

PETER LANG

# Making Sense

Beauty, Creativity, and Healing



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## *Beauty, Longing, and Fear*

by Katy Martin and Linda Cummings

### **Linda Cummings Interviewed by Katy Martin**

LC: There are many aspects of Elaine Scarry's talk that resonate with my approach to beauty. One is her concept of regard, that beauty has to do with an ethical position related to how one regards the other, and that is the root of concepts of fairness and legal structures. I think of that idea of regard in terms of caring, so for me, beauty relates to something that I care about. The more I care about it, the more I'm interested in pursuing it and the closer I want to get to it.

A second aspect is that for her, beauty is in the particular, not in the general observation of something.

KM: So there's not a category of what is beautiful. There's an experience of beauty in the moment.

LC: Yes. And that experience comes from this idiosyncratic way in which we recognize difference. It's that difference that makes it special and piques your interest. That's a shimmer of beauty. That's a longing, a manifestation of desire.

KM: And as soon as you have this sensation, it's gone. Your work is all about these issues.

LC: Yes. This quality of appearing and disappearing is, I think, connected to beauty because beauty is not something you can have or own or hold onto.

For me, beauty is a multifold experience. It can be both the reverie of being out of time and the particularity of being brought back into the moment of some kind of startled experience or response—oh, that's beautiful! In that moment, I have a heightened perception of something outside of me being emotionally connected to something inside of me. Whether that something is wanted or unwanted, it is a point of reference, a point of contact between outside and in.

I work primarily with a camera, and I think of the camera as a dream machine. A dream collects all of these fragments of experience that happen during the day, that I may or may not have been aware of, and projects them on

the screen of my inner life during my sleeping, when I'm not censoring, when I'm not really trying to make sense of anything. It shows me this unfolding cascade of pictures.

The camera carries with it the potential to synthesize what is going on in my internal life and connect that to what's going on outside, by virtue of taking a photograph at the moment that I feel a connection. I may not be aware of what it means, but something internally wants to be expressed through the lens and whatever it is that I choose to photograph.

KM: So photography is potentially an experience—like that of beauty—that connects you inward and outward.

LC: At the same moment.

KM: Let's talk about a series you photographed in an operating room.

LC: The title is *The Operating Theater*. These are black and white photographs that I created at Saint Vincent's Hospital in New York City around 2001.

KM: What's powerful about them is the dramatic contrast between the stark lighting of the operating room and these petticoats that you've tossed and caught on film as they're flying through the air. The petticoats look ephemeral, emotive and vulnerable.

LC: There is a sense of defiance of gravity.

KM: The figures seem to want to run away.

LC: They keep wanting to lift off the operating table, so we don't know whether they're rising or falling. There is an ambivalence, an ambiguity. Are they rising, are they falling, are they ghosts, are they phantoms? In my mind, they represent a gesture or a struggle towards life, towards vitality, action, resistance. Highlighting the fragility of this garment against the penetrating, searing light creates a metaphor for the life and death struggle that we all experience in illness and injury.

KM: Why did you choose a woman's petticoat?

LC: For me, it represented a woman's skin. It is the closest thing to her body that can be visible without showing or flaying the skin.

KM: So it's something under the clothing?

LC: It's under the clothing but next to the skin.

KM: So it's really a stand in. It's as if you're throwing the person in the air and capturing this movement.

LC: Yes. This person, but more this surface of the person.

KM: Let's talk about surface. Your recent series, *Stirring the Waters*, is all about surface. Let's start by describing your process.

LC: I am focusing on one particular place and time. This happens to be the surface of water and a very delicate moment in which I am stirring the water with my left hand and holding my camera in my right.

KM: You're out on the water...

LC: I'm on the Farm River along the Long Island Sound. My studio is on the banks of this river and I'm in a kayak. I have a two mile stretch that I have been paddling for one whole year during the duration of this project. So I've been photographing this river in all times of the year in different light.

KM: So what is this *Stirring the Waters*?

