



When Painting Meets Classical Music, Figures in Motion are a Natural

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by Pat Rogers

Music is a powerful thing. It can move people to tears or to spontaneous laughter, all without visuals. Add in dance or performance as creative companions, and music can transport in new and intensive ways. Pianist Alan Moverman, a soloist with the NY Ballet, began to wonder what might happen if a painter would step in and make art in concert with music. He turned to his friend, [Karen Kaapcke](#)—a classically trained painter with a background in music and dance—to broach the idea. It seemed like kismet as Kaapcke’s art had recently begun finding subtle inspiration from music, she said in a phone interview.

The pair began to meet to explore the possibilities and define the project. Moverman suggested classical music or recorded improvisational jazz for Kaapcke to listen to as a muse for art. For this creative project for both Moverman as a performer and Kaapcke as a painter, the duo added an underlying theme of portraying different stages of life.

The results of the year-long collaboration debuts this weekend at [The Artist Study](#) in Southampton, NY. To kick off the exhibition in the right tone, a classical concert and two artist talks on the process accompany the exhibition presenting figurative abstract paintings inspired by classical and recorded jazz improvisational music selected by Moverman.



“Here’s That Rainy Day”, (Bill Evans, improvisation from album “Alone”, 1967) by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy of The Artist Study.

“Life’s Stages: A Collaboration with Painter Karen Kaapcke & Pianist Alan Moverman” will be on view November 2 to 16, 2017 at The Artist Study in Southampton, NY. The exhibition features 10 paintings resulting from the collaboration. Also on view are drawings on musical staff paper (gifted to Kaapcke from a nonagenarian jazz musician) from her “The Food of Love / Consumption” series. Made before the collaboration and in the wake of last year’s American presidential election, the series explores the act of consumption and the ways extremes can lead toward destruction and rebirth.

Many of the compositions that inspired the art on view will be performed on Sunday featuring Moverman on piano with cellist Maureen McDermott. The concert, on Sunday, November 5, 2017

from 5 to 7 p.m., will allow audience members to experience the music Kaapcke was inspired by for much of the art on view. The concert takes place on Sunday, November 5, 2017 from 5 to 7 p.m. During intermission, Kaapcke will give a brief talk on her experience and the art. A full Artist Talk will be offered on Saturday, November 4, 2017 from 3 to 4 p.m.

For both Moverman and Kaapcke, the creative project has been a significant one and resulted in their pushing their respective creative expression in new directions.



“Duet” (Robert Schumann, Fantasy Pieces for Cello and Piano, Opus 73, 1849) by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm. Courtesy of The Artist Study.

Moverman found that the project freed him to move his interpretations of music, as a performer, in a more spontaneous manner than his early training allowed for, Moverman said in a phone interview while touring with the NY Ballet. He now feels freer to take risks with musical interpretation when the occasions allow, he said.

He has worked for the NY Ballet for decades as a solo pianist, an orchestra pianist and as a musician providing live music for the troupe’s practice sessions. Each type of performance requires different skills to best support the dancers and choreography, Moverman explained.

This newfound freedom that allows him to follow the moment and go where the music takes him (within the constraints of performing the piece appropriately), stems from working in conjunction with Kaapcke’s process. The painter’s process relies on intuitive exploration that also springs from classical training in the French Academy in figurative work and studying American abstraction for two years. Having another art form to react against has been a helpful device in developing the pianist’s abilities as a musician and performer, he said.

“It’s very liberating,” Moverman said. “I still seek the collaboration. Having something to push against is really helpful. I think I’m more focused on dealing with others and other influences. It allows my own personalization...and allows freedom to become spontaneous.”

As a theme to help direct the musical choices and project, there is a subtle theme of transitions in life. The theme is both literal and metaphoric: Moverman selected pieces written during a range of periods within each composer’s life, from young adulthood to near death.

Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 32, in C minor, Opus 111, written in 1822, turned out to be a lynchpin composition that convinced both artists the collaboration would be an interesting and fruitful one.



“Opus 111”, (Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 32, in C minor, Opus 111, 1822), by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of The Artist Study.

In a separate interview, Kaapcke said she was instantly moved by Beethoven’s Sonata and immediately conjured an image for her painting. At that moment, the only things she knew about the composition was that it was Beethoven’s last and he was fully deaf at the time of its writing. She let intuition sweep over and guide her to begin the creative process.

