



KATHLINE CARR

WRITER ★ ARTIST

Interview by Harryet

Photographs courtesy of Artist

What is it within you that leads you to one or the other outlet: writing or the visual arts? Are there periods of time when you possibly will merge both, art and writing? Can you give us an example? And, do you feel double triumphant at its completion?

Kathline Carr: I love language, and constructing texts, but I am also frustrated by language—how it sometimes fails—then there is non-verbal language, the language of images. I tend to work in separate bodies of writing and visual work at the same time, and then see how they might fit together. Merging art and writing—it doesn't always work for me, the way I want it to, but I continue to search. I've been working with and studying hybridity and text-image art for many

years—hybrid poetics was central to my BFA studies in creative writing and my MFA concentration of visual poetics. I am attracted to and inspired by artists and writers who work with text/image ideas (writers like Anne Waldman, Jill Magi, Shira Dentz), or write alongside their visual work, such as Louise Bourgeois, Annette Messenger, Kiki Smith—or artists whose visual work deals with language, nonverbally, like Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl, Marlene Dumas.

My new book *Miraculum Monstrum* succeeds as a text-image work, for me, because the art is not illustrative, but rather exists alongside the text, partially defining the character's struggle and existence, while also providing a framework for the story—a fictional

exhibit catalog. As an artist reading art history or teaching and wanting to show students work by different artists, you are often looking at and reading exhibit catalogs. I think they are very rich texts—meant to be looked at, not just read. That's a goal for me, as I work, for sure—writing alongside visual art.

Why have I gotten a feeling of existentialism plopping into my lap after reading the synopsis of your new book, “Miraculum Monstrum”?

Kathline: It is a story that deals with existential situations and problems. The physical transformation of Tristia is quite marked and complete, but her character changes from someone docile, quiet, someone who avoids

relationships and crowds, to essentially an animal, combative, frustrated by her pain and degenerating physical condition, her speech limitations. The supportive characters also undergo radical personal transformations as they care for Tristia—as her caregivers and new “family”, they develop new skills and are ultimately the historians that provide the primary documents to which the curator character owes much of her research.

I need to know, Kathline, what does the title of your book mean in general, and what is the specific meaning it holds for you, and what would you want it to mean for readers?

Kathline: The title is two Latin words, *Miraculum* meaning thing of wonder, or prodigy (alt., miracle) and the other, *Monstrum*, a supernatural event or portent, aside from its alternative meaning as “monster”. Aside from the reference to Tristia herself, the cult that co-opts her as their prophesied deity calls the text of their religion *Miraculum/Monstrum*. The curator who puts all this together to accompany her posthumous art retrospective names the exhibit *Miraculum Monstrum* also. The title itself is a hybrid phrase, which should alert the reader (along with “hybrid narrative” that the book is an experimental text, not a conventional narrative, not a series of poems, not an art catalog, but a hybrid of these, working toward the expression of fiction, of a contemporary myth.

Now, please give us a short synopsis in your words what your book is about, and what it explores. What gratification have you gotten out of completing this piece?

Kathline: *Miraculum Monstrum* is a narrative, told in fragments by a curator who is piecing together a retrospective of work by a woman artist who’s affliction of wings changes and mutates her artistic practice, and her life. The subsequent creation of a mythology around this occurrence ultimately destroys the artist; simultaneously and coincidentally an ecological upheaval is coming to a head that changes the breathability of the earth’s atmosphere. It borrows from the epic verse form, but also contains curatorial notes—which at times break into the text itself—and scriptural writings from the cult’s codex, *Miraculum/Monstrum*. The most satisfying part of having completed the book and to witness its publication is that it has left the realm of the personal and has taken on its own life. People have read it and can connect with it, relate to it. Not everyone will. But I hope some people will love it, embrace the form, and be inspired to see hybrid literature in a different way.

Do you happen to be thankful that you are also a visual artist? Maybe, in some ways, it has helped you to write clearer, or help you get in tune with the deeper, more mysterious part of yourself while you journeyed down the road in search of *Miraculum Monstrum*?

Kathline: Sure, I’m happy to be a visual artist—it gives me great pleasure to make things, especially when it is effortless and I’m in a meditative place and the product doesn’t matter, or when it approaches my intention or aesthetic the way I’d imagined—this is not always the case naturally—sometimes it’s really frustrating

and distressing too. But any great love is that way.