LC: Literally it is me, creating a drawing with this transparent substance, water. I'm very engaged in the question of how to make a drawing that is both appearing and disappearing at the same time.

KM: So you're drawing with paper and pencil? You're drawing the water?

LC: No, I am drawing with my fingers on the water. I'm swishing my hand on the water and the images that are being created come from the movement of my hand and from the wind, the water, the tide, the reflections above, the reeds and murk underneath—whatever is in the elemental forces, in that moment, coming together. The photograph is the moment in which the time is frozen and the picture survives.

I use a close-up lens.

KM: It's not a wide swath. It's a vertical shaft.

LC: It's a very small segment because I'm interested in looking closely, reducing the elements to an essential contact point where the surface of the water becomes a dividing line between what's underneath and what's reflected above.

KM: So there are two ways that this action that you've set up reiterates your longing for beauty. It is part of a reverie yet very specific, and it's connecting something underneath with something above, something outside with something inside.

Let's think more about the surface of the water. This is a very elusive surface. First of all, you've just made it move, but it's going to reestablish itself. It's going to overcome quickly whatever you did to it.

LC: Exactly, very quickly. And that's exciting.

KM: So your gesture is modest.

LC: Yes, and transient.

KM: And very aggressive in a certain sense, to insist.

LC: To insist, yes, on making my mark. It is a form of asserting that I am here too. I want to be part of the picture. I want to be included in this experience. I do it as a desire to enter into a relationship with the world.

KM: With the river?

LC: With the river.

KM: With photography? With an audience?

LC: Yes. With the history of art, with meditations on time—and how time, like the reflection and like the surface of the water, is something that is constantly appearing and disappearing. As soon as we recognize a moment, it's over.

I use water specifically because it is the perfect metaphor for illusion. When we look at the surface of water, all we can really see is what's reflected above it or partially obscured below it. We can't actually see *it*.

I'm interested in that line between what we can see and what we can't, so this surface of the water is a perfect medium, an invisible surface—visible and invisible. It renders the invisible visible.

KM: So it's a lens to what's below and a mirror of what's above.

LC: Yes.

KM: Water does this best when it's still, right?

LC: That's true. But I want to know... I want to touch it. I want to know more about it. I can't know this physically except to touch it.

KM: It's interesting because, in looking at your pictures, your process is not at all evident. You don't see your kayak, you don't see your hand and you never see your reflection. You've put yourself in, but you've also taken yourself out.

LC: That's true. It's because I don't actually exist. Only the trace of me exists, in that image, in the trace of my movement.

KM: That is the big one, isn't it?

LC: Yes, and that is a key place that our work intersects.

KM: So what exists is the photograph?

LC: Yes.

KM: The photograph is a composition, an invention. It's made up—yet that's what exists.

I want to talk more about your use of the lens and the mirror qualities of water—the above and the below—because you opened this talk with the metaphor of a dream. So can we consider what's below as...

LC: The unconscious, a dream, and what's above as the visible world outside. The surface becomes the place of consciousness and the plane of action. The only place where things can happen is on the surface.

The surface is a very powerful notion, whether it's the surface of a photograph, the surface of skin, the surface of anything. It's the defining edge, to some extent, of what something is.

KM: In your work, it's as if you're trying to undo the definitions and break through what keeps certain boundaries in place. It's as if you use finger drawing to wiggle them.

LC: Wiggle them, join them, make them disappear. I want the boundaries to disappear or to be altered in ways that rearrange what is being separated or held. It's an experiment in transitional space as a way of making a third space. It's not particularly real and it's not particularly unreal. It's a third space. The photograph is a kind of record of this place where boundaries are rearranged.

That's what art does. It rearranges forms in order to help us see things more clearly or unmask illusions that we hold as fixed and untouchable. Art has a way of breaking boundaries, of cutting through these divisions in our thinking, in our experience, in our way of seeing the world. Culture needs to have this mirror, this reflection that art provides.

KM: You had talked about that in relation to connectedness.

LC: Yes. How do we see each other? How do we even see ourselves?

