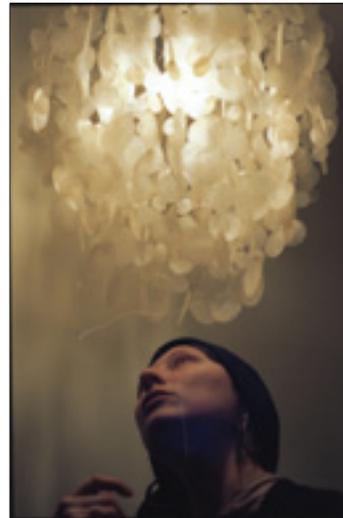


## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Pam Rosenblatt

### Photographer Kris Hatch and her self-portraits

*On one sunny but brisk Sunday, March 16, 2014, the Nave Gallery at 155 Powderhouse Boulevard, Somerville, Massachusetts opened its doors at 1 p.m. to let visitors in to view a rather dark and intriguing photography exhibition titled "Chaotic Forms" curated by Kris Hatch, a photographer based out of Somerville, Massachusetts. About a half of an hour later, Wilderness House Literary Review arts editor Pam Rosenblatt entered the large gallery space, introduced herself to Hatch, and proceeded to view the show. The two women spoke after Rosenblatt finished observing the various artworks, some of which included photographs by Hatch herself. It was agreed that an interview for WHLR would take place. And one week later, via e-mail, they corresponded...*



WHLR: How would you like your name to be written in the Wilderness House Literary Review arts article?

KH: Kris Hatch.

WHLR: Where were you born? And where do you currently live?

KH: Though I only lived there until I was just over three, I was born in Hartford, Connecticut. I currently live in Somerville, Massachusetts.

WHLR: Did you attend high school and/or college? If yes, where? And what degree(s) did you earn?

KH: I went to three different high schools, in Texas and Massachusetts, the latter being where I graduated. The trend continued to college. I completed a couple of years of college, three different colleges, in Utah and Massachusetts. My health required me to withdraw from classes after my first semester at Massachusetts College of Art.

WHLR: How did you become involved with art, especially photography? Who influenced you the most in your career? Which artists had the greatest impact on you?

KH: I was interested in art from childhood. My senior year of high school I learned how to operate a manual analog camera, and I loved it, but didn't have my own camera until I was 22 or so. I wasn't interested in it being my primary medium really, but my health limitations led me to dedicate myself to it, as it was one of the only mediums that didn't tax me physically. Beyond the significant influence that illness had on my "career", my photographic influences are limited to contemporary photographers, and all of those that I count as major influences are actually a part of the exhibit I've curated — 'Chaotic Forms'. Ellen Rogers, Courtney Brooke Hall, Alison Scarpulla, and Rebecca Cairns are photographers that I would most credit for my growth within the medium.

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WHLR: As seen in the exhibition “Chaotic Forms” that took place from March 6 – March 30, 2014, you enjoy black and white photography. In the online “Call for Entry” for “Chaotic Forms”, which you curated and which was basically done in black and white photography, you mention how:



Early mystics spoke of a cosmology in which our universe was originally, and is at base, infinite energetic chaos. They believed that chaos created us, and all life within our universe, in order to “know itself”. A sense of form and pattern was born; the nameless became named. This can be both mimicked and reversed in the body of a dancer. A nameless, intangible energy can be expressed through lyrical pattern and form, or acute perception can be broken down into intuitive, chaotic movement.

Why create an exhibit about mystics and cosmology and how “nameless, intangible energy can be expressed through lyrical pattern and form, or acute perception [that] can be broken down into intuitive, chaotic movement”? What’s the purpose?

KH: The purpose is none other than to satisfy my own aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual leanings. The gallery itself inspired the idea of an exhibit themed around dance, as I felt that the space was so perfect for dance performances; it reminded me of dance studios from my childhood. At the time I began fleshing out my intention for the show, I was learning more about Gnosticism and Kabbalah. I found their cosmologies fascinating, and so it felt natural to integrate them into the exhibit. Little that I do artistically is spared for long from my fascination with mysticism, religion and the occult.

I would note, though, that although most of my work in the show is in black and white, the number of pieces from all photographers in the exhibit collectively are actually evenly balanced between color and black and white photography.

WHLR: Most of the photographs that you emailed over to me, as well as your photographs in the “Chaotic Forms” exhibit, seem to have a mystery element to them. For example, your photograph of the woman looking at the dangling chandelier. The viewer may wonder who is this woman and why is the chandelier dangling so low? Or the photograph of the barren beach scene with the person taking off his/her shirt. The viewer may try to figure out who is he/her? Where is this beach? Or the picture of the mysterious photographer reflected upside down in the cosmetic mirror. The questions that develop here are who is this photographer? And what is the purpose of the picture? And



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finally, the photograph of the two big bales of hay rolled up with a person edged between them. The viewer may conjure up the questions: What does the person's face look like? Is the person a man or a woman? Where is the location of this country scene? Again, mysterious. So mystery continues to be a theme in your work. Why? And what would you call your type of photography? [Please do not answer the rhetorical questions after each analyzed photograph written about above, unless you want to. Please simply answer the bolded questions at the end of the paragraph starting with "Why?"]



