



OPENING THE FRAME

PROFILE & PORTRAIT BY DIANA GREENE
Christine Kirouac, video artist

Neat categories are inadequate when describing artist Christine Kirouac. Yes, she's a painter and a video artist, but her bold vision is more kaleidoscopic and expansive than those labels suggest. She blends images, theatre, ideas, words, sound, even her mom's kitchen table, if necessary, to create evocative, often provocative, work.

"I seem to respond to where I am," says Kirouac, who moved from her native Canada to Winston-Salem in 2008.

Location, however, is only one part of her matrix. After all, the phrase "where I am" is a door that opens many rooms.

For example, when Kirouac suffered a "horrible break-up" several years ago, she responded. She set up her video recorder, put on make up, arranged Hollywood-style lighting, and began reciting the introduction of *Lord of the Rings* in a lushly colored British accent.

"I wanted to sound like Cate

Blanchett," she says with a laugh. "I am interested in cinema as a coping mechanism, and I love how sound can take you somewhere. When I go through a break-up, I watch films repeatedly and take great comfort in the repetition and predictability."

Looking directly at the camera lens, Kirouac begins *Introduction* by repeating the epic and haunting line, "The world has changed." As her narration continues, the words fracture, break, and layer in rounds of enveloping sound that make her spare, seductive performance mesmerizingly indecipherable.

Kirouac has exhibited her videos and installations internationally, throughout Canada, and most recently, at Winston-Salem State University, where she's an adjunct faculty member. In addition, her work is held in many collections.

As an artist with roughly 20 years experience, Kirouac is turning her focus from the outer world to more personal interior concerns.

"All my work stems from a search to belong somewhere," she says. "I

used to look outside myself, but the search has become much more within...which I think requires a level of acceptance and maturity."

In the video *Hybrid*, Kirouac focuses her camera on her mother, Irene, who demonstrates how to make piecrust while telling jokes and discussing Christine's adoption. "I knew you were Irish and French and Indian," her mother says, with an infectious felicity. "I thought it was Indian from India."

Kirouac, off camera, says this revelation is shocking; she'd always imagined her adoptive mother knew Indian meant Native, Aboriginal, specifically, Cree. As the artist's mother bakes, talks, and deflects her daughter's occasionally edgy commentary, the nine-minute video blends close-ups, split screens, and shots so slow-moving they appear to be stills. In Kirouac's dexterous hands, a frame is anything but four

RIGHT TOP: *Hybrid* presents a conversation with Kirouac's mother. RIGHT BOTTOM: The simplistic *State Line 2*.

sides holding a composition in place. And as a result, her editing of *Hybred* is bumpy-loose and entertaining—a lot like their conversation.

Collaboration is a critical element in Kirouac's work. First, she collaborates with her own situation—biographical or geographical, usually both—then begins building, undaunted by technical challenges, unbound by a fixed identity of herself as an artist.

When Kirouac felt lonely living in Montreal, she filmed the simple, singular line running outside a subway window. She had never produced such minimal work before and hadn't a clue who would create the soundtrack, which is integral in the 13-minute piece *State Line 2*.

"You don't need to know what you're doing, you need to be confident," she says. "An artist makes a decision based on courage and truth. I've always thought, as all artists do, that you use yourself as a lens to see the world. I make work for others to see through."

When did you first realize you would live a creative life?

When I failed my first math test in high school. I went to an all-girls Catholic high school that was highly academic.

What inspires you?

Justice. I'm into karma and justice and I try to still believe in it, especially in artwork. The TV program *Law & Order: SVU*. Making sure that my six senses are open. 17th- and 18th-century paintings, the stillness of that world.

What do you think of failure?

It's a necessary evil. I think that failure is an opportunity to know something that you didn't know the moment before. It's a gift. People who say there's no such thing—that's b.s. The moment that you accept your failures is the moment that you grow.

What do you admire in other artists?

Discipline. I really admire people who are able to do one thing for a while.

Who are the artists you most admire?

Jazz musicians. I need music all the time. I really love short-story writers like Truman Capote. In terms of artists, Sophie Calle, Marina Abramovic, and Oscar Munoz, who is coming to SECCA. Comedians. Christopher Guest. Artists that don't take themselves so seriously.