KM: You were saying that the moment of seeing is a moment...

LC: Of contact.

KM: Of beauty.

LC: Yes, and connection.

KM: That moment is seductive, in and of itself. It's really thrilling to have those glimpses. You are saying this is what art offers and, from your reading of Elaine Scarry, this is what beauty offers—the ability to see and connect.

LC: Yes.

KM: Your work helps me understand Kierkegaard, and what he may have

meant with that phrase, *transparency in the face of God*. Your work deals with transparency, with water as a refractive and a reflective substance. It becomes a metaphor for that kind of transparency. When I say, *in the face of God*, I simply mean concepts of self and other, that perfect union that Kierkegaard so longed for, that he described as *faith*.

I'm circling around this notion of longing, but now I'm also circling around *grace*. You were circling around the moral value and the social, physical and emotional health potential of beauty and...

LC: Art

KM: That actually starts with a sense of disconnect, a scrambling of boundaries, a lifting of restraints.

LC: To help us see.

KM: To help us connect.

LC: To help us question.

KM: Any talk of God or grace, and you are right away in the territory of awe and fear. So what's that about? Why is that? While we're asking big questions, let's bring that back into the picture, because somehow, there's a connection between grace and dread, beauty and fear.

LC: I would like to try to think about that in relationship to seeing.

KM: Let's talk about it in relation to your *Vortex* series. You were scrambling the waters to reproduce something. What was it?

LC: The *Vortex* series literally has to do with a near drowning experience that I had. I was carried out by a rip tide and all of a sudden, I realized that I had been photographing the water in this very poetic, inspired reverie, from the safety of my imagination, whereas in that moment, I was being carried out by the power of the undertow, of what was under the water, what I couldn't see.

It was a beautiful day all around. There were people frolicking on the beach. My friend and I were inches away from dying and nobody knew. The experience of this indifference and the power of the water was absolutely terrifying to me. I did the *Vortex* series in response to that.

KM: That experience of danger?

LC: Yes. Also, you can drift into a complacency around beauty. It can be so seductive that the temptation is to just repeat the pleasurable aspects of it over and over. So to help myself resist that temptation, I try to put myself on an edge of physical endurance when I'm photographing.

KM: You get beyond a safe place?

LC: I get beyond a safe place and I let myself be carried away, quite literally. I don't really, of course. I protect myself as best I can, but ultimately I'm that sort of person that would run over the edge of the cliff in search of the butterfly that was in my net. One part of me lifts out of the physical world and is not concerned with my own physical safety. This has been part of my process throughout. I like to be right on that edge of danger. It's another way of cutting through the censors.

KM: Well, those boundaries keep us safe!

LC: Yes, I respect that. But I have to go beyond that in order to do my work. To pierce the surface, to unlock what is held under the surface of the water is partly what these *Vortex* pieces are about. I'm trying to look into this incredible centrifugal force that water does on its own when it's stirred in a particular way. It activates the force of gravity, and you can see it being pulled down. It's, again, making the invisible visible, and trying to suggest the turbulence that underlies this soft surface.

Does that answer your question?

KM: It does. Let's bring it back to beauty. When I look at one of your *Vortex* pieces, I'm really attracted by the way it looks, by the color and form. It's not like you look at them and feel an immediate sense of horror. You're drawn to them and you want to spend some time.

LC: What I'm hoping will happen for the viewer is that they will feel like they're being overtaken, too, by this pull and that they are outside of time. In that moment, they are pulled into an experience that they can't stop, so it activates some kind of primal fear of losing control. We are always drawn to being in control. But ultimately nature wins.

KM: Isn't that a form of *catharsis*? It's a term that comes out of theater.

LC: As a way of healing?

KM: As a way of safely reliving a terrifying experience. It's interesting you called your operating room series *The Operating Theater*. You're offering a kind of theatrical experience. Is that why you work on such a large scale?

LC: Yes. In working on a large scale, I want to mimic the experience of the body. At five feet high, the piece engulfs you. It feels bigger than you are. It embraces you more than you embrace it.

