

1 Action Figures

An Interview with Cat Kimball



Q: If you were going to put the entire show in order, is there a 1-2-3-4-5 order to these?

A: The Furls kind of happened while I was putting the varnish on the 48!. I had to do something other than the physical activity of just varnishing. It took me several weeks to varnish the 48!'s.

Q: So are there many layers of varnish?

A: Well, there are three layers of matte varnish and then where the gloss portions are, those are three to four layers of gloss on top because I wanted those areas to look almost plastic-y. I wanted the weave of the canvas to recede a little bit. So they became sparkly in their own respect. Like a piece of plastic film on top of those areas. So they have a 3-

dimensional quality to them.

Q: What's the driver? What made you decide to create this work in the first place?

A: I had done a bunch of what people called flowers, and what I had done is wander around town taking pictures of automobiles - headlights and taillights - and I had abstracted them to the point of them becoming flower like. I flipped the shapes of the headlights and taillights and the bumpers and fenders, and they became these floral expressions. And I kind of liked the geometric quality of those, and I always wanted to go towards geometry. I'd been taking pictures of swings and merry-go-rounds and tilt-a-whirls and I just liked those structures and their playfulness, and I liked them being on stands and the weighty-ness of them and the lightness of them all at once. So I took all these whirlybirds and I started drawing them and I saw something there. I love the idea of sign posts and flags and just went with it.

Q: So, it started out with some of your photographs. Like some of the ones that you have in your book "Break"?

A: Not really. I'd have to say, "No."

Q: So it started from other photographs?

A: Well, as everyone does, I do a lot of surfing on the Internet. And in the past I've gotten my mojo on with trash compactors and how weighty they are, and I looked at a zillion trash compactors and ultimately drew two of them. And then I became enamored with the whirly birds and tilt-a-whirls, sign posts, solar collectors, and multi-directional solar panels and just kept on looking at these things.

Q: So, it was looking at these images online?

A: Yes.

Q: So, a lot of just exploring images of these types of things?

A: Yeah. Because you can go to Google and type in "merry-go-round" and click "Images" and there's just thousands of images of merry-go-rounds. And I would look for the archetypal merry-go-round. That one image that provided that "locked in" feeling, that clicked in for me. That one locked-in image and I would draw that and then I'd pair it down to its essentials and put it on a stand, and plant it on the ground, and give it a horizon line, and that's my image.

Q: But you went to a lot of sources to hone it down to just a few simple forms.

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Are those simple forms ones that you found universal and had a commonality over a lot of different images of machinery and objects?

A: Yes, there was a universality, and that's why I was looking for the archetype in my mind. Because every single one had commonalities, but not all of them sat correctly. Like there was a lot of photos of merry-go-rounds where it was from above, and I didn't want that. I wanted it to be more heroic, so I was looking for that specific angle too.

Q: I definitely see the whirly-gig.

A: That's why I called one of the 48! "Collect".

Q: So, when you talk about the 48! Oh, I see you've got "Wedge", "Hover", "Collapse"....

A: Yes, so all of those are action words. So the words collapse, sheer, collect are all verbs, etc. So, even the names I call them have something to do with action. And the way I see them, occupying their shallow space. The "Collect" is taken from those small solar panels you see on light posts that are collecting the sun, and I wanted that angle of collection. And the one above it is "Shear" and I just see those slabs above that gold slab wanting to shear off, to move away from that bottom one that's holding it secure. And the "Collapse" above that - all the wires are tilting in towards each other, so that when you look at it it wants to be straight, but all those wires are making it kind of collapse in on itself.

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Q: So you see those as wires.

A: Yes. I see those very thin lines as wires.

Q: Do you see them as wires on each of these sets? Because these are solar panels down here?

A: No, for instance, the “Shear” I see as solids. Like an outline of a solid, but most of them I see as wires.

Q: So, it’s multi-faceted, because you have the verb and the language, but you also have the form, and you also have the color gradations - like the rainbow effect that is very subtle.

