

The Umbilicus of Sleep

by

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From whence comes the impulse to create art? Some place deep in the subconscious as yet unplumbed by empirical data? If electrodes were attached to an artist's brain to register neural activity to measure thus the muse, would it do so? Millennia may pass and artists will continue making art as they have for millennia past, and in that far future I would surmise that nothing will be resolved as to the particulars of the act and the resultant action, no matter that the brain and its myriad functions have been "mapped."

Yet Kocot and Hatton give of themselves fully both to making art from the prime and primal flux of marking and also the genesis of the mark itself. "Semiconscious," running to May 19 at Larry Becker Contemporary Art, 43 North Second Street in Philadelphia, offers a diverse and vital oeuvre that is both a record of art as something alive through the artists being so, as well as a testimony and aural calendar that clocks creation as a series of moments chained by an inevitability to leave behind an object, an artifact.

Marcia Kocot and Tom Hatton belie the negative connotations of the word "complicity," for there is no better term to describe their collaboration. Their complicity negates any subsuming of separate wills, which is the definition of their work together. Though the viewer cannot know where one artist left off and the other began, what is certain is that every line offers a pair of individualities at once distinct and melded—This seeming paradox is the true power of mysticism at the heart of this exhibit and its creators.

Mysticism runs deep through this work—as deep as the pebbles hitting bottom after being

tossed by both artists to ensure the basic image of their collaboration in the form of "August, 1996," a photograph that serves as their template. As the focus spirals out from the center, the concentric rings of influence are subtle—and subtlety is the ultimate base of all the work in this fine exhibit.

Upon entering the gallery one experiences a sequence of white on white paintings that bind the viewer to them as point of fact inasmuch as the paintings are not static, rather possessing incentive for one to move about each and thus find new nuances. They are reminiscent of an open palm and the creases and lifelines that time affords the flesh. They are also slow moving yet grand waterways into which one might toss stones and so see what circles blossom. Lastly, they are measurements, like an EKG, of the soul.

The origins of this sublime work are grounded in the time between the twin states of the hypnagogic and the hypnopompic, the former being the interval between wakefulness and sleep, the latter the opposite. At face value one might think this quintessential experimental art via process, yet nothing could be further from that narrow notion, for these paintings are expansive efforts that necessitate repeated viewing. One comes to this work every time with insights anew awaiting.

The grand gesture intrinsic here is the absence of histrionics. Another artist or pair of artists might well draw attention to themselves, rather the work. Kocot and Hatton make this impossible through their own impetus. Indeed, this work flows in accord with a natural state. It is less about space and everything about time, those minutes as endorphins are released or subside after the requisite REM allotment.

In the next room double exposed photographs of prominent people in the Philadelphia art scene line the wall. Again, subtlety is the watchword, for there is nothing obvious about the

double exposure; rather the second image is akin to a shadow or a doppelganger occupying the same coordinates in some parallel universe a fraction of an inch out of sync with our own. Indeed, these photographs correspond to space as the white paintings do to time, thus fulfilling the complete trajectory in a repertoire that plays off each other in a methodology analogous to self-portraiture.

Which brings us to the stack—a commingling here of both space and time, since they are indeed portraits painted daily over a number of years and placed facedown in a stack. Here the end process is both painterly and sculptural and altogether mysterious, a touchstone that holds tight to the aesthetic that one leaves the gallery in wonder, while wondering.

Kocot and Hatton have achieved a breakthrough here, somewhat aleatory, somewhat precise, and totally oracular in its eloquence. The language and value here are, of course, meta-pictorial, their collaboration expounding a profound synergy capable of carrying a charge to set each of them as an anchor in memory, and there is no better definition of what a touchstone is in its reliance on cueing dreams to invade the waking world.