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Transitions

composing history with Jo Kressin



JO KRESSIN'S PHOTOGRAPHS CAPTURE THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND FORCE THE VIEWER OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE. THE STARK AND SERENE BLACK AND WHITES ARE CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY AT THE MANX UNTIL MAY 5TH.

THIS WILL BE ONE OF KRESSIN'S FIRST EXHIBITS IN OTTAWA. THE GERMAN-BORN GRAPHIC DESIGNER CAME TO CANADA IN 2001 WITH HIS PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNER, STEPHANIE KRESSIN, WITH WHOM HE HAD CREATED THE GRAPHIC DESIGN COMPANY KNOWN AS INCONCEPTS. ORIGINALLY LANDING IN THE GEORGIAN BAY AREA, KRESSIN WAS DRAWN TO CAPTURE THE LANDSCAPE AND START CREATING PERSONAL WORK AGAIN.

They relocated to Ottawa three years ago after delivering a winning pitch to the War Museum. The move from Georgian Bay was spontaneous and resulted from the simply raised "don't you think we could live here?" . In Germany the majority of their clients were high-tech corporations but a client base of non-profits was always their goal. The decision to immigrate to Canada after eighteen years together in Germany (Stephanie is originally from the Toronto area) was sparked by a keen interest in adventure, a desire to explore Stephanie's heritage and the tech-bubble bursting. When it became evident that the high-tech economy was changing (Inconcepts counted Worldcom amongst their customers until the corporation declared bankruptcy) they made the move to Canada and looked forward to "learning something new".

Kressin had always known from a young age that he wanted to create but felt he was unable to draw or paint. A friend he met in a pub introduced him to the idea of photography, design and vision. He had

already completed a three year apprenticeship as a cabinet maker when he bought his first camera at the age of nineteen and started developing and applying his skills with a new medium. The partnership with his future wife made perfect sense her training in art became the right-brain to his left. Kressin says, "I'm more the Bahaus with straight lines, strong composition and everything has to be logic and Stephanie is more the counterpart, she is really open and more playful. But together...sometimes a hard process but that's what makes it interesting!"

Kressin had shown his work when he was studying but "then we jumped into business and I did nothing for myself." His focus had to shift to product photography and other commercial work. Creativity was sparked again with the move to Canada. Kressin says, "I was influenced by the landscape because I was only doing architectural stuff in Germany most of the time". Immigrating to Canada and living in the the Georgian Bay area produced extreme and

reduced landscapes which he feels brought him peace in the "whole situation of change".

The photographs to be exhibited at the Manx, fourteen in total, are mostly stark winter scenes rendered in black and white, long rectangles or squares for dimensions. They are melancholic and compositionally strong. "I think they are really peaceful...there's a lot of thought behind it so in the end I'm really a huge composer maybe...through our business, we are graphic designers and we have to be precise, as a cabinet maker you have to be precise, as a photographer you have to be precise so my style is really precise...I would say, I would hope maybe that people see it...I have strong composition rules for myself.

The photographer had no qualms about exhibiting but has found it hard as a newcomer to find the right places and people to connect with. The Manx and Kressin found each-other through a friend who was a regular patron of the pub. Having seen and

enjoyed a variety of artwork there she enticed Kressin to take in his portfolio. Andy Farrell, manager and curator, was instantly struck by the work and offered the photographer a show. Kressin was also struck by Farrell, "a good guy, has a really good sense for art...and I think he's pretty excited that we are doing something together...he seems to have a really good reputation because people are really talking good about this exhibit...for me it's a good chance to get a foot in in Ottawa."

Kressin so fully captures the clean winter glamour of Ottawa that his effect is almost painterly. Highlights glinting off of drifts of snow look like peaks of oil paint. Kressin says he "really connects to the places he lives". He develops a keen interest in his subjects whether they be bridges, benches or bones and researches his shots intensely. His point-and-shoot camera is used only to hunt down subjects which he returns to later with well-laid plans and a tripod. Due to his graphic design background, he often seeks out days when the snow will become a white backdrop for his subject. "I see something I want to do and sometimes I have to wait three months...I wake up and I see the weather conditions, get there fast and don't think it's cold." Precision and a strong will enable Kressin to be patient while shooting in a snowstorm.

