

Bridget Galway
The Art of Will Kerr

I chose to introduce Will Kerr in his own words; I can only add he is one of the most holistic artists I have met to date. He is inspired to use all art forms to be an integral part of what he chooses to create.

For example, in this interview Will speaks about an ongoing musical collaboration with composer Greg Finger. I can say with complete certainty this will be one of many artistic collaborations. His creativity has no boundaries, and he communicates all his ideas with tremendous enthusiasm. While in the midst of describing one artistic project he is involved in, the spark of a new idea will arise, and another wheel is added to the momentum of his creativity.

I keep thinking how perfect that his name is Will. For it is through his abundant will power and tenacity of spirit that he has accomplished so much in his young life.

"I have always been interested in systems, patterns, and networks. Lately, my observations of people and culture in public situations strike me in how distinct individuals create social frameworks and networks, and still their senses and feelings range between connectedness and alienation. One feels each, and I imagine that we all feel these things - and sometimes maybe both extremes at the same time, whether we are alone or in a group."

BG. I know you have represented 100's of artists at your Gallery XIV, what was the inspiration that motivated you to focus on your art?

WK: Over the past 6 years, I have worked closely with about 40 artists running Gallery XIV as a traditional curator/gallery director. Through my work with Reflect -Arts in New York City (www.reflectarts.com), I have co-curated another 500 or so artists into solo and group exhibitions in different gallery spaces from Boston to New York City to Europe. It has been inspiring to work with some great talent making art today, but, fundamentally the experience and the work only reaffirmed to me that I need to have my own daily practice with my own creative process. Fundamentally, I am my own artist and I need to make my own work more than anything else. The opportunity to be supported while painting full time in China couldn't have been more timely and synchronistic.

BG: How did the opportunity of doing the fellowship in China present itself?

WK: Hmmm, it's full of connections, but in 2007, Reflect Arts produced a large international exhibition in New York City that was thematic and about the influence that eastern art and aesthetic has had upon western artists. In the end, we reviewed over 5000 images to curate an exhibition of 44 artists from 16 countries. It was a fantastic show. The very first artist who we accepted into the exhibition was Daniel Krause, an American sculptor making work and teaching art in Guangzhou, China. Our artworks were displayed close to one another at the exhibition, and Daniel and I have become friends since that show. A very prominent Chinese artist on faculty at Sichuan University named He Gong asked Daniel to

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recommend some American artists for consideration for a new 'artist in residence' fellowship to paint alongside Sichuan University MFA students in sort of a mentoring role. He Gong got in touch with me, and things fell into place very quickly. Within about four months, I found myself here.

BG: How has it been so far?

WK: It really couldn't be a better or freer situation. I can pursue my large commission in the Middle East and I can follow whatever creative directions I wish. I can make as much or as little work as I like – there are no official expectations. Time is my own. The talent of the Chinese artists is astounding, and the scene in China is just so exciting, happening, and now! The market is growing, the artists are starting to really push boundaries – and the level of craft and technical ability is superior. It may be that the China of tomorrow may be akin to the Paris of the early 1900's and New York City in the 1960's. I have been invited to go to Art Shanghai and to the Shanghai Art Fair next month, and I am excited to see what that is going to be all about.

BG: Your work definitely shows an Asian influence, where does this come from?

WK: It comes very simply from the materials and process of making those marks. I grind the Sumi ink on a stone to make my ink, and then I make marks on rice paper with a traditional Sumi brush. From my very first days of making art, I have used these materials. The process grounds me.

BG: Tell me more about that.

WK: My interests before I started to make art were academic – I studied western philosophy with rigor and, in particular, I was deeply grounded in notions of Phenomenology and German Idealism; namely, Hegel. I was interested in the origins of human consciousness and in written language as an expressions and affirmations of thought itself. Making ink and marks and gestures with the Sumi brush pulls me out of my head and connects me to the creative process. I have made thousands of marks for each one I might use in a painting. The Sumi brush itself is synonymous with an eastern aesthetic in the minds of western people...but they are maybe not so 'eastern' to eastern people. I find them somehow archetypal, but more abstracted.

BG: Will, Where did the conception of your most recent work derive?

