

Kathleen Bitetti's Art



Artist Kathleen Bitetti

By Carol Masshardt

Great artists often draw inspiration from the natural world and from other art forms, and such is the brilliance of South Boston artist, Kathleen Bitetti's, new exhibit at the Gallery Kayafas on 450 Harrison Ave in the South End. Her show titled "The Sea Hates a Coward," from Eugene O'Neill's 1931 play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, is pleasing and challenging, fun, and disturbing, and beyond all, beautifully conceptualized and presented. A series of forty-five pieces, and five studies all in repurposed white frames and accompanied by literary quotes draw us into the majesty and peril of this profound natural force. The installation is best described as "site specific small works on paper" and were composed through the visual of the

site, and then the frame, the quote, and the final artistic rendering.

The sea, which has been Kathleen's backdrop throughout life, provided the power and reach of this successful exhibit. Incorporating the words of such writers as O'Neill, Edmund Burke, Buzzy Trent, Joseph Conrad, Samuel Beckett, Langston Hughes, and Lucretius, among others, she pays homage to a rich thinking and adds her own depth and artistry. The scope of this work wasn't conceived overnight, but is a continuation of the artist's mapping projects *Crossings: Massachusetts-Malta* (2009-2019) and *Crossings: Emerson was Here*. The projects led the artist from Boston to a residency in Malta with Valetta Contemporary, and then home to Boston again.

"It can stand with all my other work," said Bitetti, "and it involved making my usual 3D into a 2D world and this is a new type of work for me."

It is impossible to separate the art from the guiding values of this artist. "I find the frames," she said, "that makes it "green" and keeps the work affordable, but also, they've held other memories before and that adds a layer."

Kathleen created the entire body of work during the protracted and daunting crisis of COVID-19.

"What do you do during a pandemic? I found being outside and then in my studio inspired me and afforded me

the focus to do this," she said

Long respected and immersed in the art world of Boston, Kathleen is an independent curator, currently with Spoke Gallery in South Boston, and her generosity of time and encouragement has benefited legions of artists.

Arlette Kayafas, the Director of the gallery, has seen vast numbers of art work over her twenty-two plus years at the gallery, at first featuring only photography and now includes other carefully selected pieces .

"Kathleen's soul is in her art. It's about deep emotion. When I saw this work, I knew it would work perfectly for my gallery. I always look at the visual connection work has, but also at the meaning. I only show what I would buy," said Kayafas at the well-attended opening.

Her impression was shared by many attending and most lingering to look for more than a glance of the beautiful images.

"She is such a visual storyteller. I was dying to see this because she works in the historical and literary and is just such an intelligent thinker," said Luanne Witkowski.

Ross Miller quickly bought a piece after surveying the show. "Sometimes you buy something about an idea you have in your head that you haven't yet explored. I found myself looking at this and then my eyes started moving around. The genre of collage that she's sewing together resonates with me in ways I

want to think more about," he said

The popularity of this show isn't surprising given the artists compelling reputation and connections, but Vanessa Boucher, unfamiliar with her work and employed by Art Scope Magazine found her way to the exhibit and examining each piece said, "I like the collage and layers. There is a lot going on in these and I like that. The work has interesting images and details."

Kathleen Bitetti is a woman and artist driven by quality and values and that extends to the vigor of this show. "I wanted the pieces to be affordable so people who wanted them could actually buy them and am grateful that the Gallery was supportive of this," she said. "I am honored and excited to be represented by the Gallery Kayafas."

The obvious buzz about this show delighted but didn't seem to surprise anyone. "She usually stays under the radar," said Kayafas. That may have changed thanks to an inspired and thoughtful artist, a wise gallery, and a public yearning to see meaningful art.

(The show runs through May 28th, and the artist will be present on the "First Friday" event where you can see this show and other galleries, and on Saturdays from 2-4 in May. Gallery Kayafas can be reached at 617-482-0411 and www.gallerykayafas.com. Carolhardt@comcast.net with comments and suggestions.