KM: So you find yourself in it.



LC: You find yourself in it and you lose yourself in it. Losing and finding is a very important part of what my process is about, so I want the viewer to also be lost and found, and have that experience in the looking.

KM: All your work—especially the petticoats—has something to do with losing and finding. What are you looking for? What are you finding?

LC: That losing and finding again relates to losing touch with some kind of primal connectedness that perhaps one might talk about as a kind of oceanic experience.

KM: Like God, for example.

LC: Yes, a mystical union, as you've brought up, and that sense of boundlessness, belonging and longing to belong. To be lost from that, to be separate from that, is also to be an individual, is to be the particular—the particular viewer, the particular moment, the particular consciousness.

The particular event that I focus on in my work is a kind of finding myself, which I think is so much a part of the human condition. We want to be individuals, but we are all part of this collective being and this constant human struggle to be separate but be together.

KM: So to locate ourselves...

LC: To locate ourselves, to recognize ourselves is this quest in consciousness. My working process is a losing and finding of this consciousness. I like to be outside of time, I like to be in this suspended consciousness, this reverie, and then all of a sudden be pulled into a particular moment and a particularity that I consider beautiful. It's individual and it's a finding and an ability to locate myself. It is also a willingness to lose myself. This oscillation between losing and finding is what my art is really engaged with.



Figure 1. Linda Cummings, "Hovering" 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 50" × 33" (from the series, "Stirring the Waters")



Figure 2. Linda Cummings, "Surfacing" 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 50" × 33" (from the series, "Stirring the Waters")

