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WORKING PRACTICE: **KATHRYN LYNCH** | by Julie L. Belcove



ONE thing that has remained fairly constant in the course of art history is

the penchant of artists to rely on muses for creative inspiration. Recent examples are abundant: Lucian Freud frequently asked his daughter Bella to sit for him, often nude; octogenarian Alex Katz has painted his wife, Ada, for more than half a century; Chuck Close has repeatedly turned to his old buddy, the wild-haired composer Philip Glass.

In the case of Kathryn Lynch, her muse is also hirsute, though arguably better groomed than Glass: It's Splash, her two-and-a-half-year-old Labradoodle.

Kathryn Lynch's dog, Splash, inspired her latest body of work, on view at Sears-Peyton in Chelsea through June 23, including *Dog Run*, 2010. Previous page: The artist in her studio. All portraits by Alen MacWeeney. All images of artwork courtesy of the artist and Sears-Peyton.

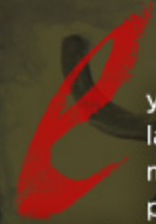


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hen Lynch, 50, and her family acquired Splash in 2009, the artist was known for moody paintings of her environment — evocative snippets of New York, such as cityscapes, traffic and the Hudson River, as well as landscapes captured on Shelter Island, where she spends summers. But not long after Splash joined the family, Lynch began to sketch the pup, as well as other intriguing canines at the local dog run. The subsequent paintings and charcoals, which hover in the zone between straightforward and funny, and range from 8" x 11" minis to 10-foot-wide canvases, are on view at Sears-Peyton Gallery, in Chelsea, through June 23.

Rendered in a muted palette of whites, grays and blacks, with subtle tinges of pink and blue and an occasional jolt of red, the paintings depict all manner of dogs — squat, long-eared, spotted — and occasionally their owners, all in brushy strokes and a highly reductive style. Simple shapes rather than specific characteristics define both the dogs and the humans; her people, for instance, generally lack most or all features, save the odd pair of sunglasses perched on a nose. Lynch's work, in her view, "falls through the cracks" of abstraction and representation. "It's somewhere between being and nothingness," she says.

A Three Dog Night, 2011, like many of Lynch's latest paintings, is realized in muted neutral tones, with only occasional pops of color.



Lynch works from a studio in the West Village, a large space reached via a creepily dark and mazelike hallway of boxes and crates. The place is convenient — she drops off her son and daughter at school every morning just a few blocks away — but her kids “hate it here,” she says. Oddly for a painting studio, it has no natural light, and the light bulbs, in fixtures hanging from the rafters some 16 feet up, are starting to burn out. Lynch hasn’t figured out a way to change them. “I’m not in a position to design my own studio,” she says matter-of-factly. “This is available. I take what I can get.”

Lynch’s windowless West Village workplace is somewhat quirky — but she says it serves its purpose.





Lynch is married to architect turned real-estate developer Peter Moore, and the last few years have been difficult ones for his business. For years they lived a luxuriously nomadic life, decamping from one property he owned to another, though they have been in their current TriBeCa home, which was chic enough to appear in the *New York Times* Home section, for the last six years. The family travels light. “We have a table, a couch and beds — the bare necessities, which I prefer,” she says. “If I could design a home, everything would be built-in. I’d have no objects.”

Monetary constraints have impacted the size of her canvases, forcing her to go smaller than she likes at times, but, she says, “financial roadblocks can become windows to another place. It breaks your habits.” Painting a successful small picture also makes her appreciate the opportunity to do an enormous one, which she describes as a “playground.”

The economic downturn has not been the first period of instability in Lynch’s life. Growing up in the Germantown and Chestnut Hill sections of Philadelphia, she changed schools six times, going to public, private, Lutheran and Catholic institutions. She says the inconstancy proved enlightening. “You quickly cling to whatever it is that makes you comfortable,” which in Lynch’s case was art. “You’re really aware of what you connect to because you’re so disconnected from everything.”

Details of the artist’s *The Trainer*, 2011 (top) and *The Conversation*, 2010, (bottom) and showcases her big, evocative brushstrokes — a Lynch signature.



Lynch's new work is a departure from her earlier pieces, which focused on New York vignettes and hazy land-, sky- and seascapes, such as *Tug on the Hudson*, 2011.



Lynch's mother, who died when Lynch was in her teens, was of the mind that skipping school to go to a museum was perfectly acceptable. Lynch went on to William Smith College, in upstate New York. After graduating, determined "to protect the artist in me," she says, "I tried every job I possibly could." She worked for an architect, a fashion photographer, even an investment bank. There she realized, "A lot of people make money in investment banking. I was not going to be one of them." So she opted for grad school at the University of Pennsylvania. "I had nothing to lose, so it was easy to be brave." Upon earning her MFA, she found

that teaching, the safety net for many a struggling artist, was not for her. "When you teach, you feel these little sponges stuck to your skin, bleeding you," she says. Finding a gallery proved particularly hard since she had trouble even talking about her work. "I have such stage fright." Lynch worked menial jobs and lived in her studio in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn, where she built a sleeping nook and cooked on a hot plate.

From left: *Little Sailboats 1*, 2009, and *145 Sixth Avenue*, 2007.



he may now have some physical separation between her studio and her home, but Lynch is known to tote her sketchbook everywhere. "You're always processing stuff," she says. "It's never turned off. That's why people accuse you of being spacey." She never paints from photographs, finding the experience "not real." Instead, she explains, "I paint real life. I'm really just reporting on my present situation."

Her sketches are loose, but they keep her brain and hand joined in the art-making process. "Sometimes I'm not even drawing the dog in front of me," Lynch says. She'll realize instead she's sketching some

other dog that's still on her mind, or perhaps the ears of one, the nose of another. A final painting might reference several different sketches. "I'll paint so long the shapes become my language. They become mine. It's all wrong — nobody's arm looks like that arm," she says, pointing to a figure whose elbow curves rather than bends. "As you're painting, you realize it's no longer about the dog run, it's no longer about your dog. It's about painting." Her process also relies heavily on editing. "So many of these are about things I erased."

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Lynch compares color palettes to recipes, which she believes should contain no more than four ingredients. "I use three or four colors," she says. "All my favorite paintings in the world are very simply painted." (Chief among them is probably Goya's *The Dog*.) Moreover, she notes, the smartest people she knows excel at clarity and are "not tied up in complicated language." Her brushstrokes, though, are expressive and bold. "I was never a delicate painter," she says. "I was always kind of clumsy and fearless."

Lynch has been alternating her dog pictures with a series of tugboats, which she likens to the dogs because they're not nautically correct but "my shapes."

As for Splash, though captured notably in *Back of a Dog Named Splash*, she has served more as catalyst and inspiration than model for the dog series. "I can only paint the back of her," Lynch admits. "I don't have a single picture of her front. Her best shapes are from the back — probably because when I'm walking her, she's always leading me."

Splash flashes some tail at her owner in *Back of a Dog Named Splash*, 2012.