A: Yes, I do call myself a minimalist, but all the concepts I work with are kind of maximalist in my mind too. Because there’s so much going on that people can either care to know about or they don’t have to care at all and they can just look at these and be calm. It’s unobtrusive. Like when you’re standing away from it and you’re not seeing the entire image, I call the gloss part of it the “romance”. The gloss draws you in

and it says, “Oh, I’m nice and pretty and shiny...come towards me.” So, you’re becoming the Action Figure immediately because you’re seeing that gloss and you’re saying, “Ooh, pretty!” And you walk up close and then you can see the wires, the horizon line, the atmospheric perspective at the bottom near the horizon line. You’re seeing all these components that you can’t see from far away. And then you want to move with it. You see the gloss moving across each one and it sparkles at you. So, it’s like a friendly manipulation that I’m causing. I’m manipulating you to become the Action Figure.



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Q: Right. Let's look at these over here. These are a little different. These aren't verbs...like "Wedge". That's not a verb.

A: Yes, you can wedge.

Q: Oh, right. So, you're talking about 'wedge' as a verb. Yes, to wedge, hover and fold. I see...okay.

A: Yes, but then when you look at it you see a wedge of cheese, don't you?

Q: (Laughing)...Now that you mention it, I didn't at first, but yeah.... first one?

A: So, it kind of pushes and pulls you. You want to see that whirling kind of thing on a stand, but the gold thing is this wedge. So you're being pulled in different directions with these. Backwards and forwards. Right to left. Verb versus noun.

Q: Right. Did you know you were making a wedge when you started the

A: Yes. Because I dropped that line out almost immediately. There are lines that have been removed so the effect is more effective.

Q: So, is each one of these shapes pre-planned?

A: It is. Yes...absolutely.

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Q: Did the word come first or the form?

A: The form came first. Yeah. Well, actually, the form came first but the effect came along with the word. Because I didn't just drop out one line, I dropped out many lines and then added them back in until I was happy with everything being exactly the way I wanted it. So I would drop out a line and I would say, "Oh, well that hovers even more. Or that looks even more three dimensional without that line." If there was no effect, I'd leave it out.

Q: I have to say, the more you look at them and the more you think about them the more intriguing they are and yet, if you just walk into the space, it's pretty much, like you said, calming, it's unobtrusive, it doesn't really get in your way, but it's got a decorative quality.

somebody could think that it's boring at first...like it's all the same.

A: (Laughing)...Yes, that's what I want. I want somebody to come in and go "Why is this art?" Or "Why am I here?" I want that.

A: It does.

Q: But if you look at it...even

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Q: (Laughing)...Well, I think it's effective that way. I had a couple people come in and be like, "Huh?" And I was like, "No, you have to look harder."

A: (Laughter.)

Q: But, you know, it's like everything. Some things appeal to some people more than others.

A: Exactly.

Q: Now, we have the math problems up here. And that goes over some of our heads. So can you elaborate on the mathematical equation?

A: So, I formulated the 48! so that you could consume them as just one panel. Like, the yellow "Wedge". You can just take that out and it would be strong enough to stand on its own. You can take that and frame it and put it on a wall. Or you can take a "Wedge", a "Fold", and a "Collapse" and you can put all three together and that would be one permutation, or another way to hang the 48!. I wanted the 48! to be...I wanted each panel

to be reminiscent of every other panel. So that when you see one you see them all, and when you see them all you see one. So they all have this same quality, they all have this same nothingness to them. So that you take one and you can get them all. I was interested in the idea of that and I didn't even know I was going there, but then I said, "Okay, so how many permutations *could* this be?" I looked it up on the Internet and there is something called Combinatoric Math that is used to determine how many permutations any grouping of things can be arranged. And for my grouping of 48! It's 8.8 billion permutations that you can hang it in.

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Action Figures

Cat Kimball

Statement

$${}_n P_r = \frac{48!}{(48 - 6)!} = 8,835,488,640 + 3$$

Cat predetermines a set of rules based on an intuitive collection of real and fictitious geometry, mathematics, engineering and science. Her aim is for the forms to simultaneously express the quasi- or pseudo-intellectual and the naive. The surface and forms are painted in a very particular way so the viewer understands they are also an Action Figure; they are part of the equation.

