



Exploring Certain Realities With Artist Megan Kimber

A Certain Reality, an exhibition featuring works by artists David Ball, Jennifer Davis, and Megan Kimber, opened last night at grayDUCK Gallery (608 W. Monroe Street) and is also part of tonight's Art Night Austin. The exhibition runs through March 30th. We contacted Megan Kimber to learn more about the influences behind her beautifully haunting paintings.

You mention that you're inspired by spooky and murky things. What are some spooky events you've experienced that inspire your work? Have you ever seen anything particularly otherworldly or creepy?

My curiosities and fascinations seem to be a paradox. I love simple, kind, gentle things that comfort me, like my cats or finding little stones, but I also am fascinated by stuff many people would be creeped out by. For example, last summer, I was out in the farm country of western New York, and I found, half buried in the shale near a waterfall, some little bones. [It looked] as if there had been a mudslide [that] trapped the poor thing. I dug into those stones, determined to find as much of the skeleton as possible. I felt this frenzy, like by getting the bones out from under the crushing stones, I was doing justice for that animal and giving it proper respect and honor for its life. As I was digging, I thought to myself, "Good lord, what if someone was watching me? I look like a mad woman!" Maybe I am. I honestly don't even care if I am.



Sometimes, what I feel are otherworldly things are actually just very unique experiences, like slowly befriending a wild horse on an island off Georgia. I knelt down by his head and watched him eat the grass near me while occasionally casting a curious eye at me. It tooks hours of trust, but when we connected, it felt otherworldly.

In terms of otherworldly, in the last few years, things have made me think that the spirit world exists. One night in my grandparents' house, I woke up to the silhouette of an African-American boy looking at me, standing next to my bed. I fell back asleep and didn't think twice of it until I found out years later that my grandmother's family was involved in helping out with the Underground Railroad. I don't know if what I saw was connected or what that little boy was trying to tell me, but it made me wonder.

In terms of seeing creepy things, I've seen a semi-decomposed body from a suicide when I lived in Providence. Also back in those days, I used to intentionally get lost and sneak into places. You find some pretty creepy stuff in abandoned places. I don't do that anymore, though. I'm too freaked out that I will get shot or mugged. I've got nephews now; I've got lots to live for.

I don't ever want my viewers to think I am all about doom and gloom. One of the things that makes me almost burst with joy is pure nature, like finding a dense patch of ferns or horsetail plants or little baby birds in their nests or finding fossils. Simple things make me very happy, like when my smallest nephew plays absentmindedly with my fingers while he sits on my lap. I watch his fingers carefully explore my rings and the turns and ridges in my knuckles. It's beautiful to me. So unassuming. No acts, no pretenses.

Who are the people depicted in your paintings? Are they inspired by people you know?

Sometimes the people in the paintings are inspired by people I know, but usually they are just completely made up. It's a collage of my visual experiences. For example, I may see an older woman sitting on a chair next to me with her hands resting on her knees in a manner that is just gorgeous without her even knowing it, and I try to remember that image in order to someday give someone in a painting hands just like hers. Or I may snap a photo of someone I know, where either the light or wind is doing something exceptionally subtle yet lovely with their hair, clothes, or skin, or they are just looking at me in such a way and their eyes are just luminous, and I just want to capture that.

Can you tell me about the specific pieces in this exhibition at grayDUCK and how they fit into the theme of A Certain Reality?

This time around, I intentionally made these pieces very personal and autobiographical. It's weird; I haven't done that for a decade, but it was time for some self introspection and admitting of things I still can't quite put into words. I have been very inspired by portraiture from the Civil War era, specifically women and children. In terms of this exhibition at grayDUCK and how my work fits into the theme of A Certain Reality, I think that most people, whether it's realized or not, have applied a "certain reality" to how they live their lives and thus, how they survive. "Certain" is a key word - it sounds like a solid absolute term, but in this context, A Certain Reality, I feel it is subjective. Reality can be an all encompassing word, but it's definitely not universal. Everyone has their own world, their own patterns and rhythms to their days, the way they view the world and people and things around them; I am guilty of that. I have my own neuroses and filters that I view my world through, as does everyone else. But I try to be brave. I want to be more brave, and I think that my work in this show reflects that. The girls I drew have a strength, even if they seem flawed. They still pull through, you know? I think I painted what I have been purely, deeply feeling in my life and what I hope I am to become.

Contact the author of this article or email tips@austinist.com with further questions, comments or tips.
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