His photography is almost exclusively "out of season". Sports fields boast no players, bodies of water are frozen and trees are bare. His entire portfolio shows only one lone figure, and this blends in to the composition seamlessly as opposed to becoming the focus. In regards to shooting in the sum-

mer, "this blue sky thing, this clean sky thing, maybe I can not deal with that? I don't know, perhaps it is another development I have to make...I just follow my emotions and my feelings in the end because I don't have to do it I just do it. In the end maybe I do it for myself and I hope that other people enjoy it." He acknowledges that there are times when he produces a photograph, a work, that could "sit over every couch" but that is not the goal. "I don't think about selling it or pleasing somebody, I mean it's personal need"

This photographer is engrossed with

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change and transitions. His natural abstractions tend towards movement and his subjects are always abandoned or evolving. Decaying leaves float on the reflection of trees growing towards the sky. Worms make mulch and industrial buildings are disused.

"For me it's really the beauty of this moment of change when it's getting really uninteresting for most people, but I want to show maybe this special moment and for me there is so much beauty in there".

He is inquisitive and observant and enjoys focusing the viewers direction, in his work; "you have to show interest in your clients you have to be like a little tick all the time to find out 'what are they are doing, why are they doing it' and to really help them you have to understand not 100% but at least 80% what their vision is", in his life and in his art; "I don't like walking. I am a

cyclist. I think cycling is the right speed for me because I can see very quickly. So sometimes walking is too slow for me strangely...but on the other hand sometimes you have to reduce your speed. The interesting thing is that what I do in my work, I reduce the speed, you know the speed we are living at? My work is really quiet and freezes time sometimes...you try to get people out of their normal life"

He works digitally now and takes full advantage of Photoshop's darkroom-based design. He feels "there are more possibilities...as long as you don't start to think digital". He seeks to capture transitions and plans each shot carefully. "In the end you compose but you are dealing with reality. You can change your standpoint or time of day but you have to have a strong vision to turn this reality into what you see as a reality, what story you want to tell, 'my view of the story I see in this place'".

He has become passionate about capturing Ottawa but it is evident that he misses the ever-present history that Europe offers. "There has to be dirt to have beauty there has to be sadness to have happiness. You know, the contrast. Sometimes I miss that." This appreciation for "other" things gives Kressin's work a real sense of serenity, intrigue and the passage of time. "The safe things are wonderful but I like to see people who really express themselves. Sometimes in an extreme way."

Kressin will likely succeed and continue to show, not just for the calibre of his work but it's intent, "you do it for yourself but then you have to do the next step and show and in the end you show yourself". **up**

ART NOTES:

The first **Chinatown Remixed** will take place on May 2nd. Local artists will show their works up and down Somerset in a variety of venues including Raw Sugar Café and Shanghai. When dinning out keep your eyes peeled for **Carl David Ruttan, A. James Brummel, Megan Haughian** and **Howie Tsui**. **Julian Garner** will be showing at Wurm Gallery from May 8th to June 4th. His paintings "sarcastically depict the juxtaposition

between the prettiness and the hideousness of our world and culture..." **Darlean Morris** will have her One Night Stand at GLPM with abstract landscapes. GLPM will also show **Tony Fohse** latest photographs with "User:Women". These photographs are from the series "User: Portraits of crack addicts. The show will run throughout the month of May. Irene's Pub and Restaurant will be featuring new works by **Morgan A. Cook** from the vernissage on Tuesday May 12th, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm., to June 14th. "Watch Your Back" is a collection of oil paintings of women in the local garage-rock scene featuring musicians from the Visitors, the Misclits, the Felines and the White Wires. The show will be briefly interrupted on May 28th when Irene's will play host to "Framing Harper". These portraits are a reaction to cuts to the arts, specifically the loss of the portrait museum. FoundDesign, located at 1192 Bank St. will be showing **Pat Vaz's** latest series of paintings titled "Howl" until the 22nd of May. "**Beat Nation**", an exploration of how urban culture affects traditional communities, can be seen at SAW Gallery until June 6th. Last but not least **Sherry Garcia** will be showing her dark and sugary ladies again with "**Sticky Sweet**" at Canteen until the end of the month.