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E. M. DONAHUE GALLERY

KK Kozik

How has your project with dead animals as your subject matter changed over the past 10 years?

The beginning of the project was in 1984. Before that I had been doing all sorts of different things from printmaking and photo-based work to abstract painting to film and video. The first animal painting was a pig's head. At the time I wasn't painting at all. I'd been passing by the pig's head in a bodega window in Hoboken and I was very attracted to it. I kept feeling that the pig was everything...the flesh was paint and it represented a kind of painting that hadn't been available to me.

It was also a chance to deal with more personal issues. Because I began my art-school training during the mid '70s at a "progressive" arts high school where young women artists were encouraged to develop women's language and painting was definitely out, that pig's head in a way represented everything I'd been denied. The type of painting and values associated with it like quality, craft and beauty were not available to me. I bought the pig's head and the paint to paint it with on the same day. It was a turning point for me—an act of personal liberation.

For the first five years I worked from observation, learning how to paint and learning how to deal with the rush of having a dead animal in the room. Before that I had been really bothered by the fact that I didn't feel anything. It was a way of fabricating a feeling and it was very scary. It had a smell...it was sensual...and it was purely horrible, a way of connecting to non-intellectual experiences or memories. The project as a whole deals with what I think of as the forbidden.

Do you think people have a need to make images?

Yes. I think pictures are completely necessary and important. I don't know how you could explain so many people starting to paint again after maybe being discouraged in school. People are re-



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exploring issues that come along with painting, and values that go along with it. I think things are really changing now and opening up. I never thought when I started painting my project that there would ever be a community and now I'm starting to find there is one. It's interesting because in all this painting that is going on that is supposedly representational it is not all with the same goals in mind, not with the same values. People are starting to talk about the differences among them.

Do you consider yourself a figurative painter or a still-life painter or something else altogether?

That's a good question. I guess I have to consider myself both of those things but I've always found those terms limiting...I don't consider myself to be particularly concerned with representation.

What are you concerned with if you are not concerned with representation?

When I think of not being concerned with representation, I think of representation as having to do with recording things that you see...observation...depiction.... For instance, I don't have real space in my work. I'm more interested in painting and its abstract qualities.

I guess what you're saying is the work has a realistic look, but it's not Realism in that it's not based on anything perceived. Your intent is not to demonstrate your ability to create verisimilitude. Your intent is to create something that will be provocative on a metaphysical level.

I'm more preoccupied with the possibility of developing an original way of painting because I think of paint handling as meaning. The paintings transcend the

object depicted. For instance, the paintings of dead animals are more about resurrection than about death—not only about resurrection of the object depicted but also of a technique. The cadavers are also brought back to life through the painting of them—they become portraits of meaning. In the iguana paintings in the show, the paint is built up so that it is more specific or more real...they are more iguana than an iguana will ever be but yet when you get up close the illusion completely falls apart...it disintegrates into decoration...it ceases to read as anything and becomes its own language or intelligence. That's what I'm interested in.

Aside from simple questions of markets and trends, do you think there is something in the changing zeitgeist that has engendered the growth in the size of an audience who will accept your work, and painting generally, as an apt media for avant-garde art?

Maybe. I don't know how you could explain so many people starting to paint pictures again after being discouraged. Maybe it has to do with a need to re-explore issues like sex and death.

Maybe people are starting to look at work themselves and there is more interest in work that doesn't need to be explained or for which there is no sound-byte. One of my concerns is audience. I see it as an elevator. This kind of painting lets everybody on. They might not get up to the top floor with these paintings, but at least they are getting on. I'm suspicious of art that is made with proletariat concerns but actually isn't available to the proletariat.

My work is not about saying that a certain group of people is smarter than another group. Regular people get my work and they get it on a deep level. For me that's important because that's my background. I don't want to alienate the culture that I come out of.

In all these things you can talk about in painting, I think the primary element is pleasure. Everything else is really secondary. After you say all the smart things, what you know of the truth is that you love it and that's the real driving force.

You get to be in control, too.
Yeah, there's that.