

Chance Evolutions  
Summer 2010 – Conversations

*Kristine Moran, interviewed by Lindsay Cuff*



Kristine Moran, *Steam Bath*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, NYC.

**Lindsay Cuff:** When I look at your body of work, there seems to be an explicit sense of movement from one state to another. The figures seem to hang in a suspended moment, as if, instead of trying to capture something as it is, you capture it as it is becoming. The process of transmorphing or shape-shifting is not always a positive change; it is sometimes undesirable, a move to a darker form of the self. Do you consider your work to be narrative, concerned with the thread that links the images, the trajectory that they travel along? Or, are you more concerned with the gesture, the movement in a single moment?

**Kristine Moran:** I'll often start with a loosely constructed narrative at the beginning of a painting series. This sets the direction and tone of the work. But once a painting gets under way, the work really takes on its own form, and the narrative recedes back. For the past few years I've been working with this idea of dissolving notions of self through painting. Many paintings begin with the idea of a figure or space undergoing a sort of metamorphosis. As the figure goes from being recognizable—or representational, into something irrational—or abstract, notions of self are deconstructed, and ideas about one's identity become much more open-ended. I'm especially interested in how abstraction can be used to transform concrete ideas of place and self into open-ended forms that lend insight to the primal side of human nature. A painting like *Steam Bath* (2008), for example, clearly has a figurative element to it. At that time, I was thinking a lot about a person's ability to suddenly transform into something purely animalistic, sexual, or violent, as a reaction to their environment. That particular painting is really about one moment in time. Whereas other paintings are part of a larger series, where the viewer can be a witness to the protagonist's transmorphing shape from one painting to the next.

**LC:** I find this idea of dissolving notions of the self through abstraction quite interesting. It's rather counterintuitive, the move from recognizable and representational to irrational and abstract, from a fixed identity to one that is more open-ended and fluid. The process of painting is one that is gestural and physical. Do you see any parallels between the protagonists and forms in your paintings and your own artistic practice?

**KM:** Yes, I've recently been thinking about these protagonists as acting out a form of unconscious desire, a negotiation between imposed social constructs and the need to have an unconstricted sense of self. Drawing parallels to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage—where a child recognizes its own image in the mirror for the first time but feels a disconnect between the reflection that is whole and contained versus the belief that it instantaneously exists everywhere and without concrete form—this latest series of paintings, of which *Self-efface* (2010) and *Reclining Nude* (2010) are examples, reflects a fragmentary idea of the self through the symbolism of refracted light. In my own artistic practice, as I begin the process of deconstructing painterly forms of corporeality, I similarly have to negotiate between the cognitive process of thought, where judgment and

the weight of history can interfere with the much more desirable intuitive aspect of painting. There are instances, usually occurring very late at night, when the unconscious mind takes over, and is directly manifested through the physicality of the painted gesture. In this sense, abstraction becomes the best vehicle for this process to occur.

**LC: So, it's not only in the painting but also through the painting process that abstraction becomes the means of moving from a whole, concrete concept or image of self to a more primal, fragmentary one. What is the relationship between the self and the other in your work? The painting and the viewer? The fantastical and the mundane?**

**KM:** I offer the viewer some information, whether it is through pictorial cues, depiction of space or a given title, in the hopes that he or she can locate themselves within the painting. My work generally tends to be a slow read, but once the viewer becomes invested, he or she has the opportunity to take the representational cues as entry points into the abstract forms that dominate. This ideally allows the viewer to enter into a fantastical space that parallels that of the protagonist. As concrete figures and spaces devolve into abstract shapes of ephemera, the viewer's experience of the painting becomes increasingly open-ended, as is the interpretive nature of abstraction.