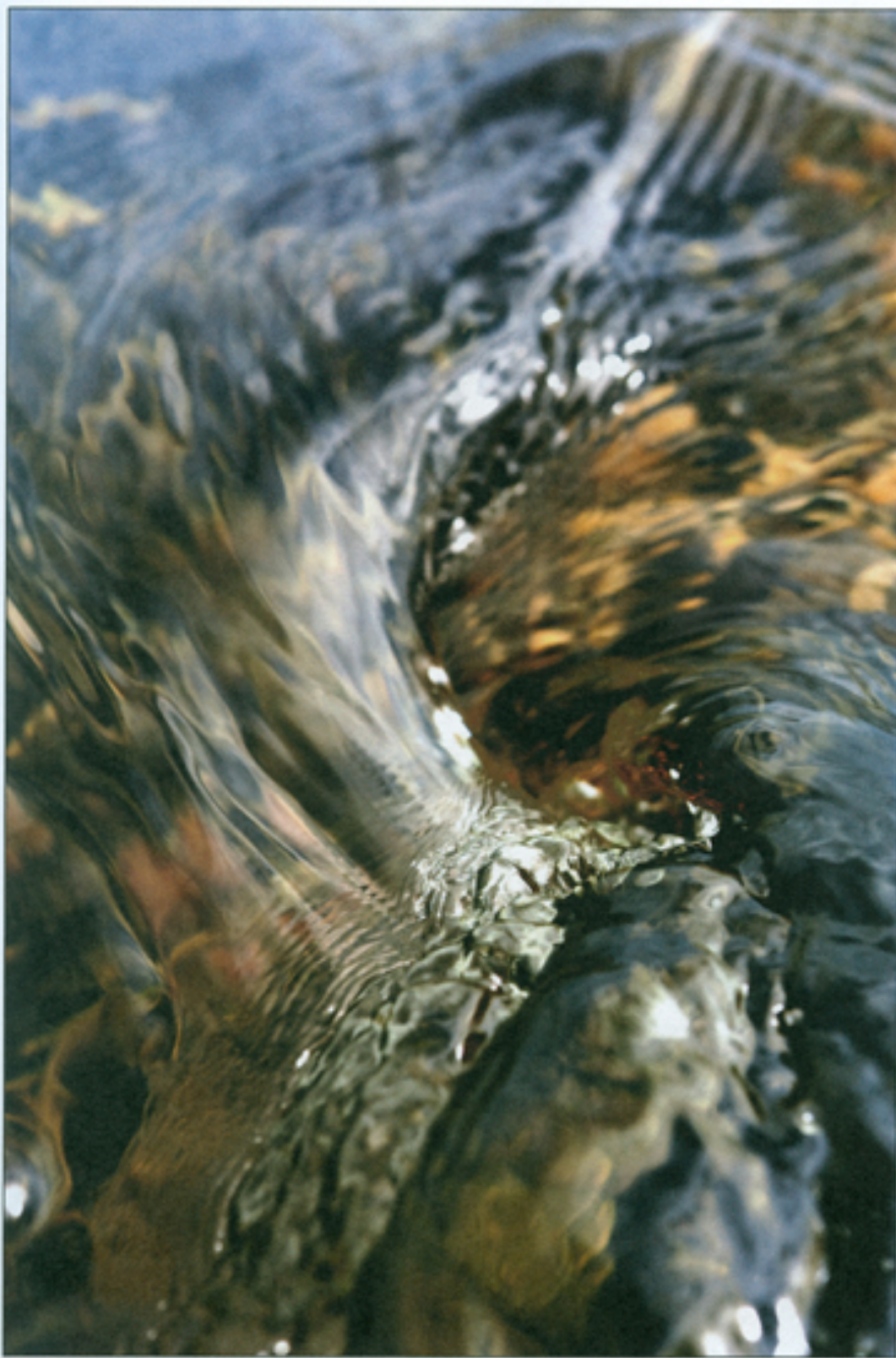


Figure 3. Linda Cummings, "Uprising" 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 50" × 33" (from the series, "Vortex")



Figure 4. Katy Martin, "Bada's Mountain" 2011, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 72" × 44"



Figure 5. Katy Martin, "After Bada Shanren #2" 2008, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 60" × 36"



Figure 6. Katy Martin, "Water Mountain #2" 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 32" x 42"

**Katy Martin Interviewed by Linda Cummings**

LC: I've always felt that the way you approach surface in your photography is extremely vital. Does that connect in any way to your response to Elaine Scarry and her articulations?

KM: I like her concept of beauty and aliveness. You talked about how, for you, beauty is a wake up, a state of hyperawareness. Scarry writes that this is reciprocal. You feel alive in the presence of beauty, and you also imbue a sense of life into what you perceive as beautiful. Even if it's a vase, it comes to life.

LC: By your attention?

KM: Yes. I had an experience in the Shanghai Museum, where I was standing in a floor filled with ceramics, and they took on a ghostly animation. Now vases are often considered embodiments, and in my mind, ghosts are in the realm of possibility. But we've all had experiences like that. How do you invest an inanimate object with life?

In art, it's perhaps that the object is ambiguous. It's maybe simple and complex—you can't pin it down. I'm after something like that in my work and that influences what I do with the surfaces.

A classic definition of beauty, that Elaine Scarry is honoring, is that it has to do with balance. But a classic tradition that I'm honoring, I first heard about from Jasper Johns. Years ago, I filmed him, making silkscreen prints, and I interviewed him as part of that project. He talked about an 18<sup>th</sup> century Japanese play, *Usuyuki*. *Usuyuki* means "spring snow," the kind that falls and melts before it lands, so before your eyes can focus on it, it's gone. Jasper talked about *Usuyuki* and "the fleeting quality of beauty in the world." So if there's a balance, it's so fleeting that you can't get your hands around it.

Anything alive isn't balanced. It's always in motion. If there's a balance to beauty, it's always shifting.

LC: How does that connect to the objects you make? How does the process of photography and painting bring you in relationship with this fleeting quality?

KM: My work combines photography, painting and performance, so I can play with—and scramble—how we see each. I paint directly on my skin. Then I stand in front of a tripod with a cable release and I photograph myself. By now, I can pretty much visualize how the frame, the brush strokes and the lines of my body are going to interact. That's the composition. I take several



hundred frames in a shoot. If I'm lucky, I'll get one or two where that marriage of those different kinds of activities—painting, movement and photography—intersect in ways that make the image seem alive.