WK: I have always been interested in systems, patterns, and networks. Lately, my observations of people and culture in public situations strike me in how distinct individuals create social frameworks and networks, and still their senses and feelings range between connectedness and alienation. One feels each, and I imagine that we all feel these things - and sometimes maybe both extremes at the same time, whether we are alone or in a group. I am also fascinated with the relationship between gesture and meaning – and how abstract marks can denote clearly distinct (and

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different) meanings for different people. And how in a myriad of situations, it all seems to be so relative to the given elements and situation, and fluid.

BG: What seems to be fluid?

WK: Our own personal experiences - observing one another and simply interpreting a gesture are each so varied and dependent upon the interpreter and muse. This, I guess, is the root for my current work. I want to create senses of space that challenges my observer's sense of place and orientation. I make layered patterns that hold images that may not be immediately seen. I want to offer visual ideas that can only be interpreted after the second or third look - and to challenge people to look beyond the surface.

BG: You spoke to me about some experiences you remember as a child.

WK: I am lucky to have come from a family that loves and appreciates art. I grew up with a diversity of music and art in our home, and I remember seeing and hearing beautiful things all the way back to my very first impressions. My Grandmother was a painter and writer from Portugal; we had some of her paintings in our house. My Grandfather was an American born in China; he lived mostly in Shanghai until he came to the States to attend High School. He and I were very close, and I grew up with many stories from his youth in China that left many impressions that I can still recall, very vividly, today - almost as if I experienced them myself. He once told me that he saw a crow in a market place in Shanghai who could speak more clearly and intelligently than a parrot. This always struck me, and maybe planted the seed for my fascination with them.

BG: Tell me a bit about the expressive writing in the crow images that you installed at All Asia, where did that come from in your consciousness, is there a frame of reference to the process?

WK: I have always admired Crows as animals. They are social creatures who normally form life partnerships with one mate. They find that mate when they are adolescents gathering in large social groups called 'Murders' - you can often see them in the late Fall and Winter, and they are full of chatter and they can be so haunting - most especially when you see them flying together. I have always thought it profound to see such a wild animal living and thriving in urban settings. This is what inspired this piece. For the expressive writing, crows are great communicators, and I always imagine that they must be talking to and about us humans in this physical landscape that we've created. The writing in the pieces is an abstracted or meta-language that expresses my imagining the Crow's notions, senses and opinions of our human language and culture, their observations of us.

BG: Where did the idea for MiraMar: Queen Gala, Saudades, and Approach come from?

WK: These three pieces actually began as deconstructions of the pattern and aesthetic contained in the Gross Murder. The framework for

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the pattern still remains, but it has been stretched and broken apart - dissolved and altered in the landscape. With each of these works, I am focusing on human emotions and connectedness. "Mira Mar: Queen Gala" was the first of these pieces that I did, and it is the largest. It takes place on a sort of archetypal boardwalk where one can always find people together and people alone. This is how boardwalks are - it may be ambiguous which of these people actually feels alone or connected. Even my senses about it change! I painted myself sitting on the wall, and I'm looking at a Gala (who is Dali's Wife) - her face makes the sun. Her gaze is fixed upon one of the freed crows flying off of the canvas. Every now and again, I humbly pay homage to Dali in a painting. "Saudades" is more of a personal piece - it is titled after one of the most profound and beautiful words in the Portuguese language. The word 'saudades' captures the romantic and nostalgic feelings of longing and missing. Being in China and so far away from my family, I have 'saudades' - and this feeling, in a way, makes our connection more intense, immediate, and real - but also more distant. It is a beautiful and emotional word that is also inconsistent and a dichotomy; but I think that anyone who has both travelled and loved understands this and has felt it. So far as I know, only the Portuguese have such a specific word for the complex emotion. "Approach" is maybe the most expectant of the paintings. A young family moving forward, together, marking their new journey - I see them as hopeful and uncertain, but with a wonderful confidence and movement.

BG: Have you been inspired by past or contemporary artist?

