
JOAN HALL: *From Whence We Came*

September 2007

POINTS BEYOND

I've spent a lot of time on, and talking about, sailboats with Joan. This summer we spent three days replacing all my running rigging-halyards, lifelines, boom vang, mainsheet, outhaul, jib sheets-everything right down to the tiny lanyards that pop open the shackles. It's amazing to me how this collection of ropes and knots is the thing that allows you to harness thousands of pounds of force and move these twenty-four feet toward Montauk, Block Island and across the Atlantic Ocean.

These points beyond have their origin in the net, the knot and the line that are both metaphors and depictions in the work of Joan Hall. They become quickly interchangeable with images of her cancerous and healthy cells and give way to what we cannot see-the twisted strands of protein that inhabit and make up our bodies and are the very site for the mutations that can become cancer. This site for mutation opens-it is a liminal space-a space of within and without, opening and closing, and the difference between life and death.

Joan Hall's newest piece: *Your Existence is not Unlike My Own*, is a collection of printed nets and digital prints on Mylar. The space between is a literal one. The formal activity is one of careful tracery and removal of sections outside the printed strands. This navigation of the edge of illusion is performed by means of a scalpel. This preservation frees the image to retake its role as trap. Its gesture, stretched and revelatory in its torn history, seems to embody the flow and heave of the ocean. The material, again a formal

choice, is Mylar and suggests dredged and abused plastic, beach glass or even spittle.

The mutation of imagery and its ability to shape shift psychically, puts in mind a favorite poem by Emily Dickenson:

*My Cocoon tightens-Colors tease-
I 'm feeling for the Air-
A Dim capacity for Wings
Demeans the Dress I wear.*

This poem, and specifically the word "tightens", allows us as reader to perform the same struggle as the butterfly and travel out of the cocoon with a total claustrophobic clarity. The performance of poet/butterfly/reader is the same for the artist/sailor/viewer and resides in the choreography of technical and formal actions that we navigate. Here we can imagine the physical act of tying the knot, and winching up or out the sails as twin to the practice of printing-and the pressing, splicing and slicing that act upon the enormous sheets that make up Joan 's work. These harsh physical actions resonate and impart the surface with cruelty and conversely fragility. We become pressed into these forms by our lack of peripheral understanding and aware that the cocoon tightens around us only when we struggle to get out.

Written by Katharine Kuharic
Long Island, New York (2007)

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This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends.