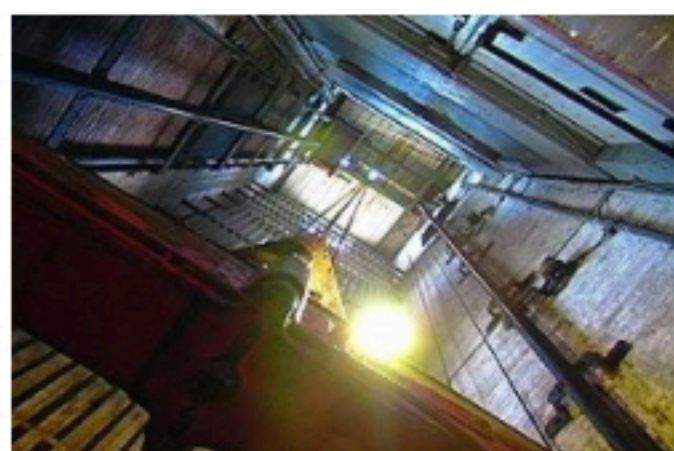




Out of the box

by Paul Smart

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Looking Up by Lynn Herring.

Lynn Herring calls herself a late bloomer when it comes to art, even though she moved to Woodstock a year ago as an artist, and has been working at her visual creations for 20-plus years at this point.

It's just that she didn't decide to pursue a formal education in what she loved to do most until the last few years, only getting her BFA three years ago. And didn't feel comfortable enough to step away from a career doing art directing for advertising firms until a few years before that.

"I've always been doing my art, but kind of in isolation," she says from her studio in Kingston's Shirt Factory. "I finally decided it was not good to be doing it all in my basement..."

And in re-dedicating herself, she adds, she not only found other people she could speak with and relate her ideas of art to, but discovered her work moving in a more conceptual direction.

"Before, I had really been working on aesthetics. I was drawing, painting," Herring recalls, leading me down the hall from where she works to where she's got a trio of new pieces showing, downstairs in the same building filled with studio and gallery spaces. "Half way through school I found myself getting into materials...I started experimenting with video."

The next thing Herring knew, she was using herself as part of her art, not so much as a source or subject, but a cipher, a tool.

"I worked with my relationships...I made a sculptural box-like form of my husband's head and cut it into segments. Thank heavens he has a good sense of humor," she explained. "Then I started basing things on my experience of the culture of this time we're in, and using myself as simply someone middle age, middle class..."

Herring started visiting friends in the Hudson Valley before enrolling at the School of Visual Arts in New York, then finally decided to move up here in December, 2009.

"I met so many artists, and everyone was truly supportive of the arts," she says. "In New Jersey, I felt like a fish out of water."

She liked the idea of living in Woodstock but found her original dream of having a nearby barn studio more expensive than she'd hoped or planned for. Enter the Shirt Factory...and her current commute to a daily regimen of work on her projects, which she lets evolve from her observations and a long, careful thought process.

We speak about the first pieces I'd seen of hers, at the Woodstock Artists Association and Museum. One was a self portrait of herself with her face masked in tea bags. The other was a pair of sculptural self-portraits, in box-like-shapes, that ended up mislabeled in these pages... under the authorship of another artist.

We shift back to what inspires all she creates.

"I follow the news a lot," Herring says. "Like my new works...they're based on how much time we spend by ourselves looking at screens, at intense events that then get taken over by the next intense event."

We come to a room with two black boxes suspended from the ceiling, and a flatscreen on a wall. I'm asked to climb into a box where I stand and face an image of the artist with her head in a box, which she hits repeatedly with a hammer. Her gaze is emotionless, like David Byrne singing in his "Road to Nowhere" days.

In the next box, I look straight up, uncomfortably, at the halls I've just passed through. The sounds are of an old elevator, whose images also show up in the loop. There's something disorienting about recognizing these elements in a different spatial format, with new sounds.

I climb out and Herring leads me to the flatscreen television, which plays an image of her, with her glasses on, silently mouthing words at me. Something seems off. It's only after a while that I realize she's submerging in water bit by bit.

I make a comment about waterboarding and she says what first inspired her were the number of floodings occurring around the world. The reports of eventual sea level rises. The tsunami imagery from Japan.

"At first I was going to take these little intense news experiences and put one in each box, like isolation chambers where we had to concentrate on them," she says. "But then I realized one of the elements at play was making the viewers part of the sculpture."

I ask Herring if she thinks of her work, progressively, in a linear fashion. Does one project breed the next?

Not at all, she says. "I don't want to repeat myself. I try to take what I've done and then move to the next level. I struggle with my ideas until they evolve."

She tells an anecdote about how a local sound engineer helped her with some of the work. Then shook his head and told her how crazy he thought her work was.

Herring smiles.

I ask if the move to the area has shifted what she does and she says not really, except that the amount of studio space she now has would have been impossible elsewhere. Which has given her more room to explore within, lending what she does a more organic sensibility to it. Which has supported its sense of originality.

"More importantly, I've been aided by the general sense of support, and respect, I have found here," she adds. "People come here to create their work. It seems this is a place that is good for artists. I've found my sense of community, which is very important. I've fallen in love with Woodstock..."++

To see Lynn Herring's isolation boxes and video flatscreen work at The Shirt Factory, on Cornell Street in Midtown Kingston, make an appointment by calling her studio at 845-514-2923.

For more on her new aesthetic, and fast-growing exhibition history, visit her website at www.lynnherringartist.com.