationship between the one and the many, the ambition to make something timeless, a vehicle for a meditative experience.