

Sharon Kagan

By D. Dominick Lombardi

Over three decades ago, when Sharon Kagan was meditating intensively each and every day she briefly developed an extra sense. For three days she saw everything as energy “people, objects, everything had the movement of energy. I would be looking at you and I would see you, but I would also see your physical presence as kinetic energy.”

This portal closed as abruptly as it came but the memories remain strong till this day – an experience that some thirty plus years later profoundly influences Kagan’s current art making process as she looks deeper and deeper into the intricacies of the physical world. Working first with knitting, Kagan creates what can be described as three-dimensional drawings in yarn that she later photographs as a low-resolution image. These images, when blown up, become highly pixilated as dimension dissolves and detail abates. These changes, which Kagan refers to as ‘artifacts’, she feels embody chance in its most conceptual form.

Over these printed images Kagan records her quest to find the essence of the physical world with labor intensive, meditative techniques that respond to the most delicate nuances in value and tone. Kagan sees the process – what happens between her and any point in the creation of her art as a dialog of movement. “The body,” she says, “has always been a big element in my work. My original aspiration was to be a dancer so movement for me can connote both the ethereal and physical in my art today.”

In her black and white images Kagan uses a jewelers glass and a fine point technical pen to carefully create patterns in the maze of modulating grays and blacks. When complete, the drawings look something like what one would imagine as kinetic energy, as the forms she uncovers with new depth of detail seem to move and pulsate as if they were submerged in water, or blown by a gentle, almost imperceptible breeze. As a result, the further you are from the work, the more recognizable the subject – an effect that Kagan loves as it is a nod the mid to late art of one of her favorites, Chuck Close.

More recently, Kagan has moved to coloring her prints with color pencils while accenting the spatial changes with a precisely drawn diagonal grid. In each diamond shape she might choose to change her direction, or not, depending on the visual effect that best represents the correct intensity, or lack thereof. Sometimes, as with her black and white works, Kagan will make a distinction between the main forms and the background as in “Untitled (#5), 2015, resulting in something of a retro-futuristic narrative one might imagine seeing on a 1950s and 60s science fiction, paperback book cover. Other times the ‘subject’ can be softened so much, and the background become so simplified or unified that the dimensional relationships between the two flattens down to two distinct layers that touch and dissolve slowly and quietly, one into the other.

Another important aspect to Kagan’s work is the rather blurred distinction between the micro and macro factor or element one may see in her imagery. As with much of her work, there is a thin line between our perceptions of her art, whether or not we see her works as something akin to an electron microscope image of some miniscule world, or the birth of a star in our ever-expanding visible universe. And it is this line of expanded thinking that Kagan’s work resides. It is all about the conceptual, the experimental, the spiritual and the exploratory world of both science and art. Like the search and subsequent discovery of the subatomic particle that holds everything together, the God particle Higgs boson, that the nearly fifty years of faith has finally been rewarded in its confirmation – it’s about finding that element, that thing that holds all the energy together to create form and substance. Most importantly, it is how Kagan represents energy, connecting separate areas with complementary color, shape and value. This is the strength or basis of the content she puts forth.

In art and science it is all about the journey, the inspiration and the faith that one-day you will find something concrete to build upon, discover and understand. Kagan will always be searching and finding because it is in her nature. Each step has an unpredictable end in some sense, and a very predictable end in other ways and it is that odd balance, that controlled chaos that at various points defies belief and defines processes in art and science. What Jackson Pollack expressed in fluid drips of paint that danced across his canvases some 60 to 70 years ago Kagan has refined and defined more precisely as a more universal state all things near and far.