WK: Oh sure, so many. A few exhibitions of past artists come immediately to mind. I had a transcendental moment when I experienced Rothko's paintings for the first time at the Phillips collection in Washington DC. They inspired such emotion and wonder, and with such visceral immediacy. I remember that moment as if it were yesterday. I can still feel it. I have also seen retrospectives of Andy Warhol (in Porto, Portugal), Salvador Dali (in Philadelphia), and Francis Bacon (in New York City) that all left a profound and lasting impression on me - both as a human being and as an artist. My work as a gallery director has introduced me to many talented contemporary artists as well. Michael Costello (who paints in Boston) and Marcus Antonius Jansen (who paints in Berlin) both stand out to me as two of the very best artists making work today. They both have very different and distinct styles, and each has a wonderful sense for their craft and a profoundly strong point of view. I have great respect for each of them. They have taught me a lot about maintaining a distinct and authentic aesthetic while surviving as a full time artist in today's world. I am glad to call them both friends and also to be connected to their work. I am always excited to see the latest things coming out of their studios.

BG: Please speak a bit about the music you and Greg Finger have been developing to be part of the experience in viewing your art, and if so what is that about, what's in your head about this?

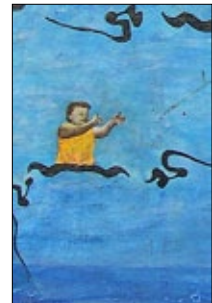
WK: This, I think, comes from my love for curating and for creating a multisensory experience where art is at the center. I met Greg in the Foundation Room at the House of Blues in Boston, we got to talking, and we

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immediately connected about music. He is a composer and he is smart; his understanding of genres and styles of music are wide ranging. I have worked with musicians many times in the past to create a musical landscape that works and compliments the artwork, elevating the experience of the person who comes to the show. I have always wanted the impressions of an exhibition to sustain long after the person leaves the show. Greg and I created *Xeno*, a musical project that connects and overlaps a wide range of musical styles – while containing a post-modern, industrial edge. It is a very fun project that has become its own thing. I will be weaving it more and more into my work as opportunities for larger scale installations arise.

BG: Is anything like that coming up?

WK: Not particularly, I really haven't given that much of a thought. Here, I'm just in the moment and so happy to be making work every day. There could be something on a large scale in the early stages being planned in China next spring 2011, but nothing tangible yet. In the meantime, I am starting to capture live music and forms here in China and Greg and I are working together through the internet to mold them. Not sure how it will all come together, but I'm having a lot of fun with it. I have been particularly amazed at how the internet keeps people (and creative projects) so connected and moving. I haven't missed a beat with my things going on in the US. I will be launching a new website for Gallery XIV soon, and I am doing all of the work here, virtually, with my design partner in Budapest, Hungary. I'm even struck with how you and I have been able to maintain this dialogue all along, and from different sides of the earth – and it's been much fun!



Will Kerr has presented artworks in over 50 solo and group shows in the United States and in Europe with notable solo exhibitions at Locco Ritoro Gallery in Boston (2004) and at Forum Picoas in Lisbon, Portugal (2005). With artwork in corporate and private collections internationally, Will Kerr is currently painting 300 original works for the Hotel Khalifa (Doha, Qatar), a commission by the Royal Crown Prince of Qatar for a flagship luxury destination/resort in the Middle East. Of late, Kerr has received a Fellowship from Sichuan University (Chengdu, China) to be 'artist in residence' - starting this August, and extending into spring 2011.

“seeing,”

said the dragon while running west,
“takes cultivation.”

i caught these words
while i lay resting
in the garden of my life.

the sun was setting
and i bid my golden master
“grace my sight with your life giving light!”

these words cast to the sky
while my eyes made love to brightness
- creeping into the heart of my soul
and illuminating this still moment
of pure be-ing.

