

Ghostly Magic

Artist Kathleen Bryson blurs realities.

Speaking with a hint of a British accent picked up from more than a decade living in London, Corvallis artist Kathleen Bryson makes it pretty clear pretty quickly that in the game of “Which one of these is not like the other?,” she’s the pick. It’s not really anything specific that she says. It’s the way she likes to blur the lines most people draw with indelible marker, the lines and divisions that help stabilize our own unique definitions of reality.

Bryson paints richly textured, multilayered images that whisper “Magic is real.” She explores other realms of existence that leave the viewer with the somewhat unsettling, slightly euphoric feeling that comes from believing, if only for a second, that realities beyond what we can see or feel do actually exist.

Her paintings imply as much as they leave out, the way the absence of noise can tell you something’s wrong. Swirls of pale blues and shadows of barely-there trees are set against a whitened background with wispy air, falling snow and a cyborg lying on the ground staring up at the pallor of the sky. Werewolves, mermaids, gorgons and more otherworldly creatures populate her drawings, all alchemical distillations of two fantastical beasts blended, like her paints, into one.

With bottle-blond hair swept into a braid away from her high cheekbones, full lips painted blood red, and slate gray eyes, it’s hard to imagine this woman, who’s dressed like an urban glamour girl in a smart black and white

shirt unbuttoned low enough to reveal lots of cleavage, living in Corvallis. She grew up in Alaska, spent some time as a student in Sweden and spent the last decade in London.

But now that she’s moved to Corvallis to be with her long-term girlfriend, who recently



Denali Sunrise 2003

started working at OSU, she plans to be in Oregon for a while. She’s trying to adjust to a slower, less urban lifestyle, and seems to find the quirkiness of small-town life delightful. “Where slowness was something I longed for in London, I think I’m somewhat in culture shock,” she says.

In addition to painting, she’s (hopefully) about to finalize a deal for a book she describes as “anti-chicklit,” less “lesbian” than her last book, *Mush*, and “kind of wicked, funny and accessible to more people.” Meanwhile Bryson continues to work on multiple paintings at once, using glitter, lipstick and Wite-Out along with traditional paints. Playing with a world of ambiguity, she delves deeply into the gray area of muted sexuality,



Kathleen Bryson

portraying creatures that are both and none. More recently she has been painting things that are half there — ghosts, shadows, clouds.

Bryson, who holds two passports, speculates that her transition to the barely-there images is probably a shimmering reflection, her own personal mirage, of how she’s feeling these days and how the world around her feels. “It’s a subtraction rather than an addition,” she explains. “Because ghosts are half, not whole.



Northern Lights 2004

Bryson paints richly textured, multilayered images that whisper “Magic is real.”

There’s been a lot of upheaval for me lately. I have two passports (U.S. and British), so I feel split in two a lot. And the world feels very tenuous.”

Bryson’s work is displayed in her eighth solo exhibit, titled “Lucky Charms,” at Interzone in Corvallis through June 30. **EW**

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