What strikes a chord in your self that would promote you the need to express a thought through art?

Kathline: I’ve always wanted to be a visual artist or a writer, since I was very young. The only exception being theatre—I’ve done some of that too—but then, theatre is a very text-image based medium. Because I’ve never wanted to do anything else, that’s where all my expertise and experience lies, and work is really about practice—not inspiration so much, but daily practice. I don’t get blocked,
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FIG IV
KATHLINE CARR

I just move on to another medium until I can go back to whatever I was working on previously. There are always many more projects that I can really finish, so being disciplined and working toward completion is important too. Having multiple practices means you could potentially never finish anything—so that has to be guarded against. Sort of.

What is the meaning behind your statement, “I render abstractions of real and imagined space”? Can you cite a specific piece of art, and explain.

Kathline: That is from one of my artist statements from a while ago, must be on my website somewhere? But I think it is still accurate for some of the visual work I make. I work with abstraction, often landscape-based, definitely process-oriented, exploring space and

physical trajectories, such as from driving or walking. I’m interested in Psychogeography as a factor in creating visual work, hunting for a particular feeling derived from a space, whether it’s in the woods or in an urban setting. I’m fascinated by surfaces of all kinds, dereliction, and the intersection of lines, the tensions between the manmade and the natural. I have a painting called *Varial* for instance, named for a skateboard move, and modeled after the motion that might be derived from a varial kick-flip.

Were you surprised at receiving the Clarissa Dalloway Book Prize for *Miraculum Monstrum*? When and how did you find out the great news?

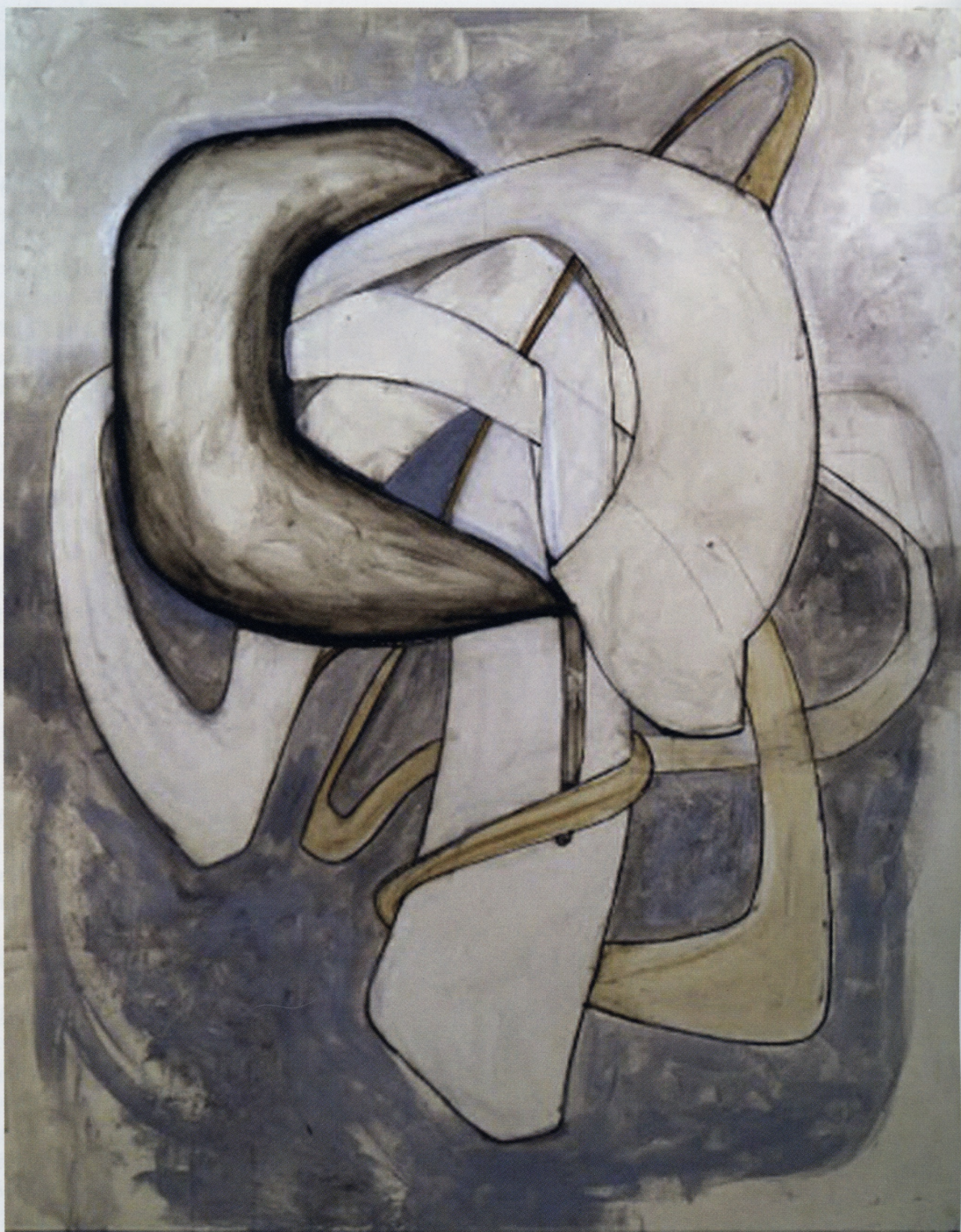
Kathline: Yes, very and happily surprised! I wasn’t sure I understood the initial email—I

