

The Highlights - Bay Area Figurative Language

Shashana Chittle's work maps her attention in relationship to matter and consciousness. Information enters the body and leaves the body transformed. Scientific optical investigations are coupled with exercises in repetitive prayer, embedding sight itself with sublime spirituality. Shashana Chittle is an artist living and working in her hometown of Fremont, California. Her first solo show, titled *Humaneyes*, opens at Acuna Hansen Gallery in Los Angeles on March 15, 2008. Katie Herzog is an artist from the San Francisco Bay Area and is currently living and working in Los Angeles. Herzog's recent exhibitions include *Soft Philosophy* at PawnShop Gallery and *The Greatest Generation* at Circus Gallery. The following interview was conducted via e-mail over a period of several weeks.

Color Coded Mental Counting Structure Made of Pyramids with a Base of 5, 2006. 8.5 × 11 in, Pencil and pen on graph paper

Katie Herzog: Over the summer you saw an influential exhibition at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco titled *Telling Tales: Illustrated Storytelling Scrolls*. I received an e-mail from you back in July, in response to the show, in which you wrote: "Scrolls are sort of like light; how it's a wave and a particle at once because they hold their information all at once, and at times may be viewed like a painting, or a particle, all at once. But the content is only accessible through movement and allowing the attention to flow, like a wave, like life, like light!" Your artistic practice is often informed by your yoga practice, and I know that you have also been involved with dance. How does movement figure into your practice?

Shashana Chittle: I have this feeling that everything I need to know about being alive is available to me through my body. Observing the limits of the body and the talents of the body, and manipulating the body through movement, I notice the patterns in my mind are inseparable from the body. Interlocking circles made by rolling the eyes in their sockets, the tongue around the mouth, the head on the neck, the arms in the shoulder joints, et cetera... creating symmetry in the body balances the energy that moves through the body, including the mind... Drawing is a dance of energy translated onto the page; we can draw that which is felt. There is a gap between what is felt and what is known by the mind. In movement, instinct is more valuable than thought.

KH: What are the number games you play and illustrate in your work?

Journey of Consciousness into Matter, 2007. 27.5 × 27.5 in, watercolor and colored pencil on paper

Lead Dove, 2005-2006. Dimensions variable (life size), 11lb of lead

SC: I have structures that I make out of points and connecting points in my mind by counting. I try to draw them on paper sometimes. It's very hard to do a good job. Each number from one through ten has a shape formed by the number of points that number is. I also count to build interlocking pyramids, interlocking circles and infinitely expanding flowers and sparks from stars. The five-pointed base of the pyramid is the strumming of the fingers one time, the next row of four is the strum of the fingers save the thumb, three... two... one... I think the way I organize dots and lines to make these shapes is endemic to the way I organize information, like a symptom of this brain. I think we all have these patterns we fall into... Some are facts of matter and some are misunderstandings, dreams, habits... I'm trying to differentiate them.

KH: Vedic Sulbasutra texts contain some of the earliest recordings of mathematical invention: "Those who wish to destroy existing and future enemies should construct a fire altar in the form of a rhombus." Do you see your work as a version of a fire altar, whose form functions to define a performance or to make a change?

SC: I see my work as a reoccurring choice to pay attention to whatever is most basic and to tend to it lovingly. I made a 1:1 casting of a dead dove out of lead in the hopes that the weight of this peace symbol would somehow transform the world and thereby be transformed itself. If mind is more primary than matter, it may stand a chance.

KH: Is there any chance you could be an ancient Indian mathematician reincarnated? Or maybe even Alfred North Whitehead?

SC: I love Alfred North Whitehead, but I just made a list of people who I could possibly be reincarnations of and he wasn't on the list.

KH: Who is?

SC: These are all personalities I relate to in my life, but have chosen not to pursue this time around...

A schizophrenic

A lonely, self-important academic (male)

A flower child who OD'd (female)

A fascist

Also, I feel really connected to the work of Hilma af Klint. She lived and worked in relative isolation, guided by a number of spirits. She had a spirit guide named Ananda, who I think was actually a contemporary of hers whom she never met named Paramahansa Yogananda (my meditation teacher's teacher's teacher). I think it was him because his teachings are called "Ananda Yoga," and his teachings are really copacetic with Klint's diagrams of how the world's religions view good and evil. It makes sense to me that Hilma af Klint's spirit guides did not want her work to be shown until the end of the twentieth century to give Yogananda's work time to spread and deepen.

KH: Why is there something rather than nothing?

Spheres of Consciousness, 2007. 9 × 27.5 in, Pen and acrylic on paper

SC: I don't know. I've heard something exists so that it may experience itself. I'm going with this hypothesis for now. Reverend Ellen Grace O'Brian, a second generation disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda says the experience of existence consists of the following cycle: It exists. We are it. We forget. We remember.

KH: If everything exists so that it may experience itself, how does your art practice figure into your existence? I recently came across an old poem of yours in which you write:
"deep space and dark space a poets own choice
who reads a poet but the poets own voice
to speak to one's self is to speak just the same..."