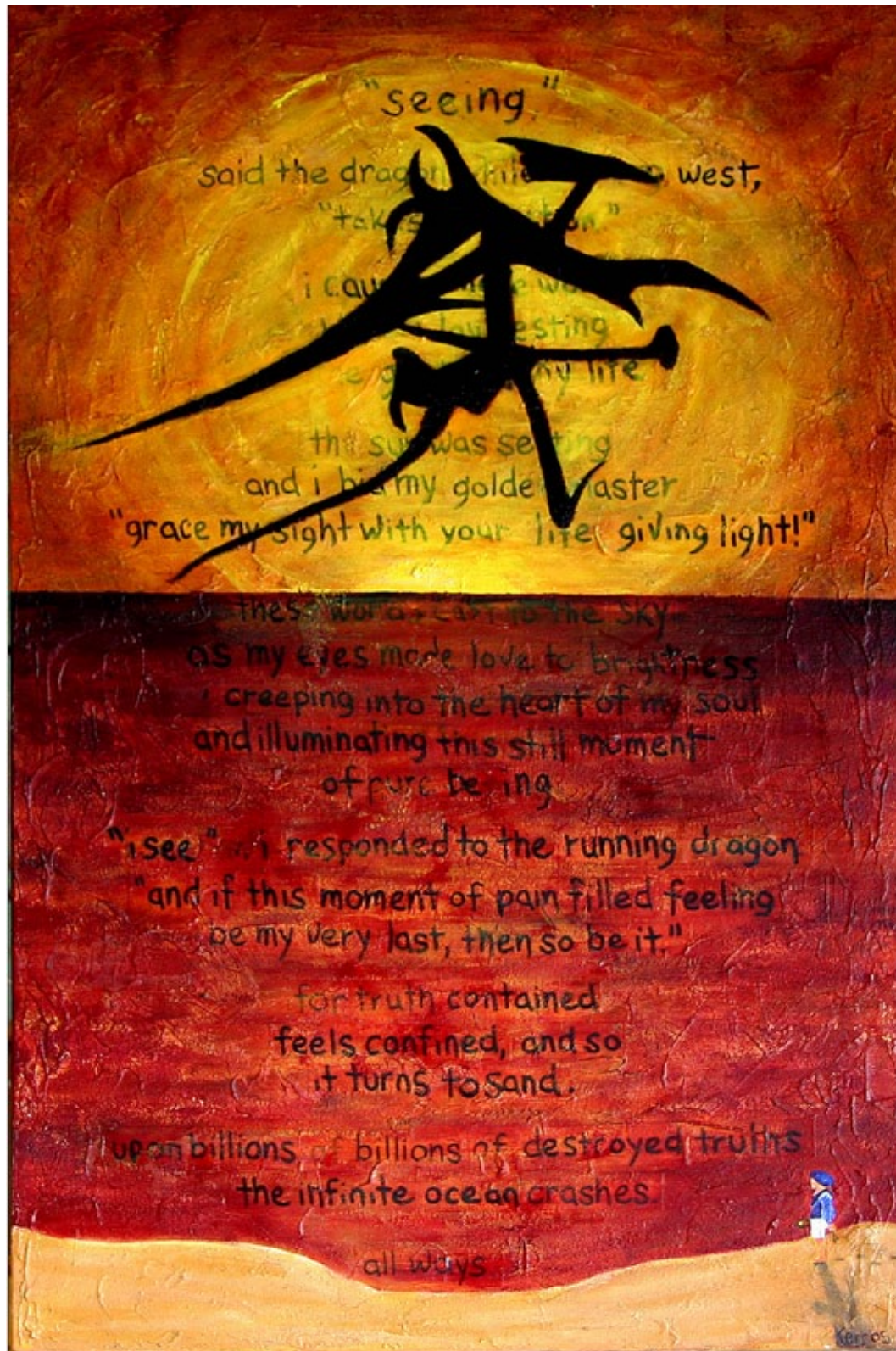
“i see” i responded to the running dragon
“and if this moment of pain filled feeling
be my very last, then so be it.”

for truth contained
feels confined, and so
it turns to sand.

upon billions of billions of destroyed truths
the infinite ocean crashes.

all ways.