had to read it over and over for it to sink in—then as I began to accept it as reality, it still didn’t feel “real” exactly, until I found myself bizarrely holding the book in my hand last week. I spent a year writing it, then four years submitting to various places, and I received the award two years ago, so it’s been a long process. But I’ve always believed in the text; you have to be your own advocate and believe in what you’re doing totally in order to see it through to completion, I believe.

What do you think about the book that they really thought was the finest reason for awarding you this prize? (what was the prize?!)

Kathline: The selection committee of A Room of Her Own Foundation, headed by Kate Gale, founder and managing editor of

VARIAL CAFE 1A
KATHLINE CARR



Red Hen Press, were looking for something for the Clarissa Dalloway “Everything But Poetry” Book Prize that perhaps embraced some formal aspects of poetry, prose, art but also bucked the traditions and parameters of those respective media to morph into something else, another kind of narrative. I think it was probably a plus that *Miraculum Monstrum* is concerned with climate abuses and disrupting status quo power structures, and that *Tristia* fights for and wins her freedom from personal oppression from the Raptus Cult, even though it means her own destruction—but you know, I’m only guessing why they chose it. These things are subjective and based on the aesthetic of individuals so it’s impossible to really say for sure! But I’m very glad of it—as an artist and writer, I am constantly rejected for things of all kinds so

it is a thrill to win this—especially when part of the prize is publication.

From a writer’s point of view, how do you make use of this award? I know it looks great in a bio, what else would it be used for?

Kathline: I’ve had a long standing desire to teach hybrid poetics, and hybridity as a literary form that includes visual art or visual constructions, so I hope that the book can generate interest in the form, that I might find a community to work with students who are interested in hybridity. When I was looking at graduate schools, I knew and was advised that it would be in my best interest to earn an MFA in writing rather than in art—but I ultimately chose a visual MFA program for the very reason that I thought I would have more

opportunity to write in a visual program, than to work as a visual artist in a writing program—and the two forms are pretty inseparable to me. This is not necessarily evident in bodies of work, but in my thinking, and process. And I hope someday to work with students who are looking to work in hybrid forms that bridge theoretical writing, art making and poetics.

Can you tell me, what in your life’s experiences led you to write this book?

Kathline: One of the major contributing factors to this story is my mother’s early onset dementia. She was degenerating quite rapidly (as is typical of Lewy Body Disease) while I was writing and she died before it was finished. I was devastated by the whole

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BAY TOWARDS THE END KATHLINE CARR

process—the bewildering condition for starters, her lack of diagnosis and differing opinions of different doctors, one of whom was completely disdainful of my suggestion of Lewy Body, which I had researched pretty extensively and thought was a tremendously close fit. Her psychiatrist mocked me, “oh, so you’re a doctor now?”—you have to really be strong if you’re going to pit yourself against medical professionals—this same doctor obtained a court order to continue giving her Electro Shock Therapy when I refused. So all of that frustration and sadness and grief I channeled into the text, and the visual art I was making alongside the writing, and I think it’s evident in the story.

Exploring the visual arts: from all the mediums in the world to work with, you chose what you chose to create a portfolio of sub-conscious sub text, abstractions using charcoals, pencils, and fabrics. How does the medium of your choice work in your favor?

