

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN KIT LONEY AND JEAN-MARIE MAUCLET

The morning I first visited Kit to prepare this essay, was bright. The tide waters were high on the marsh and the reflected sunlight was flowing into the living room of her elevated home. Lush and endless, the Low Country seascape which welcomed me that day was intimidating and fulfilling at the same time.

I had come on a mission! To uncover and expose the power of the arts as yet another member of the **TINYisPOWERFUL** collective creates it, puts it out and, with it, exposes the values attached to social and economic justice, to equity and access, to belonging and becoming.

Kit is an artist of Small Things. Our Arundhati Roy of the Visual Arts! She builds her wider saga from an array of TINY stories, anecdotes, objects, details, textures, colors, which end up filling the space as does the light of the sun. Reminding us also that, like the camera of your iPhone, the more pixels, the better the definition - the more TINY things, the richer the content of the artwork. There is no minute morsel which does not belong in a picture, a story, an object.

You would think - being revealed that Kit's ex-mother-in-law danced with Maurice Chevalier on a cruise liner or that the favorite hideaway for local cockroaches has got to be the compost pile in her backyard - does not have its place in a conversation about art? You would be gravely mistaken. Presently, Kit is writing her first book of fiction where a cockroach dances with ... guess whom, and her ex-mother-in-law, finds out that her backyard ... guess what! Without giving the story away, I can say that it tells of the worldwide adventures of a time-traveling roach, built up daily around real events as well as around the art she puts out. This constant translating of drawings and images into stories - and vice-versa - will certainly make for 100proof art fiction. Its relevance will come from Kit's deliberate choice of coupling the story of her cockroach with that of humans - Kit tells us that our contemporary communities must include the animal world as well. To separate humans, animals and nature is to perpetuate, promote the deadly all encompassing notion of segregation. Kit's foray into writing fiction is philosophical as

About my ex-mother-in-law on that cruise liner: I feel compelled to mention that this was a work trip she was sent on by the company she worked for during the depression. She was designing moderately priced clothing that somehow captured the spirit of whatever was being introduced in Paris. They sent her over to see the fashion shows. The word knock-off comes to mind. Her family was poor. She was lucky to have a job. Also, if you are under the age of, say, 60, you may well never have heard of Maurice Chevallier. My daughter says she knows him from an "I Love Lucy" rerun.

Also: despite the buzz I try to generate about that compost pile, some cockroaches still seem to prefer the house. It may be high time for an entomologist.

much as artistic. When this intellectual chemistry takes place in a visual artist's studio, her entire house really, facing the majestic Low Country marsh, we can understand how Kit's art, practiced with eyes wide open, is a celebration of what is common to all of us. A joyous, inventive and generous celebration at that.

My second visit with Kit was postponed unexpectedly. She had suffered a bad fall as she was rollerblading, although she has a long experience at this sport. That day she did not pay enough attention to the pebbles on the road, she says. I did not ask but I think I partly know: rollerblading is yet another way to go further, faster; to explore the wide-wide world deeper and playfully shrink it to the size of a thumbnail diary, of which she has a large collection. This is another passion of Kit's: diary books, from very small to big enough. This, also, implies practicing the art of paper making, paper folding, paper then book binding, book drawing, book coloring. With her traveling roach and serious book writing, she presently approaches book publishing as well. Logically, book stacking comes next! One of so many book-related art forms Kit practices, in dedicated nooks, here and there, in the house. Kit told me of her love for small bookstores if I remember correctly. So far she is just the hoarder of her books - although an eager, serious, methodical one. Then, at some point, I can imagine her opening a TINY book & art store, somewhere on the Silk Road ... foresightfully expecting a visit from her cockroach friend, on her/his way to the Orient ... And so is an ordinary visitor to an art studio on a marsh, carried away in an adventure without an end.

Kit is generous in so many ways! She taught art in Public Schools for twenty and some years. One of the secrets of her longevity, I believe? Her lasting talent for marveling at the energy and creativity of youngsters. It fed her then, it feeds her still, and never fails to inspire them. Here, reciprocity generates what bell hooks considers to be a key to restoring passion in education. Transformation and liberation of body and soul.

That is why Kit is a pivot for **TINYisPOWERFUL**.