“Right away I had a response to that piece, she said. “Right away, I thought this was a piece I could paint to. I listen to a lot of music when I paint but never as focused as this project. When I heard this selection of Beethoven, it made me feel like I needed to work. It cemented, for me, the rightness of the collaboration,” Kaapcke said.

Other musical selections inspired her in a similar fashion. She finds J.S. Bach’s Sarabande and Gigue “really paintable” and was especially moved by György Sándor Ligeti’s Piano Etudes. Three of the paintings made in response to Etude No. 2, 1985; No. 6, 1985, and No. 1, 1985 are on view in the exhibition. Etude No., 5, Arc-de-Ciel will be performed on Sunday.



“The Three Graces”, (Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 2, 1985) by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on canvas, 8 x 8 inches. Courtesy of The Artist Study.



“Autumn in Warsaw” (Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 6, 1985) by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on canvas, 8 x 8 inches. Courtesy of The Artist Study.



“Desordre” (Ligeti, piano etude No. 1, 1985) by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on canvas, 8 x 8 inches. Courtesy of The Artist Study.



“Arc en Ciel”, (Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 5, 1985) by Karen Kaapcke.
Oil on canvas, 10 x 10 inches. Courtesy of The Artist Study.

Ligeti’s 12-tone compositions provided challenges for Kaapcke, at first, and she found connection in the lyricism of the music that translated into her paintings. Like the painting inspired by Beethoven, the art is figurative with spatial qualities that translate her reaction to the music. By the end of the project, the Ligeti was a new favorite piece, she said.

On one hand, it is no surprise Kaapcke’s paintings are figurative. She studied at [The Art Students League](#) in New York City and The Ecole Albert Defois in France with [Ted Seth Jacobs](#) as mentor. She also studied at the [National Academy of Design](#) with [Jacob Collins](#), who also studied with Jacobs.

On the other hand, the project gave license for Kaapcke to incorporate her training in American abstraction: none of the figures in these series of paintings depict models. Instead, all figures in these paintings are from her imagination or memory. All are expressive. This is the first time Kaapcke has worked from imagination to create figurative works, she said. All rise from her classical training in realism and contribute grounding to the fantasy and, at times, spiritual paintings inspired by music.

Kaapcke also found Astor Piazzolla’s “Le Grand Tango and Adios Nonio, 1959, especially moving. For the Argentinian composer’s piece, she created a diptych that captures the extreme contrast of sorrow and joy in the music that easily moves listeners to tears.



“Tango Diptych: Diurne/Nocturne” (Astor Piazzolla, Le Grand Tango and Adios Nonino, 1959) by Karen Kaapcke. Oil on Canvas, 80 x 80 cm.
Courtesy of The Artist Study.

Another surprise in the process was found in the conversations about the music held with Moverman. The music was analyzed, and the composer’s intent revealed after the paintings were made so Kaapcke could remain with her inspiration for the paintings before discovering what the composer’s inspiration was.

The repeated experience of tapping into the composers’ intent was both a surprise and a joy for Kaapcke and shed light on some of the compositional and color choices as ones that truly imparted the essence of the music. In her choices of paint application—whether multiple thin layers or in thick paint that reveals the artist’s hand—the experience has been an intense and satisfying one, she said.

In keeping with the “stages of life” theme, Kaapcke considered questions about the quality of time

and added specific emotions experienced at different times of life into the art, she said. *Tango Diptych: Diurne/Nocturne* portrays an earlier time of life where sexuality awakens and is fully embraced and experienced, she said, while Beethoven's music channels the latter part of life.

Looking back on the project, Kaapcke noted that the collaboration also gave her a freedom she didn't have before. In her case, it allowed her to cast aside restlessness and settle into a new confidence; she now has a level of expertise that allows for a sense of ease with her current place in her art practice. It also gave her the sense that entwining a conceptual component while continuing to explore narrative is a road she'd like to continue to travel.

"I feel a deep level of satisfaction," she said about the collaborative project and where she is now. "I have the same feeling about what's going to happen next."

BASIC FACTS: "Life's Stages: A Collaboration with Painter Karen Kaapcke & Pianist Alan Moverman" will be exhibited November 2 to 16, 2017 at The Artist Study, 25 Hampton Rd, Southampton NY, 11968. www.theartiststudy.com.

An Artist Talk will be held on Saturday, November 4, 2017 from 3 to 4 p.m. An Opening Reception and Classical Music Concert will be held on Sunday, November 5 from 5 to 7 p.m.

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