Cat anthropomorphizes her Action Figures as nearly-sentient, quietly waiting in various standing postures inside their own world, pointing to a calm inwardness. This attitude symbolizes the meditative state she must adopt in order to successfully pull off seriality.

2020

Q: I see, so this particular way it's hanging here is one permutation of how many?

A: 8.8 billion.

Q: So, I can play around with hanging these 8.8 billion different ways?

A: Yes, exactly. You could spend your entire life hanging the 48! in these different configurations.

Q: So, in your mind, the way this show is hung right now, is just one of many ways. One of many possibilities.

A: And the reason why there's a "+ 3" on the framed formula in your gallery, is it's adding the two "Furls" and the "Breather" into the equation - just for fun. And the reason why I hung the equation on your wall is just a tongue-in-cheek statement on how museums and galleries use these explanatory paragraphs on walls next to art.

Q: Yes. I love it. Yours is explained mathematically.

A: Yes, and also it doesn't say anything. It's a bunch of gobbledygook, which most texts next to art is (laughter)...to me anyway. I don't like any of that. Just look at the art first.



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Q: We didn't talk about the black one.

A: Yeah. The "Breather" is a very simple object. I was into simplicity when I was varnishing the 48! and it's another Action Figure because if you want to find out about it...you're breathing in at the top, you're breathing out in the middle, and you're at the mid-point at the bottom. So, if you realize it's a breather...it's depicting the chest cavity expanding out, contracting in, and at a midway point, then you become the Action

Figure...hopefully...by concentrating on your own breathing. And saying, "Wait a minute. Do I expand? Yes, I do. Do I contract? And that's outward? And when I go outward, I'm actually breathing hot air out." And so I give the outward breath the warm red color. And when you're breathing in, you're breathing in cool, so I gave it the cool

blue color. And the midway point is green. I started thinking about film and stop-action, and how in the television and film world it's red, blue, green for the separation dots, as opposed to red, blue, yellow in paint and print. And the gloss lends that kind of filmic quality to it where it's stop-action. It's one figure depicted in three ways. So I wanted that gloss stripe in between to connect all three movements, because it's just one thing.



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Q: So, it's definitely connected to a film strip.

A: Yeah...it's kind of like a film strip...yes.

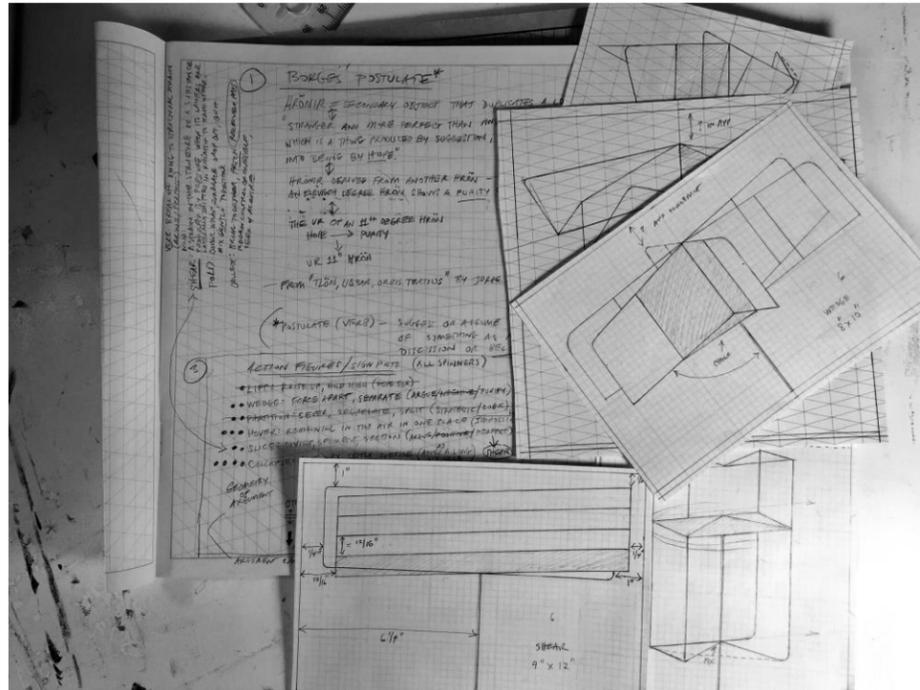
Q: But it also connects to our current model of...I'm constantly teaching people about breath work and breathing, and it's very much a part of the era that we're living in is a return to noticing the breath.

