Interview with the Artist: Anna Kunz

Chicago based artist Anna Kunz’s exhibition opens on September 11th in the 12th floor Gallery. Kunz was able to sit down with me and offer details about her background as an artist, the works that will be exhibited at the University Club, and her studio practice. I look forward to seeing you all at the art opening on September 11 where you can meet Anna.

Anna, the University Club is really looking forward to your upcoming exhibition on September 11th, can you tell me a little about how you started having an interest in developing an art practice?

I have been working as an artist and teacher in Chicago for over 25 years. My first experiences with art were through the collection at the Art Institute where my father worked. I would sit in front on the Rothko painting and observe the reactions people had to it. My first opportunities to exhibit my work were at MO Ming Theatre and I worked for the Nancy Laurie Gallery. I learned through more established artists what it meant to have a studio practice as a young person. I developed a discipline that entailed making little performative gestural paintings that eventually grew in scale. I studied performance and printmaking at SAIC and took a few painting courses with Tony Phillips and Betsy Ruprect and Richard Loving. I then went to Northwestern University for my MFA. There were wonderful artists teaching there with a wide range of practices and ways of thinking that left lasting impressions upon me.

For this exhibition, we are going to see works from your Color Scores series. Can you tell me a little more about how you started this series and the collaborative component in the series?

These works on paper are made in a more or less intuitive way. They are like meditations. I make them daily as a way to, as John Cage said, "begin anywhere". I don't critique or question my impulses. As I grew to understand the process and materials more though doing them for years, I started to think of them as notations for activity, or documents of activity. I have presented them to dancers for choreographic collaboration and most recently to composer Beth Bradfish who is writing a score from a Color Score. For me, the element of color is choreographed in these works. The way the color pulls the eye, the formal presence and the associational responses that are evoked are all woven together in my mind.

How has collaboration been a part of your practice? How do you navigate having your artistic voice with the voice or voices of your collaborators?

It is different in each case but the freshest collaboration with this work has been with Beth.
I approached her for a collaboration with a color score because she described her practice as making "walk through" sound. In my work, I think of a part of it being walk through color. We began the collaboration the way a Merce Cunningham collaboration would begin, by agreeing to make something. We started with Beth choosing a piece from my flat file for her response, and then she took it from there, charting the marks, writing the score, and interpreting the color. Then we reviewed the works together and it generated other ideas and to another piece for orchestra.

You mention an interest in having your work break out of the normal rectangle shape of most two-dimensional artworks. Where did your interest in breaking free of the rectangle come from and how are you still exploring the rectangle in your current work?
The "breaking out of the rectangle" idea comes from wanting to be inclusive of the viewer and the viewer’s experience. I was thinking about how to do that with color, so I thought about using light, since color is a property of light and it is the basis for my work. I thought about having the color seep into the space of the gallery--the way light seeps into space from a window. The history of painting is rich with these ideas and metaphors of the window/rectangle. There has been a strong interest in color and using it physically in my work both as a lingua franca and a bridge across cultural and artistic divides, as a unifier, a way to bring people to common experience. In my installations, this happens within the architecture and the bodily movements and light, in the color scores, they are more intimate in scale, so they command a different kind of participation and presence. It makes sense to me to call sound into the project, as it is a way to extend out from the frame.

What is on the horizon for you, are there any projects coming up?
I have a show of large paintings opening September 15 at McCormick gallery and will have a large work at the Expo Chicago. I am looking forward to a solo exhibition at the Hyde Park Art Center in March where I will create a walk in painting and video.

What artists or movements are your artistic inspirations? Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, Emily Dickinson, The artists of Gees Bend, The Luminists, The Washington Color School, Alan Shields, Robert Irwin, Moira Dryer and the Support/Surfaces artists are all ghosts in my studio right now but they change seasonally.