

fine art

Expressions of Inquisitivy:

The Art of Kenn Kotara

Ask artist Kenn Kotara to explain his abstract art forms, and he will immediately engage your intellectual curiosity.

"In the creation of abstract art forms, I am both initiating and responding to various inspirational catalysts, ranging from diverse issues that we humans must deal with on the one hand, to romantic notions of nature that were prevalent in days past, on the other."

This Asheville artist is fascinated with nature – the nature of form, of space, of connections between people and their environments. To investigate his art is to delve into an array of disciplines, as his creative muse leads him through the natural and physical sciences, and the entire cosmos as he seeks ways of responding to creative queries, such as: *How does form come into being?*

Much of Kotara's contemporary work is abstract, conceptual and grid-based, and engages a range of media. Currently, his two-dimensional body of work includes works on canvas, paper and Mylar, and Polaroids. Braille, typically on paper, straddles a line between two and three-dimensions, with suspended screen structures occupying their space wholly in-the-round. And, he has realized several site-specific installations incorporating multiple media which together, set the stage for an intensified sensory experience for the viewer, transforming them into participant.

Often, Kotara's works are developed through layers of grid-based systems which are connected and interlaced by way of the organic circular lines floating through them. The resulting imagery is reminiscent of the mysteries of the bayou of his native Louisiana and patterns found in nature. His works on Mylar are similar to, and an extension of, these grid-based systems, but this vein of work reframes the environs more along the lines of organic fractals and nature's number system, the Fibonacci series. Here, his fascination with organic and mathematic units guides him through itera-



Kenn Kotara



**Conspicuous Crepuscular
Bioluminescence,
mixed media on canvas.**

BY JANIECE MARIE MEEK

tions of graphite polylines on Mylar substrate.

"Flowers were the initial inspiration for this work but as I continued examining various shapes, I altered the individual element such that instead of being circular, it morphed into variants as it repeated. As I mused and analyzed various unit objects in this work, I realized that the variety of repetitive shapes seemed to be somewhat like people.

"People naturally strive for connection to community, and simultaneously long for distinction based on our unique qualities. So, the individual component – a person, an organic fractal – is a cosmos in and of itself. And when these units are composed – together and moving in rotation – we, like organic fractals, fashion complex universal systems."

With Kotara's suspended screen structures, the grid breaks free from the two-dimensional plane, forming a troupe of dynamic and responsive structural networks.

There is an openness to them, but the interference of the grid overlays obscures slightly, much as a veil blocks the perfect view.

In motion independently, the screens create moiré patterns of connection and a fabric through which they eye moves. Activated by the invisible energies within an exhibition space – people moving about and air being manipulated by handling systems – these suspended structures respond much as the *barbe espagnole* (Spanish moss) of his home place, rarely in full repose.

In the spring of this year, his work appeared in the second season of the HBO series "Treme" about post-Katrina New Orleans. Currently, one of Kotara's suspended screen structures, "Echo," can be seen through March 4, 2012 as a part of the exhibition "Homage Squared" at the Asheville Art Museum.

Inspired by Josef Albers's mid-century

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series entitled Homage to the Square, the exhibit highlights the work of Albers, his students, and contemporary artists who have taken up the challenge of the square. Viewing Kotara's "Echo" in this context proves the strength of the Museum's curatorial approach and inclusion of artists working with the square who are "exploring its limitations and possibilities in unique ways and often furthering Albers's intentions through their use of color and geometric space."

More opportunities to view Kenn Kotara's art work are on the horizon. In April 2012, he will exhibit in "Waking up with Van Gogh" at the Hickory Museum of Art in Hickory, North Carolina, and in "Today's Visual Language: Southern Abstraction, A Fresh Look" at the Mobile Museum of Art in Mobile, Alabama. In Asheville, Kotara is represented by Gallery Minerva and his works on canvas and paper can be seen there



Payage 28, pastel, acrylic on paper by Kenn Kotara

as well as online at www.kotarastudio.com

While he is an abstract and conceptual artist, Kotara knows that in the end, the images in his work speak for themselves. "Perhaps the internal push-pull that is not necessarily revealed in my art forms, but without a doubt leads me through them, is that I find the whole notion of chaos fascinating and yet want to somehow make sense of

it. I believe that it all alludes to an underlying universal harmony that is hopeful. And, this hope is about democracy, unity and coming together."



"Homage Squared" includes sculptural work by Kenn Kotara. On display through March 4,

2012. Asheville Art Museum, 2 South Pack Square. Phone (828) 253-3227 or visit www.ashevilleart.org.

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