LC: And that refers to your notion of the off-balance nature of life in motion?

KM: Yes, but I don't exactly think in terms of balance. I think in terms of opposites. Years ago, I did a long study on faith and doubt, because I thought painting was an act of faith, and I really didn't know at that time if I could continue to do it. So I studied faith and doubt, and that put me in the territory of religious history. I learned a lot about Christian history that I found fascinating, the more so because I hadn't known it before and it really shapes our culture. The dogma of original sin—how could I not have known that that is a central premise of Christianity?

LC: And Western culture.

KM: Yes. Then there's the concept of the Trinity. A brief history of that, that makes sense to me, is that the mysticism—the Holy Ghost—was mostly taken out of Roman Catholicism early on, and we're left with hierarchies of Father and Son, Heaven and Hell, good and bad. I use black and white in my work, and I'm trying to undo a sense of hierarchical dualism.

When I first started this work, I actually painted my body in half. I painted one half, one color, and the other half, another color, and I just stood there. That was basically how simple it was.

LC: When was this?

KM: 1996. For the next several years, I worked on a notion of bilateral symmetry as a way of getting inside the dualities. *Bada's Mountain*, a recent work, still has that. Half of my body is black and the other half is white. Now just technically, what happens is the white paint reveals the skin, and the black paint obscures it. That's because the tonal range of photography isn't the same as the tonal range of your eye. I've used that to push away the details in the black and create a sense of emptiness or space. That half of my body disappears, and opens out into a mystical black.

It's not even about opposites. It's about the blacks containing the whites, and the whites actually being black.

Melville writes about white as black, in an ode to the horror of white in *Moby Dick*. In his poetry, he also talks about war as that which we "shun and

seek.”

LC: It’s an ambivalent desire.

KM: Yes. Like beauty, it sets up conflicting desires, an attraction but also a fear.

LC: So would you say this research you’ve done on faith and doubt is still present in your work, as it plays out in relation to ambivalence?

KM: It’s given me hope that what you’re reaching for in any kind of practice—of art, for example, or the way you live your daily life—is a transcendence of those categories.

LC: That’s a nice way of thinking. Was that study also part of a turning point when you began integrating photography as an active part of your work?

KM: Yes.

LC: One of the ways your painting is different than painting on canvas—and it’s very exciting—is that when you’re working, you really can’t see all of what you’re painting.

KM: No, I really can’t.

LC: You can feel it and imagine it in a map in your mind, which has some correlation to a map of your body but it’s not necessarily through sight that you’re making these marks. So you are approaching painting from a much more interior place.

KM: (laughs) I’m groping at the edge of what I can see and experience.

LC: Let’s talk more about your use of black. The photographic black is not the painted black. You can do different things with the photographic black.

KM: Right.

LC: The white can take on more texture. Can you talk more about that quality of the surface texture, the surface of the skin, and how you think of it in relation to differences between painting on canvas and painting on your body?

KM: I want the paint to be seductive, not the skin. Painting has a materiality to it that is really pleasurable. I use the camera to zoom in on that—on the drips, the brush strokes and splashes of paint. But it’s actually an illusion. The final photographs are just paper. Their surfaces are smooth, but because they are big, you might even—for a second or two—confuse them for paintings. I don’t even care if it’s a nanosecond. That moment of confusion is the experience that I’m after. That’s what brings it alive.

LC: If I paint on canvas, I can’t get that sense of mystery about what it is that

you're looking at. People tell me that they find themselves wondering, why am I looking at a print of an abstract painting? And then they do a double take when they see ...

LC: A hair follicle.

KM: Yes, what's that doing in the middle of a painting? Then they're drawn in.

LC: Skin is something that every human being has.

KM: Seeing skin texture, even subliminally, is a way to relate to the painting. Now painting itself does have a skin. It's there to play with, that the paint *is* a skin. But paint is also a metaphor for depth—for spiritual, emotional, intellectual depth.

LC: It reveals how deep a surface can be.