Kathline: I have always loved drawing, it is a very primal medium for me. I paint, I make prints—monotype, silkscreens—I work directly on photographs, work in water based media and with fabric—and as a process-based artist, I sometimes have to go back to drawing—like Jack White sings in “Little Room,” (and I’m paraphrasing): you’re working on something good, and you need a

bigger room—you might have to go back to thinking how you got started in the little room! So, elemental pieces of drawings and sewn fabric are very restorative for me.

The artwork on paper, the 3d sculpture, and your writing. It looks like a transition from paper to 3d, then to writing as if it was born, then grew up, and walked off the page into peoples’ mind! Is the sculptural art a mid point?

Kathline: Sculpture was my first love—when I was a young artist in New Haven and had my first studio, I wanted to make sculptural objects—I had little interest in painting. But I soon had a storage problem. In different stages in my life, my process has undergone stages based on the space I have available. I started writing seriously in the mid 90s because my kids were little and I was a single mother and a pencil and paper was what I could afford and manage at the end of the day—besides the Papier-mâché, puppets and assorted drawings my kids and I would work on together of course! But what I burrowed into on my own time was reading and writing.

I am fascinated by your “Rejection of Technical Skill” venue. Tell us about this process please. Why does it exist for you?

Kathline: “Rejection of Technical Skill” is an artist book on my website—it is a handmade accordion book in a book sleeve based on critical theory/art history notes from grad school.

When do you think an artist knows they have reached a pivotal point in their art creating? Do you think it has to do with layers of knowledge and study?

Kathline: That’s a hard question to answer and I think there are as many different answers as there are artists. I love to hear and read about discoveries artists make about themselves through their work, but it’s a totally personal process. Study is part of the process for me, and total immersion. I’ll find my work changing significantly the deeper I dig, and daily time in the studio is a must (for me) to make those discoveries.

How does the word Cerebral relate to your works on paper, your words on paper? Or, do you follow your heart the majority of the time?

Kathline: Since I work abstractly, both visually and verbally, much of the time, I try to balance the cerebral and the intuitive. There’s a give and take, and sometimes one is dominant over the other, it’s not an exact science. **Please take a small section out of your**

book and explain how it would directly relate to a real life experience you have been through?

Kathline: There's a part in the section I (Exornatio) where Tristia is sick with the initial wing eruption which is presenting as a tumor-like growth. She doesn't know what's happening to her, and she goes to the emergency room, where she is questioned and inundated with forms. The resulting prose piece uses different fonts, phrases and pieces of existing medical forms to convey a feeling of overwhelm and disorientation. This was happening frequently when I was caring for my mother, arranging care, or bringing her to increasingly distressing procedures (like ECT), and that section was directly influenced by those experiences.

What is it you wish readers to know about you?

Kathline: Whatever medium I work in, I'm a very committed artist. I thrive in communities and situations where I have the support and freedom to work creatively. My husband and I piece together a living so we have the time to work (he is a figurative painter) but it requires sacrifice; it's not the most secure existence, financially. It's so important, though, to have a supportive mate, one who prioritizes studio time and understands the nature of creative work. I know where ever we live, we'll have studios first, and if there's room for a couch, fine. Our work habits and lifestyle sometimes make us seem antisocial, only because there is so little time—not enough time at all—to work in one's studio, and make a living, and raise kids—we have a 14-year old at home, and seven kids between us, mostly grown, we are used to being stretched thin)—making studio time a priority is paramount.

Where, when and how we can be directed to your book readings (place, location, time), website, buying the book, etc...?

Kathline: More information can be found on my website www.kathlinecarr.com, and there is a category for *Miraculum Monstrum* that lists information about the book, such as readings and reviews. I'll be having a book signing event at The Bookstore in Lenox December 14th and will have a reading there in Spring, 2018. The Bookstore in Lenox and the Bookloft (Great Barrington) will have copies locally, as will the Williams College Bookstore in Williamstown, where I'll be reading October 5th. **Miraculum Monstrum** is available for pre-order on Indiebound.org and other online book sources. I'll also be giving a talk at the North Adams Public Library November 9th, and I'm adding times and locations all the time on the website so keep an eye on that. I am represented by Fountain Street Gallery in Boston, MA.

Thank you, Kathline!

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