



Artist Interview: Kaitlin Trataris
By Brianna Nelson
September 23, 2015



WHEN: Kaitlin's artwork is on view September 3–26, 2015, at SOMArts Cultural Center, as part of The TSFF & SOMArts Annual Murphy & Cadogan Contemporary Art Awards Exhibition. Gallery Hours: Tuesday–Friday 12–7pm and Saturday 12–5pm.

WHAT: Artist Kaitlin Trataris talks about growing up in the internet age, destabilizing the domestic ideal, and leaving room for misrepresentation.

WHAT ELSE: Kaitlin is also an exhibiting artist in *Today is the Shadow of Tomorrow*, SOMArts' upcoming 16th annual Día de los Muertos exhibition, October 9–November 7, 2015, with a ticketed opening event Friday, October 9, 6–9pm. To learn more about *Today is the Shadow of Tomorrow*, [click here](#).

Your work is extremely personal in the way that it invites viewers into your home space, bringing the private sphere into the public sphere and vice versa. Why do you find it necessary to introduce these spheres to each other, and where do you draw the line between public and private—that is, if there's a line to draw?

I've always made personal work. My background is originally, mostly in self-portraiture, so I've always felt like it's easier for me to discuss topics of human experience through my own lens. I can't pretend to know or understand everyone else's experiences, and the personal sphere is just rife for honest expression. I'm also not much of what you might call a "closed person"—I like to talk about my experiences. And being of the internet age, essentially my entire life is already available for view, so it doesn't feel necessary to try to obscure or contain that information.

I like to bring the public and private together, and the home has been my focus in the past year. It's easy to invite people in because the home is a space that a lot of people experience on day-to-day basis. Bringing people into a home space invites them to get to know the individuals who occupy that space. The idea of opening up my home to different kinds of people as well as opening up myself to different kinds of people is important to me. Honestly, I don't see a need to draw lines between public and private. For me, the differences on either side of that "line" don't concretely or clearly exist.

That's such a good point that you make about coming up in the internet age—having an online presence almost means collapsing whatever boundaries could exist between public and private. Rather than strictly private, we could refer to the space explored in *In My Kitchen* as domestic. It always fascinates me how the domestic is associated with "women's work," such as sewing or cleaning, which often get trivialized as artistic practices in predominately patriarchal culture. In what ways does your work confront or challenge this?

The interesting thing about domestic space being associated with women or "women's work" is that no matter who you are, you experience domestic space. Regardless of gender you have a role to which you're either constantly conforming or constantly breaking. I like to call this the domestic ideal, or the structures of the domestic ideal. Often we'll enter into a sort of agreement with these structures to pursue—or mimic—the patterns of the domestic ideal in exchange for a sense of stability. And that agreement can translate to other types of social norms executed in patterns and intersecting with the domestic. For instance, monogamy is practiced and repeated within the domestic as a way of creating stability.

For me the use of fabric has been more about the medium itself rather than its connotations. I like the way it moves. And because fabric is something we use to cover or house our bodies, I find parallels in the geometric forms of clothing and those found in the buildings and objects with which we surround ourselves. Rather

than using geometric structures to try and control the organic, chaotic body, the fabric structures and objects of *In My Kitchen* actually respond to that body. When you walk around the objects, they move and they change and in a way they become organic—so while there's a paralleling of structures there's also a destabilization of the domestic ideal.



In addition to having this destabilizing nature, I love how the softness of your materials has this ethereal quality: the loose threads, the sheerness of the fabric, the way the “room” feels like it’s levitating... What are you drawing upon or inspired by when establishing this ghostly appearance?

I try to make my fabric objects or walls—sometimes I make fabric walls—just barely touch the ground, so there’s the sensation of potential grounding. But when you try to move through the spaces and the objects respond, the grounding appears to pull out from under you.

The floating and the transparency also make it feel more temporal and less solid. I think we kind of assume our spaces are solid and stable all the time. It's as simple as walking into a building and assuming it's not going to fall on you. We use things expecting them to always follow through with their intended purpose. The destabilizing movement and temporal aspect are trying to draw close to the idea that there's a kind of maintenance required within these objects. They can trick you or fall apart or not operate in a way that you want them to, forcing you have to adapt. Stability is fragile, and operating on the idea that everything will function as it's supposed to is potentially traumatic.



I'm particularly struck by your decision (and ability!) to create your structures and drawings from memory, rather than from a photograph or a projection. What role does memory play in your artwork and how it is significant to your process?

Memory changes spaces, and with time it can also idealize spaces in ways those spaces maybe aren't meant to be idealized. In a recent piece for a different show, I realized that the style of furniture I was drawing merged the furniture at my parent's house before they were divorced and the furniture that was in my dad's house after my parents divorced. When memory compacts time like this, details get synthesized in such a way that they become something entirely new. It becomes a new space rather than a repetition or a mimicry.

When I draw and sew from memory, I'm trying to allow room for misrepresentation.

How will the Jack and Gertrude Murphy Fellowships and the Edwin Anthony and Adelaine Bourdeaux Cadogan Scholarships Awards, administered by The San Francisco Foundation, and the accompanying exhibition support your work and future artistic development?

By being part of the show, I hope to expand awareness of my work within the Bay Area community. Every time you get to do a show, it introduces more people to the work you're doing, and I try to make every opportunity into the

next opportunity. And because my work is so installation based, it's not something I can have laying around to show people; I really depend upon being offered the space to build and show my work. My hope is that the financial award will support my transition from graduate school to whatever comes next, so that I can continue my practice even outside the academic support that I've become accustomed to.

Kaitlin Trataris grew up in the high desert east of Los Angeles and currently lives in San Francisco, California. She completed her BA in Studio Arts at San Diego State University in 2012 and is currently enrolled in the MFA Studio Arts program at San Francisco Art Institute. She exhibits frequently in galleries and businesses around San Francisco, including a solo exhibition at Book and Job Gallery. Kaitlin has been a resident artist at ArtSpan as part of their Art For City Youth program since 2013. She is also a recipient of the 2015 Murphy & Cadogan award. Kaitlin currently works as a gallery committee member at the Swell Gallery; she has worked as an art educator at The Boys and Girls Club, The Elementary Institute of Science, Live Oak School, and The Randall Museum. Kaitlin works in domestic and craft mediums exploring sculptural, installation, and performative work. www.kaitlintrataris.com

About the Interviewer

Brianna Nelson coordinates communications and community engagement efforts for SOMArts Cultural Center. Before joining the SOMArts team, she managed publications for Frameline: San Francisco International LGBTQ Film Festival. She is also part of the communications team for the Arab Film Festival and is a reader for *Zoetrope: All-Story*.

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Images top to bottom: In My Kitchen (detail), 2015, photo by J. Astra Brinkmann; In My Kitchen, 2015, photo by J. Astra Brinkmann; My Hallway, 2015, image courtesy the artist