

ART

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The Marrying Kind

With their new show, "Semiconscious," Kocot and Hatton collaborate personally and artistically.

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In the 30 years they've worked together on art projects, the team of Kocot and Hatton (that's Marcia Kocot and Tom Hatton) has produced everything from paintings and photographs to infrared videos. But Kocot and Hatton's many works, full of conceptual conceits, have never been made solely in pursuit of beauty. What K&H's art is all about is their process of collaboration.

K&H, who met as students at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, are both insiders and outsiders. They've participated widely in exhibits in Philadelphia and elsewhere. But somehow their public profile has been low. Maybe that's due to the idiosyncratic nature of the work, which is close in spirit to work by the 1960s conceptual art group Fluxus. "Semiconscious," a collaboration with their longtime friends the Beckers, should raise their profile nicely.

In the pair's first solo outing at Larry Becker Contemporary Art, every painting, etching and photograph in the show, no matter what it looks like, is a kind of self-portrait. In recent drawings and paintings, for example, mark-making—that classic sign of individuality—has been distilled down to straight lines, to do away with individual touch and personality. The result is hand-drawn lines that wiggle a little but are indistinguishable, one from the other.

"Kocot and Hatton: Semiconscious"
Through May 19. Larry Becker Contemporary Art, 43 N. Second St. 215.925.5389. www.artnet.com

Sometimes the team's reading sparks a new project. Lately, they read about the "hypnopompic," a dream state that lasts up to 10 minutes and occurs just before waking. They evolved several projects to make use of this semiconscious state. Not only was the dream team excited by the prospect of "finding" 10 extra minutes (each) to work in the middle of the night, but they were eager to find a new way to collaborate free of daytime's conscious ego state.

The first "hypnopompic" project involved making a series of dyppoint etchings on copper plates in the middle of the night and in the dark. Taking turns, they would wake, work on the bedside project and pass the tool and plate back and forth until it was finished. It took several nights to finish one plate.

The editioned prints from the sleepy series, available for view in the gallery office, are well worth a look. You may chuckle over the method of their making, but the prints are tender and delicate, and also beautiful.

Another "hypnopompic" project, the series of large white paintings called *Untitled (Semiconscious)*, is less successful. The white-on-white, almost-3-foot-square oilstick-on-acrylic works, hung on point, are ungainly and have an odd and unsatisfying presence as art objects.

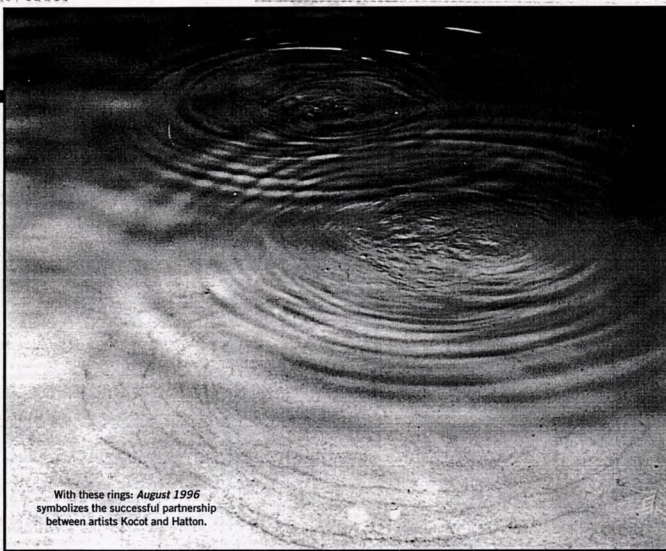
This, of course, is the danger with process-fueled work. Sometimes the finished product fails to deliver visually and ends up more a memento than an actual painting. But then, no artist bats a thousand.

Better is a series of photographs mounted on cast acrylic. These 12 black-and-white portraits and one color work pack a visual punch and are great collaborations.

The portraits, each one double-exposed, are of art-world insiders, artists and curators who are K&H's friends. The unity of vision in the deliberate double exposures is remarkable. And the stark and dramatic suite as a whole captures a spirit of intense concentration of the sitter and of the photographers, conveying a spirit of communion.

On a Zen-like quest to produce work in a cooperative way, K&H dampen their egos using invented rules and turn-taking, as in a children's game. But unlike a children's game, the goal here is not for an individual to win. It's for the collective to win by producing a harmonious work.

The show's color photograph here may be the best such example. Two concentric circles of ripples in a lake overlapping, caused by the two artists throwing bread into the water simultaneously, is a sweetly earnest image of union. ●



With these rings: August 1996 symbolizes the successful partnership between artists Kocot and Hatton.