



silvermine arts center

In The Layers

curated by Suzanne Julig, Suzanne Julig Art Advisory

November 3 through December 23, 2013

Artists talk with exhibiting artists - Tom Berntsen, Jeanine Esposito, Constance Kiermaier and Cynthia MacCollum: Tuesday, November 19, 6pm



This exhibition was inspired by "The Layers," a poem by Stanley Kunitz (1905-2006) who was twice named the United States Poet Laureate. Kunitz wrote "The Layers" in the 1970s after having experienced the deaths of his mother, his two older sisters and several close friends. The poem, which is replete with themes of change, loss, emotional pain and melancholy recollection, is ultimately one of hope and transformation.

The multifaceted ideas contained in "The Layers" are reflected in the works on paper in this exhibition through the artists' use of both multiple levels of meaning and layered materials. Several are collage-based works consisting of substances as varied as gold leaf, ground minerals, photographs, paint and found objects. Helen Cantrell's "Direction Home" and Barbara Morse-LuBell's "Mapping My Progress" incorporate personal photographs and maps that relate to the life journey of Kunitz's poem. Nina Bentley's sculptural assemblage "He Looked Good on Paper," while witty, expresses elements of misjudgment and regret. Thread, pencil and paper are used by Shaw Stuart in a delicate interplay of line and geometry that reference a journey that is not perfectly linear nor completely revealed as it unfolds.

In other works, the layering takes place exclusively through imagery, as in the photographs of Thomas Berntsen with their manifold shadows and reflections, and Bruce Dunbar, whose mysterious and unsettling tangled branches alternately hide and reveal. The monotypes of ghostly baby clothing by Constance Kiermaier evoke Kunitz's need to "look behind" before continuing, as do the suggestion of reminiscence and contemplation in Ann Chernow's "Moonlight."

The palpable grief of Kunitz's "feast of losses" and "abandoned camp-sites" are embodied in Joseph Saccio's "The Book of Catastrophes" with its crumpled pages, disturbing photographs and hollowed-out log. Elisa Khachian's "Five Generations" speaks to the scattered tribe of the poem, as do, in an abstract fashion, Nancy Nikkal's "Color Memory 7," with its fragments of images that appear like partially remembered experiences.

In interviews, Kunitz said the inspiration for the poem began with the two lines "Live in the layers, not on the litter," which came to him out of a cloud ("a nimbus-clouded voice") that appeared to him in a dream. [Tom Anastasio's](#) collage "Jacob's Ladder Series I," with its dramatic torn-paper sky and diminutive ascending figure, presents us with a fitting visual equivalent. The hopefulness conveyed by this pivotal line in the poem is captured in Jeanine Esposito's paper sculpture "Forgiveness," with its nestled forms, one seemingly scarred, but intact and not abandoned. It is also interesting to note that Kunitz was an avid gardener, and that in horticulture "layering" is a form of plant propagation. This is brought to mind in "Lucky Forrest," by Charles Geiger, with its dense, vibrant vegetation.

In the last lines of the poem we find Kunitz moving forward. Though unable to discern his future, he declares "I am not done with my changes." The optimism and determination he reveals are echoed in the exuberant cut-paper forms set aloft in Jane Ingram's "Flight," and the boundless sky of rosy-edged clouds in Cynthia MacCollum's monoprint, "Grace."

-- Suzanne Julig

The Layers **By Stanley Kunitz**

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face. Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.
In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."
Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.
I am not done with my changes.

Stanley Kunitz, "The Layers" from The Collected Poems of Stanley Kunitz.

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Source: The Collected Poems of Stanley Kunitz (W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2002)

The exhibition will feature work by the following Guild artists:

[Tom Anastasio](#)

Nina Bentley

Suzanne Benton

Thomas Berntsen

Helen Cantrell

Ann Chernow

Bruce Dunbar

Jeanine Esposito

Roxanne Faber Savage

Charles Geiger

Lori Glavin

Jane Ingram

Elisa Khachian

Constance Kiermaier

Cynthia MacCollum

Susan Manspeizer

Sandra Meagher

Barbara Morse-Lubell

Nancy Nikkal

Margaret Roleke

Joseph Saccio

Anita Soos

Shaw Stuart

Michael Zack

Marcia Zimmerman