

A Girls' Club Roundtable Interview with South Florida Artists conducted by Claire Breukel

Frances Trombly and Claire Breukel meet to drink smoothies and talk about art. It's Tuesday, September 16, 2008, 11:30am at Out of The Blue café in Miami.

Shortly after this Claire emailed Kerry Phillips the interview (she is away at a residency). Kerry responded to Frances' answers.

Later still, Claire emailed Elisabeth Condon who responded to both Frances and Kerry.

Claire Breukel: Tell me about what influences your work?

Frances Trombly: Mostly, my work is a reaction to everything I come in contact with in my environment and surrounding space. I attempt to understand objects and their role in relation to ourselves, where objects come from, how they came to be and where they end up. Lately, I've been remaking mass produced objects in the same way they were originally produced. I use the same materials only using my hand making method. I find it interesting that most copies are less valuable than the original, but in my case, the copy may become more valuable.

Kerry Phillips: True, true. Everything, anything. Friends, family. Memory. Playing. The clouds and the color trees are right before it rains. Before moving back to Miami I wondered how it would affect my work – but these same things influence me, and, they are everywhere. It seems like Miami is seen as superficial because there is this lack of connection – but it is not from a lack of desire to feel or be

connected. I blame public transportation and the 80's.

Elisabeth Condon: Buses? Miami's scale is designed for cars—I never think of public transportation in Miami except cruise ships. I remember the image of 80s Miami--Don Johnson, pink, white and turquoise...but as superficial? Perhaps light bouncing from colorful surfaces. Miami is low and beautiful, more



elegant yet faded than on TV. I too love playing with material, color, the colors of places, their texture—Florida is watercolor, reflective, curvaceous; New York is oil, bricks and mortar, grids. I take traditional Chinese painting as my model for integrating the sensations and time periods spent in various places, while my LA childhood confirms Dr. Seuss as documentary.

CB personal thought: Cause and effect from constants in everyday life and found in any environment as well as unique to the area of residence and work.

CB: What would happen if you left Miami?

FT: If I were to leave here I would be affected by different circumstances. I would change and therefore my work would change with me.

KP: A lot of testing/practice in the 'following your instinct thing!' It is more of a challenge when we don't have our familiars around, but that doesn't mean it doesn't get done.

EC: Losing what's familiar makes it easier to follow your instinct. In a new place I establish new routines as quickly as possible, which, upon reflection, seems bizarre. Spending part of the year in Florida and New York for the last several years totally re-shapes my routines, as well as perceptions of space and experience of culture. Even the ground changes-- sand to soil and back again. This definitely has an impact on my work, because I want to integrate the palettes and characteristics of each place into hybrid spaces where narrative is suggested, but not explicit—travel renders space permeable, with color, light, shape as placeholders to mark the way.

CB personal thought: *Place and situation influence artistic practice. In some cases the context of creation influences the result. Always wished I could absorb information through osmosis.*

CB: How ideally would you like a viewer to experience your work?

FT: Looking at my work is like getting to know someone, it simply takes time. If you see my work at a distance you'll see nothing but a simple object but once you take a closer look there is so much more there. Most viewers don't notice my work. They just walk right by... but



there are a few that will stop to pay attention. I always find it interesting to see who notices and who doesn't.

KP: I for one want people to interact with my work – in some cases, I even want them to lick it! I want there to be a physical compulsion to interact with it – like when you see corduroy – you have to touch it – you are compelled to!



EC: I feel the urge to compel. Ideally, people would set up camp in my paintings and travel, duck into caves, wander some more. They'd



have ongoing experiences, be transported, and finally just fall in willingly without ever coming out.

CB personal thought: All have different desired results for their work and desired interaction with the audience. Looking, climbing, licking, absorbing....

CB: If you had an intern for a week what do you think they would take away from the experience of working with you?

FT: Their response would depend on who they are. It's similar to how someone would respond to my work. They either take something from the experience or they take nothing...

KP: I so want an intern. I think they would see that influence and ideas, really can come from anything/where – and that it is important to follow one's instincts, even if the result is sometimes “failure” it is important to be able to discern your voice from everyone else. I think mostly, though, they would be sad to not get to spend so much time with my dog, Tonta – and they would feel oddly let down by their own pets. She is that awesome. I think they would also become reintroduced to the importance of midday naps – I am all for them.

EC: An intern would be great. A permanent intern...someone who loves item returns, stretching linen and accurate database entry. They would learn structure is rhizomic; that life as an artist has all sorts of dimensions, from the sacred to the mundane and it can be a sun-drenched, time-elastic process. We'd start small, mailing list, files, storage, then the fun stuff, cutting out sketchbook images of complex trees, minutely with ex-acto blades, for hours... I'd probably wait until they left before I painted, though, because I prefer to paint alone.

CB personal thought: Frances would be a CEO whose staff would be relaxed growing individuals, with Kerry she would be a nutty professor type who would expect her staff to do

crazy extracurricular activities just for fun and Elisabeth would probably own a sweat shop.

