



A Question & Answer Session with Artist Kris Rehring

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By: Dr. Joni Hand

Artist Kris Rehring presented a solo exhibition of paintings to the Arts Council of Southeast Missouri Gallery titled, "Form and Figure". The exhibit remained on display from October 6 – 28, 2017. In an interview by Dr. Joni Hand, Assistant Professor of Art History at Southeast Missouri State University, the artist discusses the context of her work, including subjects, colors, motifs, as well as her interest in other mediums and artist influences.

Joni Hand: Many of your urban images are timeless in that they are not anchored to any one place. They are like stages awaiting actors. Is this aesthetic intentional, or more of a formalist exercise as you describe in your artist statement?

Kris Rehring: I have to say I really like that they come across as timeless. There is a certain tone that attracts me to some of the architectural motifs and which I certainly hope comes across in my work. Overall though, I suppose much of what draws my eye is the more formalist nature of the motifs. In the much of my urban work it is the structure, rhythm and layers that pull me in. And when you add the intangible element of light, another layer is added that is fugitive and can alter the arrangements in any number of ways. It is endlessly fascinating. Contrasted to the perceptual painting I exercise in certain landscapes and still lifes, I feel like I am using a different set of muscles when making this urban work. I've often thought it satisfies the former, orderly graphic designer in me.

JH: According to your CV, you have shown your work in a variety of galleries across the country. Has the reception of your work been different in urban galleries when compared to rural spaces?

KR: Work which I consider a bit raw or work which is more concerned with an abstract concept or arrangement seems to translate better in places like New York or California. However, my figurative work seems to be received well wherever it is shown, perhaps because it is more easily relatable.

JH: Your figurative work has a quiet aesthetic reminiscent of Edward Hopper or Lucian Freud. What is the role of the viewer in these works?

KR: I hear that a lot in comparison to Hopper's work but Lucian Freud is a first and I am absolutely delighted in the comparison. Yes, I am all about the psychology behind the figure in my figurative work, so much so that sentimentality is a concern and I try to make sure I strike the right balance in my treatment of the subject. I want the viewer to engage and to relate on some contemporary level. Narrative is secondary and if someone interjects their own story as to what is happening, then all the better.

JH: What advice do you have for young painters? Conversely, what is the best advice you received from a professor or mentor?

KR: Broadly speaking, I applaud all forms of personal expression and anyone who devotes time to actually making art with their hands and minds. So to young painters I say keep painting and keep seeking. Try to understand and relate to all genres of painting because even if you strictly adhere to one in particular, constantly increasing your understanding of the historical contexts in which painting has evolved only serves to make your visual language even better. There is an endless amount of reading and study available that can serve as times of meditation and inspiration in what we do as artists. Never stop learning.

The best piece of advice I received was from contemporary painter, Hollis Dunlap. He basically said to stop waiting for the perfect set-up to paint. At that time I was concerned that I did not have a proper studio in which to hire a model; I did not have proper studio lighting on stands; I did not have this or that...you get the point. That advice snapped me into a work-with-what-you-have mentality. And from that point on my work grew.

JH: When choosing a subject from a still life, how important is the local color of the objects?

KR: In my statement I mention how the act of painting still life is like quiet contemplation, so I'd say local color is very important. I tend to choose something with a minimal palette in

mind and hope I can capture it with as direct approach as possible. But looks are often deceiving!

JH: In one interview, you mentioned an interest in other media, such as printmaking. Have you been able to pursue this interest?

KR: In fact I have a weekend workshop coming up where I plan to brush-up on the basic printmaking skills I learned in undergrad. I'm looking forward to it because its intent is to keep it manageable. In other words, I should be able to incorporate some printmaking into my studio practice without a total upheaval and accumulation of more stuff. The German artist Kathe Kollwitz is an absolute favorite of mine and I remember reading in one of her journals how the ease of printmaking helped her practice.

JH: Light is extremely important in your work. Do you have a favorite place to paint where the light is "just right"?

KR: Yes! Light is what it is all about. Light is fundamental. Forgive me if my answer comes across as a complete cliché – Italy!

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