A: Yes.

Q: So, was that what you were thinking? Or are you a person who uses meditation?

A: Yes. I used breathing in my meditation. I was really deeply into it where there was lots of breathing every day...even twice a day during my meditation. Lots of paying attention to my breathing. Using the 4-7-8 count - breath in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, breath out for 8 seconds. However, ultimately, I didn't find that very useful doing it that often. I now use breathing when I'm feeling anxious, when I feel like I'm spinning out of control...it's much more effective and I feel a lot more calm...at least I do...if I use it sparingly. If I do it too much, then I lose that "valium effect" that everyone seems to get from doing the heavy breathing (laughter).

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Q: I was wondering with the 48! Were you relating those forms and verbs to the way that you see people or human nature.

A: That's a good question. Actually, I'm creating my own world. I'm not really relating them to the human form, or geometry, or their source. I see them sitting in their own world. I see them in contrapposto poses. They have their own personalities, and they wait in this shallow world. That's why I include the

Borges quote. Because it's a mystery to me. I've always painted these things standing...these images standing and at one point in my early artistic career...if I can call it that...I did these things called "Bigness". They were a man's torso and his outstretched arms, but his arms are cut off by the edges of the canvas, and there's no head, with his heart exposed. And with the flowers that I just recently finished. They all have the staffs or posts, and there's never been any room in these, there's never been any environment, but they have their own world. So, it's that ineffable quality.

Q: But the Bigness series was based on the human form, and the flower was based on a flower, which is connected to nature in our environment. And here you are going towards mechanized things that you've been attracted to, but when you speak about them, in my mind, there's a quality that relates to our humanity, in terms of these verbs, which are all things that we engage in, and the fact that they evoke certain emotion if you think about a form collapsing, or something shear that might fall or cut. Or this idea of collecting, if you put it in the context of solar it connects directly to how we're relating to the earth right now or how we need to be. And the wedge thing is sort of a...I mean I guess they're all designed to boggle the mind a little bit...to be a game.

A: Yeah...that's a very good point! I mean the amount of learning and note taking I did around these and developing the right word for each one was pretty involved. I'd go to the Webster and Oxford dictionaries and try to find exactly...the roots of words. I picked these verbs because they do have a

kind of a human quality and they can be used in many different ways. 'Collect', for instance, can be used in many different ways. And that's what I was hoping for is people can take these words and make of them whatever they wanted them to be. They're kind of universal...they have many meanings to me.

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Q: Let's talk about the "Furls".

A: Both of them are the same. For each the source object is folded paper. And I applied the rule that the piece of paper had to have three circles, four lines, and two sections, and I had to fold each in a certain way so that you could see all of it, but not. So, the panel to the extreme right in the 4-panel grouping is the folded down flat paper...where it's completely flat against the table. And then the 3 panels to its left are the folded object released from being flattened, so that the folded paper unfurled a little bit, and I took a picture of that, and I drew it three times across the 3 panels, and highlighted each one of the three circles with the red orange color. And then did a gradation of toned color across the panels and applied the gloss. It's just a very simple exercise that I was doing while I was varnishing my brains out (laugh). It was just a fun investigation that kind of grew into two things. And I wanted to see if I could re-create the Furl, so I did two of them.

Q: So, this is a different folded object?