KH: As suggested, I won't address the individual photographs that you mention, but I will say that, unless it is terribly obvious, all of the portraits that I sent to you are self-portraits. I largely work in self-portraiture, so perhaps part of the mystery could be attributable to that, to limit the level of vulnerability that comes with publishing self-portraits, especially when

they are often nude. It's essentially an aesthetic choice, though. It's so intuitive, that it feels unnatural to try to pick apart the "why"; it only leads to further unanswerable existentials. In the case of conceptual series of mine, such as the 'Yoke of Mirrors', 'Baptism' and 'Variations on Sound and Illness' ones that are glimpsed in the portfolio I've included here, a certain level of mystery is intentional, because I'm using symbolism to communicate, and I want to respect the



viewer enough to allow them space to interpret those symbols for themselves. Otherwise, as in the photos you mention above, it is simply the environment around me inspiring a composition.

WHLR: You mentioned that you work with symbols in your photographs. If you would like to, please mention three (3) to five (5) of the significant symbols and perhaps discuss each one of them?

KH: For the most part, as I mentioned previously, I allow the viewer to identify the symbols themselves, so I will not list them. My titles are the most leading. In the case of the 'Yoke of Mirrors' series, for example, the yoke of mirrors is the symbol. It is a costume piece that I made that attaches at the collar, and extends down to the floor, and is stitched with 154 individual mirrors. The viewer can interpret that as they like.

WHLR: What type of camera, lens, and film do you use? Do you develop your own photographs? How?

KH: I almost exclusively use a Canon AE-1 from the 70's with a fixed 50mm lens. I'll try out various 35mm films as desired. I unfortunately

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don't develop my own film or photographs at this time. I get the film developed at a lab, and scan the negatives digitally at home. I had my own black and white darkroom for a short time, and I miss it very much.

WHLR: What do you think of digital photography versus the traditional film?

KH: I tend to prefer the look and general tone of analog work. A good deal of digital work feels very contrived to me. It loses a lot of the "mystery" that we've spoken of. If we see a particularly striking digital image, we can understand that anything unusual or fantastical could have been, and indeed likely was, manipulated in photoshop. With film, for the most part, these things need to be captured at the moment that the photograph is taken. Much manipulation can be done with someone skilled in a darkroom, obviously, but there is naturally much more romance to me in that alchemy than sitting in front of a computer, which we are far too chained to. There's a gamble, a surrender of control with film. It can seem to have a life of its own. That being said, there are photographers that use digital that I deeply respect, and their skills behind the camera and at the computer are authentic and enviable.



WHLR: Some of your photographs are unnerving. Why? What's the purpose?

KH: I prefer there to be a tight tension between anxiety and beauty. It feels more honest to me. Once again, the aesthetic is a very natural extension of myself, so, unless they are conceptually intended to convey something unsettling, it's not contrived. There is no "purpose" behind any of it beyond honestly capturing how I experience the world around and within me.

WHLR: Where do you see your artwork headed? What's your next step in your art career?

KH: I've had some short films in the queue for a couple of years now. I've been awarded an Artist



Fellowship grant from the Somerville Arts Council for multi-disciplinary work this year, so I hope to allot most of those funds to that. Getting more involved in a local artistic community is also important to me, and working with the Nave Gallery on this exhibit and otherwise is a step toward that. My artistic community thus far has been an international

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one via the internet. Most importantly of all to me is my music, and I have been dedicating more time to that than photography this past year. In terms of any shade of a "career", I am most comfortable pursuing that than photography. It is a culture that I am much more comfortable with.

WHLR: You mentioned that you're a musician. What instruments do you play? And what music genres are you interested in? And on what level are you on with your music - do you perform professionally?

KH: I'm mainly a vocalist. I use equipment that enables me to create compositions by layering and looping my voice, and I use those along with a sampler that stores short clips of other instrumentation and vocals, as well as field recordings that I can manipulate and loop as well. In terms of my musical tastes, my interests are vast, but in terms of what influences my music, religious choral music and experimental classical and electronic music are ones that I would credit the most for my sound. I have been very private about my compositions for a long time--composing and recording at home. I am presently not performing professionally.

WHLR: The e-mail interview is now over. Thank you! Please send over a photo or two of yourself. One picture from the shoulders up to the head. And the second a full body photograph. I realize that you work in self-portraiture. But I'm wondering if there are any stock photos you use for press requests. If not, which photos would you like *Wilderness House Literary Review* to use?

KH: I've never used press photos. If it is alright, you can use the one with the chandelier for the headshot, and the one attached for the full body. Thanks Pam!

