

***Out of Thin Air*, Marianne Gagnier and Kim Sloane, Cedar Crest College, November 2014**

*Out of Thin Air* features Marianne Gagnier and Kim Sloane, two painters that also happen to be married. Kim Sloane has ties to Cedar Crest College, as he was the Director of the College Galleries and an Assistant Professor of Art (1996-2000). An artist with literary leanings, he curated a show at the Lachaise Gallery in 1999 of artists associated with *The Dial* magazine (1919-1929). Gaston Lachaise was one of the prominent artists of this period and the namesake of the Cedar Crest gallery. Currently, Kim's reading the metaphysical poet John Donne (1572-1631): he's studying the poem *Air and Angels* (1633) as he paints.

Kim's oil paintings require time to reveal their secrets; his neo-expressionist works combine rhythmic patterns of light and dark, expressionistic brushstrokes, and a sense of movement. Overall, his strong drawing skills organize exploratory and energetic paint application. Bulbous knobs of built up paint regularly punctuate the canvases like raised tattoos. Influenced by Romanesque and Pre-Renaissance Art styles, Kim especially admires ancient Minoan pottery decorations that combine symbols for water, sky, plants, humans and animals into hybrid patterns. At one point, I step back and suddenly see figures and beasts imbedded the chaos of Kim's painting, it's a pleasant shock, a Lascaux Cave Painting-type of revelation: I feel as if I'm personally witnessing the visitation of previously hidden, magical beings.

Kim's painting *Some Glorious Nothing I Did See* lifts it's title from the first sonnet, or the first fourteen lines of Donne's *Air and Angels*. In the beginning of

the poem, John Donne describes how an abstraction--Love--must necessarily take a physical form. To a Metaphysical poet such as Donne, ideal love is everlasting, and the gulf between idealized love and our reality requires that the supreme, invisible power must take a less pure form to be felt or perceived. Just as Donne searches for words and metaphors to obliquely picture the inscrutable, Kim Sloane discovers fragmentary images in the abstract painting process: these bits and pieces suggest the mutability of existence, the nothing behind everything. Accumulating many layers of paint, stumbling on compelling passages of color, revealing beauty or meaning by chance, Kim Sloane's work parallels Donne's concluding sonnet, as the second half of the poem nullifies what the opening sonnet laid down as law. Donne surmises that love, air and angels cannot be fitted to form or images such as clothing, skin or spheres; seeming to advocate for Abstract Expressionist Painting well in advance of the modern era. Donne's poem admits that Purity is unreachable, while crediting the desire to do so: likewise, Kim's process accumulates, destroys, and tries again, foregrounding the pursuit of an unknown. The fact that perfection cannot be touched through the real concludes Donne's poem; yet, for Kim Sloane the problem becomes a fruitful leaping-off place, an aerie above an abyss.

Marianne Gagnier is also a Neo-expressionist painter, and her work arises out of a completely different sensibility. She creates spacious, airy worlds that thwart image or outside reference and defy scale; thus, she untangles the mind and creates pleasure. Marianne paints in acrylic, and uses various mediums to

control a given painting's finish. She "always starts with color," and scores of containers around the studio suggest that she mixes color like a chemist. She blends her colors to a house paint-like consistency, then addresses shape and movement on canvas, painting on the floor or outdoors, and avidly employing gravity. She likes to "generate accidents" but shies away from what she calls "consciously drippy work." To her, being successful means she keeps up a constant dialogue with the materials and allows herself to be pulled towards a spacious, open-ended, atmospheric endpoint.

The work she's including in *Out of Thin Air* marks an important transition; as she is moving away from the opaque paint and centrally based compositions found in *Grendel* and *Dolphins Riding*, and segueing into a style that mimics vast nature. The more recent paintings: *Cosmos (Blue)* and *Cosmos (Yellow)* are more thinly painted, and they retain Gagnier's joyful, slapdash vigor. The work is energized but not urgent, and she favors brushes and pouring techniques, and sometimes uses wet paintings to imprint other surfaces, a monotype-like technique.

Channeling nature, Marianne creates work that is as complex as her surroundings: I feel the connection between her work and the field, a rock wall, trees and blowing leaves outside her studio. She captures color and measures out ratios of order and chaos that feel absolutely natural, and indicative of the season. Kim spoke of how they are both "pulling out and finding the physical," while "acknowledging that it remains ineffable." Airiness, spaciousness, and the

brief lifespan of the visible come together to create *Out of Thin Air*, a nod to the life force behind what's apparent, something you might sense but don't see.