A: Yes, it's a different Furl...it's a different object. And I was also playing with the idea of putting color behind. Removing the frame, because the frame has been of contentious concern to me. I don't like frames, and making frames is just a waste of time for me. But I needed something so I put them on a sub-structure. And I've been toying with idea of making the sub-structure glow with a complimentary color.

Q: Oh, I see that when you went to the side of it you see that little bit of color.

A: Well, I didn't want you to see it from the side. So, the only color that glows is from the top, because you really can't see the top. I still wanted it to be a mystery. So I painted the back of the panels and I painted the very top of the structure so that all you can see...you're kind of wondering why it's glowing. It's not as noticeable in the gallery because of how strong the light is, but in a household environment when you have light bouncing all around and it's oblique and all of that the effect really happens a lot.

Q: I can see it now. And you could do something like that and light it from behind, or something and cause it to happen.

A: Yeah...exactly...and fiddling with light from behind is something I wanted to investigate...and that's probably where I'll go next. Coming up with some battery-operated system to light it from behind. So that you have...like the running lights that the guys in Florida use on their hot rods where they roll around town with their undercarriages lit. I was kind of thinking about that.

The last things I wanted to say is that these paintings work better in a natural environment. In other words, without being lit. I made these in my studio space that has windows on literally every single wall and when I hang them there, they're different at every time of day and you engage with them at every time of day because the gloss and color and metallic keeps on shining differently as the day progresses. It's the same with the Furls...sometimes you see the pink and

sometimes you don't. It's just fun to look at them.



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Q: It's quite glossy here today. (Laughter.) How long did it take you to do this series.

A: It took me three months to come up with the concept and to become confident with where I needed to go, and then it took seven months to paint. All year long I was doing it because then I had to varnish and frame everything too. I mean all year long, but I did take breaks to photograph and go out into the world. Because I would get cabin fever because my sister would be like, "Okay...you need to go out...you're looking gray." (Laughter.) Because literally I was leaning over my desk all year long.

Q: Is the book of photographs pictures you took over that time?

A: Yes, they're just some of the pictures I took throughout 2019, but there's a lot more. I wasn't looking to find things that were pretty. I don't go for that. I'm looking for things that are overlooked or have a certain form. Like the storm drain is just amazing to me...how that worked. And just things that people don't even look at...I'm looking at all the

time. I'm waiting for things to happen...that locking in.

Q: What do you think made you this way?

A: (Laughter)...I think a 35-year career of being an organizational monster had a lot to do with it. I think if I had followed my artistic path right out of college I would've been a completely different animal. I would've been a lot more free and I would've gravitated more towards the expressionism side of things, but because I was so locked down for 35 years as an executive assistant, you had to have systems in place, things had to happen over and over and over again in a certain way for them to work properly. You had to treat everything exactly the same and things happened cyclically. Each year things would happen over and over and over again. And when I was finished with the 48! series, I said, "Yay! I don't have to do this anymore!" But after a month, I realized I missed doing the 48! and I wanted to do it again. And now, I just reached the end of three months of formulating my next seven months of work and I'm excited to get back to it.

Q: So, you've been trained for years to do this systematic thing and now you have a kind of a need for it.

A: Yeah, I do have a need for it. And it's a fun need. I dreaded work; I hated work. I just despised everything about it. But when I first got away from my corporate job and became a full-time artist, I thought I would paint free, and I couldn't...and I realized I couldn't paint and I went through a depression. However, as soon as I started applying rules, procedures, organization, I felt so much better (laughter).

Q: Okay...so it gave a sense of freedom in a way. To have this structure.

A: It did. Organization freed me up...yes.

Q: That's beautiful.

A: Yes...it got me out of my head.

Q: I think that's fascinating and interesting. There's a lesson in there...there's something in there.

A: I'm continuing with the Action Figure theme and I think I'll be doing it for a very long time. In 2020 the Action Figures are called Split Stands, and I'm hoping you can see them sometime soon on my Instagram account.

Q: Well, it's an incredible training...I think that your training to get to this is fascinating too. Just your years of...you know.

