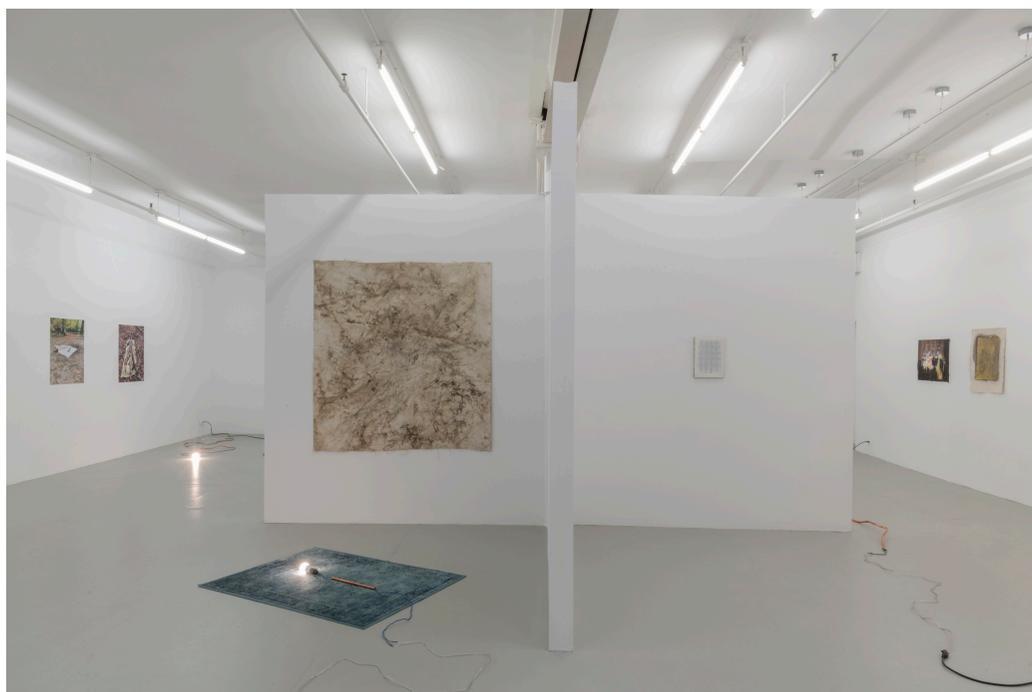


BLOUIN modern painters

Exploring Dawn Kasper's Existential Universe in New York

by Cody Delistraty
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Installation view of Dawn Kasper's "Four Scores (From Zero to Nothing)" at the David Lewis gallery. (Courtesy of the artist and David Lewis, New York.)

One of the most ambitious exhibitions currently on in New York is Dawn Kasper's "Four Scores (From Zero to Nothing)" at the David Lewis gallery. Running through January 6, the show is comprised of installations as well as a series of audio works and performances that demonstrate and question central human myths, such as creation and the tree of life. Kasper has recently returned from Italy where she lived and worked in a studio space for six months as a part of her series called "Nomadic Studio Practice" at last year's Venice Biennale. Never one to shy away from the grand or existential, Kasper's current New York exhibition is, as she told *Modern Painters*, fundamentally about creating the awareness "that we're not alone." Although technology and modern society have segregated us into increasingly independent entities, there remains the possibility of moving back to basics. Kasper spoke to *Modern Painters* about the core human mythologies, the interlocking nature of our personal journeys, and how performance art can bind us together—providing a much-needed sense of unity.

Much of your current exhibition centers on creation myths. How, even in the modern day, do you see mythology shaping human behavior?

Well there are things occurring that are much bigger than us, that supersede the material. Black holes, and however people choose to recognize how things came to be. I guess that is sort of a recognition that those things are still there for us in a refuge, I guess. Finding some sort of hope in the midst of all the chaos.

I recently read an interview with the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who said society needed to re-embrace grand narratives and mythologies in order to create a greater peace and unity. Do you hold a similar worldview?

Absolutely, and thank you for your question. I've been teaching for the first time this year, and it's quite challenging and also very eye opening. I'm teaching Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" – and that deals with books and the power of the myth. To revisit "The Hero's Journey" is to see, in a sense, we're all this sort of hero figure. We have our own journey in order to achieve whatever we need in order to survive, and I've been thinking a lot about fire and the myth of how fire was created.

Everyone has their own story, and it's something so simple that we now take, to an extent, for granted. I know I did. I need to appreciate it more and become aware of it and revisit how simple it is. I do have a dream; I know it sounds cheesy, but I have a dream to be able to light a fire with flint in the rain. I've heard it has been done. But I don't know – just going back to basics. Life before having GPS. Just being more present and self-aware. I'm grateful for technology and how things have advanced, but I think we are sort of getting lost in something maybe commercial. I think in order for us to move forward in society we need to reconnect. My point is that just being grateful for what we have in regard to what is right in front of us and how easy it is now to get inundated with information at the accelerated rate at which we are required to process that information.

How do you see your current, four-part performance series as supporting or complementing this worldview?

It's interpreting – a coalescing interpretation of music. So each of the four performances is components of, or individual aspects of, what I recognize potential for being in a line with a creation myth or something sort of out of nothing. It's very simple – "ex nihilo," out of nothing, sort of something from nothing and then "axis mundi," which is the tree of life, so each performance and each performer and I, myself, would work together to sort of investigate these aspects. Then the performances themselves are an attempt at creating sound and movement and, in a collaborative sense, unifying within those topics. It's not necessarily a means to an end per se; it's just a revisiting of these classic questions. And then of course the monolith, the many forms of the monolith and the permutations therein. But one particular aspect that I am fascinated with is [Stanley] Kubrick's version of the monolith.

Right. Vis-à-vis technology?

Correct, yeah, and the sort of technology that then can consume us, but we need it to survive.

What do you hope people take away from this exhibition?

I suppose, in a sense, the awareness that we're not alone. It's more in a general, broad-strokes attempt at bringing about community and awareness. But it's not so overt; it's more in the frame that I can manage at this point. It's not been easy, and I recognize that it's not gonna be for a lot of people. So I try to keep things simple with the exhibition. I tend to work serially so in that respect it's sort of getting back to basics by addressing something along the lines of creation. A myth, a creation myth, collaboration – and I value collaboration in my work very much.