

Karen Kunc: *The Constellation Metaphor* at MCBA

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Karen Kunc, Artist, Educator, and Founder of Constellation Studios, explores inventive color abstractions of the natural and human-fashioned world in her prints and artist books, creating ideas of 'strange beauty'.

Karen Kunc's prints and artists books stem from her contemplation of the forces of the natural world, ephemeral encounters and the immeasurability of time and distance. Her unique style of printing records the process of destruction and creation inherent in reduction woodcut.

Kunc presents "The Constellation Metaphor" during the Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) Book Art Biennial Symposium July 22-23. For more information go to BookArtBiennial.org.

How have you amplified individual and collective voice through your art?

My printworks and books create memorable images, which spark ideas, raise issues, and stimulate discussions around difficult truths with a poetic visual language that is compelling.

How does the MCBA Book Art Biennial theme "Shout Out: Community Intervention, Independent Publishing, and Alternative Distribution" inform your work?

I have developed a new contemporary print center, Constellation Studios in Lincoln, Nebraska, as an inclusive creative work site for artists to work in printmaking, bookmaking and papermaking. My goal is to educate and encourage creative practice, collaboration engagement, and the do-it-yourself spirit that is part of print culture. As an artist printmaker, I believe in the possibilities of empowerment through hands-on making and the expression of collective values of visual culture. These are core messages of the studio and within my own art.

How do you define success?

I think success is about personal satisfaction, being challenged, and growing as a human. For me, the meaning of life is to contribute — to help the world, others, and oneself to be engaged, to understand, to empathize.

What is the biggest lesson you've learned as an artist?

That my "weaknesses" are actually my strengths. How I draw, make marks, develop my visual aesthetic is uniquely mine, and I have learned to study, strengthen, and create with my own aesthetic. I don't create "realism" and never

found that interesting. I see the world differently, so that lead to my interest in this other way of seeing, and recognizing space, and analysis of how I do see, and how to cultivate this way as valuable and interesting.

Can mistakes lead to creative success?

Always. I make mistakes all the time, in creating my art, and I have to struggle to resolve those crazy choices — of color, or design, or idea. And finding the solution always pushes me further, into doing what I could never have planned for or did not know I could do, resulting in something completely unique.

What is your greatest success as an artist?

My life goal has always been to gain experience . . . and now I have years of experience! That of my teaching experiences, my travel and presentations, my incredible network of artists around the world, and my creative works and projects.

As an artist, what keeps you up at night?

Keeping up with the challenge of social media. It is not in my nature to be self-promoting, but that is so necessary now, and yet to do it with grace, purpose, and timeliness is vital to keep myself relevant in these rapidly changing times.

What called you to the book arts as a profession?

I made my first print in high school and became very engaged with the creative process. I really like the step-by-step analysis, problem solving, and knowing my marks become special when translated through print media.

If you could travel through time to discuss a socio/political issue close to your heart, who would you reach out to and what would you discuss?

Halldór Laxness (1902-1998), my favorite author, when I can find his books translated from Icelandic to English . . . the best is "*Independent People*." His spare yet beautiful novels address the human condition, with gentle humor and satire, often of a humble artist character who needs to create, who is affected by nature, and who experiences small incidents in life that snowball out into disasters, misunderstandings, political or community tragedies. Events that loom beyond anyone's control, all while the small character tries to do what is right, what is necessary, what is their dream. So the issue to discuss is a shared perception of human's innate desires, our foibles and weaknesses, and the "impossible," due to accident, the circumstantial, the coincidental.

BIO:

[Karen Kunc](#) explores inventive color abstractions of the natural and human-fashioned world in her prints and artist books, creating ideas of 'strange beauty'. Kunc is a Cather Professor of Art at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she has taught since 1983. Awards include Fulbright Scholar Awards to Finland and Bangladesh, two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, a Nebraska Arts Council Fellowship. Her works have been shown in exhibitions nationally and internationally and are held in numerous private, public and university collections. She has taught workshops nationally around the world, in Egypt, Italy, Finland, Bangladesh, Poland, Japan, France, Mexico, Iceland; and she has lectured as a visiting artist to over 200 institutions. In 2014, she opened Constellation Studios as a creative work-site for print, paper, and book, inviting artists for residencies, workshops, collaborations, exhibitions.