A: I appreciate that you call it training...I really do. Because as a fine artist now, I've had to come to terms with the fact that I had to become fully formed in a very short amount of time. I mean there are artists out there...and I'm not equating myself by any means with 90% of them...that have spent their whole lives painting. And I don't have that luxury, so I've been in a hurry (laughter). And it's been a fun experience to come up with the ideas and relate them back to myself as a non-artist and to get to art pretty quickly.

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Q: Who would you say are your biggest influences?

A: Ellsworth Kelly because of not only his painted forms, but because of his photography. A few years ago, shortly after he passed away, I went to New York City to see his photographs in a gallery up there, and it just blew me away. I was in tears in front of these things. That cracked me open. Also, I went back up for the Hilma af Klint show at the Guggenheim. It was phenomenal. She did her geometric abstractions before Kandinsky and she had developed a belief system around these geometric shapes and imagery. And I feel like I have a belief system and it kind of opened me up to that possibility. She would repeat things over these several panels. She's just mind-boggling. Agnes Martin, of course. Very contemplative. Amazing paring down of form where she just gets rid of everything except for the most elemental. Robert Mangold...he has those quiet lined shapes that he just keeps on repeating the same idea over and over again in incremental ways...just amazing. Jasper Johns and his detached

symbolism. Al Held was the first guy I started looking at when I was in art school and I went back to him almost immediately when I became a full-time artist four years ago. I read an entire interview that was pages and pages long and they talked about his "studio strategies." He used a ship building belt sander to create his work. And I'm like, "There's no waaaay I can compete with that!" And I feel like I have to compete with somebody like that at that high level. So I had to come up with a way for me to create art physically and this is the way for me to do it so that the art becomes big but that I can handle the small pieces in the form of small panels so that when I put them all together they become big. Sol Lowitt...oh my gosh...his algorithms and they way he applies rules...those algorithms become his reason so that he doesn't have to think is just amazing to me. That's why I spend three months on with my brain and seven months off, because those seven months are a heaven of repetition, of action, of just doing, and it's a lovely experience.

Interview Conducted By Lilla Ohrstrom.

For more information, private viewing, or any questions, please contact Lilla at 540-270-0402, or email

youngbloodartstudio@gmail.com

You can find more of Cat's work at catkimball.com

Pricing

48! \$14,400 for the entire 48-panel series
 \$2,400 for an entire 8-panel row
 \$300 per panel

Collapse (yellow, toned yellow/orange, orange, red, violet, blue, green, black)
Acrylic on eight 10" x 10" Canvas Panels, 11" x 88" overall including frames

Shear (yellow, orange, toned red/orange, red, violet, blue, green, black)
Acrylic on eight 9" x 12" Canvas Panels, 13" x 104" overall including frames

Collect (yellow, orange, red, toned red/violet, violet, blue, green, black)
Acrylic on eight 8" x 10" Canvas Panels, 11" x 72" overall including frames

Wedge (yellow, orange, red, violet, toned blue/violet, blue, green, black)
Acrylic on eight 8" x 10" Canvas Panels, 11" x 88" overall including frames

Hover (yellow, orange, red, violet, blue, toned blue/green, black)
Acrylic on eight 9" x 12" Canvas Panels, 10" x 80" overall including frames

Fold (yellow, orange, red, violet, blue, green, gray, black)
Acrylic on eight 10" x 10" Canvas Panels, 11" x 88" overall including frames

Furl 1 \$1,200 (toned red/violet with pink atmosphere)
 Acrylic on four 8" x 10" Float Joined Canvas Panels, 10" x 32" overall

Furl 2 \$1,200 (toned blue/green with green atmosphere)
 Acrylic on four 8" x 10" Float Joined Canvas Panels, 10" x 32" overall

Breather \$900 (blue, red, green)
 Acrylic on three 9" x 12" Float Joined Canvas Panels, 9" x 36" overall

Break \$50 (orange cloth bound book of photographs)

Note: For collectors who reside locally, Cat is happy to install artwork in the collector's space.