SC: It's cool to be in conversation with you right now about my art because usually my art is

an ongoing conversation with myself. Within this conversation with myself the question of "who's speaking" is always of interest. Every time I am aware of communicating words some how through myself, I wonder, who is speaking... sometimes I know and sometimes I don't.

Detail (Confronting the Fear of Both Living and Dying), 2004-2005. Marker on paper scroll

KH: You live close to your grandmother, who has Alzheimer's disease. Has her disease had an affect on your thinking about self, memory, and existence?

SC: I believe that she has an exaggeration of something we all have. We're all amnesiacs to at least half of our day everyday... Every night we go to sleep and forget everything to enter an alternate world of darkness and mismatched signifiers. We drive on the highway unaware of the other drivers also speeding someplace beside us. Our experiences in the sleep world as well as sensuality in most of our waking life seem mostly irrelevant, so we don't pay attention or remember what we dream or how our lunch felt against our palate. Everything has become irrelevant to my grandma except the things she obsessed on in life, and on those things she continues to obsess. Her condition forces her attention to be exactly right here, exactly right now. Her rational capacity is dreamlike, free verse and associative. I relate to her very much... The only thing she still consistently responds well to is love. Without Alzheimer's, it's very hard for an adult to perceive without signifiers; this is what made the phenomenologist's project so difficult, and I think it's why some intellectuals have dismissed the value of meditation. Sometimes my grandma is without signifiers; she cannot communicate or make sense of what she sees conceptually. I think that her Alzheimer's returns her to the Ouroboros, giving her the otherwise unattainable phenomenological perspective. I wonder if Alzheimer's may happen to balance a lifetime of not being present.

Confronting the Fear of Both Living and Dying, 2004-2005. Marker on paper scroll

KH: Has it influenced your work?

SC: I think about my grandma and whether she chose the life she's living now. It seems like we innocently collaborate with conditions beyond our control to choose our futures largely

out of inexperience and fear. I really want to come from a place other than fear. A lot of my work attempts to heal my fear and find a quieter, more solid place to come from. I recently made a scroll on which I wrote the Buddhist prayer for loving kindness over and over to myself. Right now I'm writing it for "you" to give out at my art show.

KH: Please respond to the following with whatever comes to mind:
Information

SC: In Formation
in form mate ion
innocent form mating song
in form
mate song
informatelion
In Form, One Song
uni verse

KH: Circle

SC: Circle

KH: Eye

SC: I
1
all
love
humanize=human+eyes
I am going to call my show at Acuna Hansen *Humaneyes*

KH: "You've got as many lives as you like, and more, even ones you don't want." -George Harrison

Mental Projections and Visualizations of Shushumna Nadi, 2007. 27.5 × 27.5 in, Watercolor, pen, acrylic and colored pencil

SC: I taught myself to sign George Harrison's name the way George Harrison signed his name. I once got to sign his name on an art gallery wall. I really like this piece. The dead live through us; this is an aspect of karma. When George Harrison died, I felt like my uncle who I'd never met died. I love him. I think he is my father's brother in spirit. My dad never had any other brothers. The other Beatles could be kind of distant. John died too young. I love Yoko Ono. She is my favorite living artist. I would love to collaborate with her someday! I would like to do a song together and make a book together. She wrote a letter to a young artist that you gave me Katie, and it was such a wonderful gift!

KH: "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible." -Paul Klee

SC: The art that really resonates for me is art that makes visible the otherwise invisible, absolutely. I try to make art like this.

KH: "There's some mysterious process at work here, which I don't even want to understand."
-Philip Guston

SC: I do want to understand, but as soon as I feel that I understand anything
nothing to say
the silence is
"it"

One Equals Plus One, 2006. 8 × 15 ft, Billboard in Bloomington, Indiana

KH: This interview is online and free to anyone with Internet access. Is there anything you would like to say to these free and online folks? Any other Web sites you would like to recommend they visit?

SC: Let freedom ring! I volunteered at this organization for a while earlier this year; I really believe in their work: peaceactionwest.org. I get a lot out of listening to talks from: dharmaseed.org, infinitemile.org. I enjoy the sitar and hammered dulcimer podcast from magnatune.com. The Herbal Highway Podcast from November 1, 2007, "[Paul Stamets: How mushrooms can save the world](#)" is amazing! I recently learned the following resource is available to us; you might want to bookmark it for future reference: [The Spiritual Emergency Crisis Network](#). These mandala paintings are beautiful; click on "[The Unfolding of a Human Self](#)". This is a video of a science experiment that demonstrates laminar flow, a phenomenon in physics in which actions can be completely reversed, because chaos is not in play: flixy.com. If you haven't seen it yet: storyofstuff.com.

KH: In hopes that the reader may glean some insight into eternal love, what was your favorite piece of advice you were given at your wedding last summer?

SC: "We are all one family."