KM: We want the surface to open out. There is also a whole play on how we do or don't experience our bodies, and how we do or don't look at other people's bodies. I'm trying to break through that and, at the very least, give myself permission to inhabit my own body.

LC: Through painting and photography.

KM: Yes.

LC: Can we talk more about the function of absence and presence in your work? If white is embedded in black and black is contained in white, absence and presence have the same kind of reciprocal energy.

KM: You can say the black signifies absence but that's bringing a value judgement. I do tend to push the details of the blacks back, photographically—we talked about that—and coax the texture of the whites forward. But what if the black is really where you want to go?

LC: Would you say the black is a welcoming place?

KM: For me, it's all of the above. I've always loved working with black. I used to have a chalkboard painted on my apartment wall, and I loved making my lists there. I would do these conceptual drawings of words. Mostly I loved the eraser strokes. Why should a black wall be soothing? You could see it as oppressive.

When I first started using black on my own body, I did intend it as holes and stigmata. At first, that scared me. I thought, is this the abyss? Is this hell? Was this very dark territory? Maybe—maybe not. In a mystical sense, black is an opening up. Black is an emptiness that is also full.

Since 2005, I've been going to China every year, visiting artists and looking at Chinese painting. That painting grows out of a system of thought that is like your river. You have this flow of energy, or *ch'i*, and the person wielding the brush interrupts the flow. In a sense, they sully it.

LC: They mark it.

KM: They insist on their own presence within it. So what you're looking for in a Chinese painting is not only the marks, but also the flow of energy around the marks. That's what is full. It's empty but it's full. In my work, in suppressing the details of the blacks, I'm actually making them full. They're full of potential.

LC: They also enliven the whole field.

KM: Yes. You could say the field has more potential and poetry than the actual marks. In the West, we call it negative space—again a value judgement. But here, black is welcoming and mystical.

There is a fear of mysticism in Western culture. If something is a mystery, we don't have our safe categories. There's something frightening about that.

LC: We can't control it. Does this get back to the idea of absence and presence, the absence and presence of control?

KM: I think what we're after is beyond control, but we have to use artifice and skill to get there. I use a brush, but I also paint with my body. I bend, fold, slouch and smear. I'm trying to get away from the notion of the hand, intentionality and control, and embrace what is beyond control—for example, aging.

LC: In your work, the cracking paint is an interesting metaphor for time.

KM: Painting carries the burden of a radical collapsing of time. When you paint, you're aware that you're fixing a moment that will never happen again. When the marks work, they convey the touch of an actual movement in a particular time and place. The paint dries and that's a metaphor for death. Drying is also a metaphor for stasis.

You and I both work with gesture, and we both work on moving fields. We're both very involved in choreography.

LC: And performance. Can you talk about the idea of transience in your work?

KM: When you make art, you're both insisting on your presence and taking yourself out of the moment. In my work, I'm looking at myself, but I'm

using myself as a metaphor.

LC: Your skin? Or yourself?

KM: My own body. I don't really care about myself. I started this work, deeply worried about myself, and whether or not I could take up space. But I kind of got over that—a long time ago—and I've come to realize that, by looking at myself, I'm actually taking myself out of the equation.

LC: And you're allowing viewers to put themselves into the equation.

KM: Yes, exactly.

LC: So something about the specificity of skin is very important, but the specificity of whose skin is not.

KM: For now, it has to be my skin. There is something about bringing my own experience that is important for now. But in the end, it should reflect the viewer's experience. It's not to tell anybody about me. It's not a confessional.

LC: Or a duplication. The way in which you work has so much ambiguity. The sense of detail is not about the specific person. It's about the experience of skin. For me, it's about trying to negotiate the boundaries between one's self and others.

KM: If we practice enough, those boundaries can become very ephemeral.

LC: Practice what?

KM: Is the word, *unselfing*? Scarry uses that term. Getting outside of yourself, letting go, in this case by going into yourself. *Bada's Mountain*, for example, is a picture of my back, but I'm not sure I would ever think of it as myself. But then again, maybe our whole construct of self doesn't really exist. Maybe the boundaries, the containers, are fleeting.