CB: Your work is different in that it becomes precious by virtue of the skill and time to make the piece?

FT: Yes, It does take time to make my work. This is why there is less of it. I could simply get the work fabricated but there is something about the intimacy of making that is really important to me.

KP: So many (I am thinking of my non-art major students – and my parents, here) seem to respond to the time and skill involved in a work



of art – as if that alone makes it somehow “real” or precious. My work seems to go about this in the other way – not that there is not skill or time, but unless there is a good reason then these hardly hit my radar. I am not setting out to make something precious, per se, but a found object (trash) becomes such, because I make it such – because I pick it up.

EC: When kids reach ten or so, don't they start to measure skill by mimicry, thus forgetting the greatness of their drawings at two or five years old? Yet, the process of trying to make sense of something, how a kid draws, is proximate to the

experience of painting. So the intimacy of making and the time element in that becomes essential, because painting is how I make sense of life: visually realizing what is happening around and inside layers of time. These layers press against the surface of a painting creating an index of color, facture and mark that translate spatially. That is where skill enters, as a by-product wrested from trial, error and plain curiosity. I am unsure about “precious”—one part of me goes to icon painting, the other to Thomas Kinkade, obvious and overloaded. Yet, painting is communication,



FT: I spend most of my time lately listening to Mono and Sigur Ros.



so I have to set terms for viewers to understand. Each painting has a different life span and set of demands—sometimes they come alive and start dictating terms—yet always the value of the work derives from the level of immersion in making the painting, more than skill or time per se. The process can be fast or slow—what matters is the focus and the clarity of the aim—even, or especially, when it gets complicated.

CB: *I wish we could value the time spent on “non-valuable” activities- driving to work, brushing teeth... get paid for all time spent instead of designated hours.*

CB: **What music do you listen to?**

KP: I listen to whatever is on, or whatever my friends give me. And a lot of npr – something about the talking and the repetitiveness is soothing. Usually I get stuck on one thing – one cd or mix and I listen to it over and over and over and over – until something strikes me to change it. I have been trying to learn French better, so I have also been listening to French language CD’s – I love Antoine – “this literally means ‘I like tight sweaters’” – he is so funny in that French kind of way. A lot of the time I am just without music – there is so much sound and rhythm everywhere we are – it is like a soundtrack already. (sometimes I make up and sing songs, too, about how much I love my dog, or how busy I am, etc.). I also really really like the music they play in Publix – it is unlike any grocery store I have ever been in.

EC: Reminds me of the French rap cd La Brigade I bought in 1999, which makes good language practice. When I hear words I stop and listen, even talk back, so I can’t work to NPR or language cds, though I did try a Mandarin CD in 2005. Mr. Smith had Mr. and Mrs. Lee to dinner and they discussed the

furniture, from the bathroom to the living room, itemizing each article for listeners to repeat five times. I have played the same Steve Reich tape for about seven years in the car and in the studio am playing minimalist or drone-y music: Reich, Arnold Dreyblatt, Terry Riley, Boards of Canada, Eliana Gilad, Aphex Twins, Flanger. Or, like Kerry, silence. And am on the take for new suggestions and tips.

CB personal thoughts: *In short Mono, NPR, Publix music and French rap. Hmm!*

CB: What about fashion?

FT: I love the simplicity of dresses because you can just put them on and go...

KP: I am unclear about the question. Could you repeat it?

EC: Reading that stewardesses wear Dansko clogs inspired me to buy a pair, because I stand while I paint. I also bought a pair of Fluevog slingbacks, but saying I wear them would be a lie. I wore them once and it took me 25 minutes to walk one block.

CB personal thoughts: *Sigh! Oh dear!*

CB: Books?

FT: Currently on my nightstand is - Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. It's been a little neglected lately but it's there.

KP: I love to read books and have them and use them as material for art making. I am really fond of fiction – though I can't think of anything really great I just read. (On the same lines of the high school movies – I did just read a Robert Ludlum book I found in my studio. I am trying to not watch TV and this was around, I picked it up and got stuck. I am now keenly

aware of things that would be meaningful if I were a covert spy, but I'm not, and they don't.)



EC: I have neither a TV nor a nightstand. However, the NY Times Tuesday Science Times, Thursday Home and Styles sections, Friday Art section and on occasion the Sunday edition can be very absorbing, especially with Metro and Real Estate. I just read Nam Le's short story collection *The Boat* and before that Terese Svoboda's *Black Glasses Like Clark Kent*, about her uncle in Japan during World War II. Nam Le writes beautifully about the Australian landscape in his story *Half-Moon Bay*. If banished to isolation with only four books for the rest of my life, I choose Francois Cheng's *Empty and Full: the Philosophy of Chinese Painting*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, EL Konigsburg's *Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*. Though I love *Poetics of Space*, it's a tough call.

CB personal thoughts: *Reading much better than fashion! Quite a diverse bunch!*