- Will Kerr



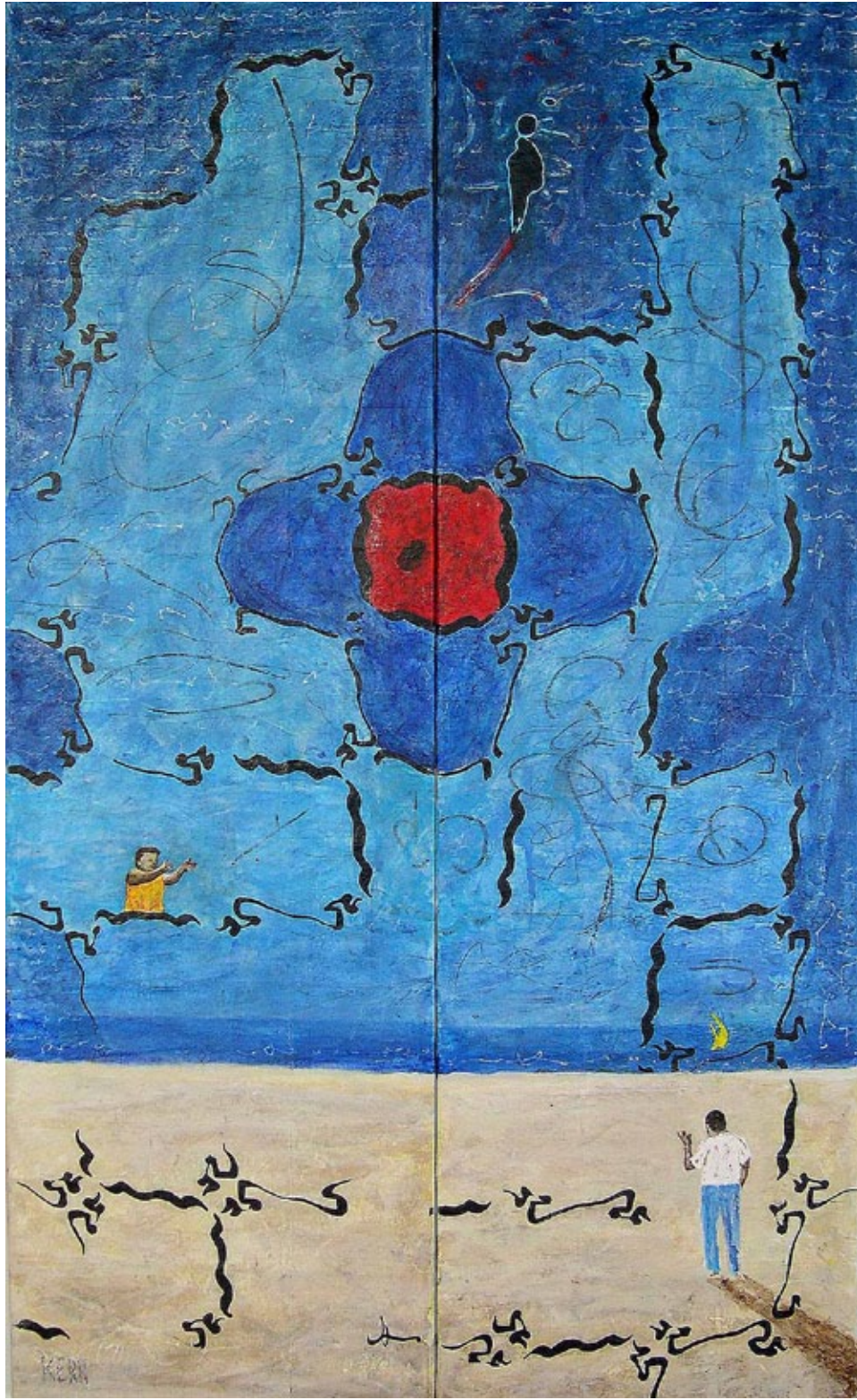
"Seeing" (artist statement) - 48" x 30" acrylic, sand on canvas



"A Gross Murder of Crows" - 144 8" squares, variable dimensions installed (acrylic, ink, sand on canvas)



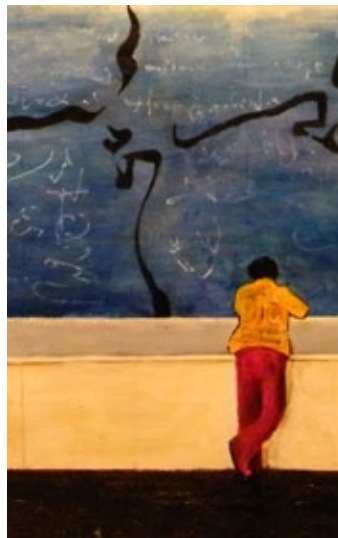
2nd arrangement of Gross Murder of Crows



"Saudades" – 43" x 25" acrylic, Sumi ink, rice paper on canvas



"Mira Mar: Queen Gala" - 43" x 60" acrylic, Sumi ink, rice paper on vinyl





"Approach" - 35" x 26" acrylic, Sumi ink, rice paper on canvas