She partakes in all aspects of the **conNECKtedTOO** experiment. She assiduously participates in the Circle of Advisers. Listener, observer and note taker, she also brings along her previous experience with some members of the team, dating from

I do want to emphasize this: how the physical body of a book can take on the identity of a building block. Who does not enjoy playing with blocks? Imagine building a library with such blocks, or a tiny city...

This idea of reciprocity connected to teaching turns out to go pretty deep. I thought I was teaching the kids, but I recognize more and more how much, all along, they were teaching me!

the year 2000, (*the Charleston-Atlanta-Alaska Challenge*), to the last two and some years of collective art making, exemplified by “*The Rag Quilt and Paper Bag Neighborhood*”, renamed “*the Highway*”, to reflect the collaboration with Sharon Cooper-Murray. With this installation, presented at the Reynolds Avenue Community Lab, Kit was determined to prove the thousand ways to recycle grocery paper bags. She cuts them in proven patterns, whitewashes them as one does walls and produces an intimate, colorful, joyful cityscape, stretched on a 20 foot table, the occasion for Sharon to match the distance with the rag quilting of a Highway, pot-holes and wild flowers included, along which Kit’s TINY people, TINY buildings and TINY accordion books line up - for a serious purpose: to translate, for visitors, in visual-art-speak, the perception she kept of the TINY Businesses participating in yet an earlier manifestation of **conNECKtedTOO**, (Piccolo Spoleto 2019): “*You bet 'n me 'n me 'n you*”.

How can I skip over the Reynolds Lab display of multiple overhead weavings? Anti-gravity art, augmented with Jacob’s ladders suspended in the air, above the long table, to make the scenery even more ‘aspirational’, more fanciful too! And her chickens - Oh! her chubby chickens!

Let’s remain focused! How about the art and education projects? Initiated by Pam Gibbs with Kit’s evermore important collaboration. One is a series of Family Art Lessons on how parents and children can collaborate, repurposing random objects found around the house? And what about the Anti-racist Bookclub? Where one does not read novel novels but “*the Color of Law*”, “*Stamped from the Beginning*”, “*Denmark Vesey’s Garden*” and, in earnest, “*Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*”. Aimed at teachers, it is in full dedication to teachers’ awareness of race and racism in today’s America. This important work also defines Kit, the artist. At the end of my second visit, as we were roaming through her warehouse of found and recyclable objects, Kit pointed at a discombobulated figure made of strings and half-gallon milk jugs. Now ready for her talents as a magician, I instantly foresaw a great future for this still uncontrollable puppet: that of a low-tech cartoon character. Because Kit is also into animation, of course. She has built herself a work bench, on the dining room table, I think! She explains that it is the start of a search for answers to this dizzying question: “*If racism was a monster, what would it look like?*”. Instant effraction into po-

Really? My chickens are chubby? I imagine them not so much as chubby but as really big-- as big as a house, or even much bigger, say, stretching across the sky. I think clouds give very good lessons in chicken painting technique.

Focus is indeed a challenge in my day to day work. To avoid feeling overwhelmed by the muchness of it I tend to compartmentalize my various endeavors (writing poems, writing the cockroach story, making the giant kimono, making monsters and dresses out of trash, teaching, making journals, etc.) I tend to think of them as separate strands. This meta vision reminds me to step back now and then and notice where they connect, resonate, and begin to find unity.

etry, politics, their art-enlightened intersection and infinite imaginaries accessible to all, from classroom to retirement home, I guess! In fact, it is the result of Pam and her combining their work with the Bookclub, the Art Lessons and a full array of world-related issues: environment, education, racism, democratic engagement ... and the arts.

Clearly, in her ever-expanding scope of art practice, Kit is proving that, as an artist open to the world, she has become an agent of change, a woke educator, a friend of the earth, a civic agent. Thank you Kit for producing such a rich, powerful yet unassuming art. The way you tie together the not-so-small things of the local with the mega questions of our times, affirms, loud and clear that ...

Thank you Jean-Marie for such a deep and very generous interpretation of my work! I feel like this piece captures the spirit of the conversations we had in my studio in a truly meta manner. Now, to build some marionettes!

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There is no longing here. It is all in the actualizing.