Think about what you aspire to in culture. Elaine Scarry has it as a sense of equality and justice. Me, I don't think in those terms. I aspire to a heightened empathy, literally being in someone else's skin.

Do my pictures allow people to be in their own skin? To be in my skin? I don't think it's about my skin, is it?

LC: It transcends the personal.

KM: Right. Using myself as a point of departure, I want to go far beyond myself.

LC: And suggest through your work that that's possible.

KM: Yes. What about that is frightening? It sounds great, doesn't it?

LC: Until you get up close, which is what I think is so interesting about

your photographs. They're so up close.

KM: In *Bada's Mountain*, what you see is a back with crusty paint. It looks like a rock or a tall, vertical Chinese mountain. Is it a back? Is it my back? Is it a man's back? Is it a woman's back? It would be really wonderful if I had a genderless body to work with. I started this work with a feminist impetus. But again, I've moved on since then. I don't see these images as a comment on how the female body is experienced, or how we as women experience our bodies, or how men look at women's bodies. It's really me as *any body*. That's the conceit—me as any body.

What that says about self and other, I don't know. But if I'm going to aim toward empathy, then I have to be ready to be any body. What I learn from the process is perhaps only visceral, but the way I make art does allow me to act that out.

LC: Why only visceral?

KM: Because I can't tell you where I've been. I can't come back from the experience and say, today I was the fruit vender on Mulberry Street. I don't think of it that way. I didn't go photograph someone else and use his or her body. I'm a stand in.

LC: But you're also the maker and the made.

KM: Yes, that's right. Is that beauty?

LC: Well, you talked about empathy. That does connect to Elaine's idea of caring.

KM: And being hyperaware and ready to be wrong.

LC: And ready to see the other, to hold the other in regard, as well as yourself. That impulse toward transcendence sounds like it's very much part of what you find beautiful. That doesn't mean pretty or comfortable or pleasant to look at. But it does mean full of potential for reevaluation.

KM: It perhaps lessens your knowledge instead of increases it. But it gives you a longing, a taste for more awareness, for lifting the blinders because—as you said—*I want to know*. You talked about touch as a way of knowing. Unknowing is also a way of knowing.

LC: In your work, there is an expanded notion of surface that has to do with contact. In the way I see you constructing your image, there is a direct relationship between you and the paint, you and different parts of your body, and the viewer and the image. It's a metaphor for this idea of contact, not

through your mind but through your body.

KM: It's calling up a visceral knowledge. Physical therapists talk about visceral memory, that you'll release someone's knee and they'll start to cry because they remember an experience associated with that. Getting back to that idea that we know more than we know we know—which gives us the confidence to go into the unknown—somehow the body, and in particular the torso, is a good place to start.

LC: For that investigation?

KM: Yes. Again, it's a dichotomy—body/mind. But what if you're trying to loosen the hold of those kinds of dichotomies? What if you're trying to think with your body or honor the body's way of thinking?

We're both involved in gesture, which has to do with voluntary and involuntary movements of the body. We're both involved in breathing, with breath being a metaphor for religion and culture. Inspiration is ...

LC: Literally to breathe.

KM: Yes. We both use physical movement as a way of asserting our presence and insisting on our own participation in the language of art.

LC: And the body of knowledge.

KM: Right. I was talking about faith and doubt. Is doubt a fear? I hope doubt is a strength, a willingness to be wrong, a willingness to reassess.

LC: It's perhaps a willingness to acknowledge that there is more than we can know.

KM: Or control. We do a lot to protect ourselves from forces, internal and external, that are greater than we are. But what if we could open ourselves up?

Art is a safe space. It's a dangerous space, because all hell can break loose, because it is also safe. It's not safe and it's safe.

LC: We want a space where we can *not know*, a space where all hell can break loose, because the hell is there...

KM: And maybe it's not hell. Maybe it's an open, mysterious place.