

## **All the Small Things : Jordanna Kelly and the Process of Creation**

**by Letitia M. Pratt**

Fantasy writer J.K. Rowling, author of the famous, lore intensive Harry Potter series, once shared that she meticulously created the imaginative world of Harry Potter in a sequence of hand-drawn tables holding character and plot information. To accomplish a creative feat with the calibre of those novels – or other epic works like Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* – an author like Rowling must plan out her world intensely. The process of building, planning, and organising this world for the reader to get lost in is the true artistry of novel writing and is a skill that is useful across genres - literary and otherwise – that encourage the viewer to get lost in the process of consumption. Therefore, the artist and fantasy writer, I argue, have a lot in common, especially if the artist aims to create a new world for the viewer to experience. This is true for Jordanna Kelly, whose love for the process is unique among the things she enjoys about creating her work. In fact, Kelly and J.K. Rowling share more things in common than one would expect.

Hear me out.

On the eve of completing the work for her second solo show, *OVERWHELMED*, I arranged to meet with Kelly at her studio so that she can tell me more about this process. A bright Nassuvian sun greeted me as I stumbled out of my car into her driveway, and the still, morning air was thick with dew caught by the high spires of trees surrounding her house. I half expected, on my first visit – a few days before – to walk into a little shack beside her family home and to happen upon Jordanna, hermit-like, in a space full of the trinkets of her creation. Instead, she opens a door leading to a cosy basement on the side of her house, stepping inside a dome full of small things: bottles full of sand, resin-frozen butterfly wings hanging, and boxes of tiny cut-out circles.

In her basement studio, Kelly can be close to her supportive family who often helps her with her projects – studio assistants, Jordanna insists – and with an undertaking like *OVERWHELMED*, Kelly needs all the familial help as she can get. She is working on building multiple installations throughout The D'Aguilar Art Foundation's gallery space, hanging assemblages along with smaller, intricate connecting pieces. Jordanna creates delicate circular cut-outs from paintings, and like her previous show, *Bugs, Blessings & Barriers*, she layers these small pieces also to build the larger installations.

The work she produced for the show is no small feat, and like Harry Potter, *OVERWHELMED* encourages the viewer to get lost in the interiors she creates. She refers to the assemblages as "little environments" because of their resemblance to terrariums or small invasive cities. "I originally wanted to create these environments – these little worlds – to be all-enrapturing," Kelly says, holding up one of her work of delicately painted papers strung together beneath a plastic dome. "So when the viewer looks at the work, they are mesmerised by the many things that are going on. I want their eyes to bounce from patterns to levels, to layers."

The wall works that Kelly created in this series do just that: they call on the viewer's imaginative participation. The scale and depth within the works are involved and asks you to create connections to other complex forms. Like reading an extensive fantasy novel,

these sculptures are an exercise in brainpower; they are abstract microcosms of colour and shape, inviting the viewer to explore each hanging for the hidden world that lies inside.

The process of creating this exhibition was a long one, and Kelly spent a considerable amount of time in planning mode. She often asserts during our meeting that this was a form of art within itself, stating that "Before these [works] even started, the idea of what the show was going to be and how it is going to feel was probably weeks in development." She then shows me the many paintings she cuts the minuscule circles out of, provisions that are mainly used to control where she is going with the work.

"I have not painted in so long. It's something that I've been battling because it's so loose, too free. I'm a very controlled person, and I'm not going to start splashing and putting paint down and not have a direction. After I paint and cut, I spread them all out, and this becomes my new paint. So when I create my background, it is about picking them and sorting them and thinking about which colour changes this field so much. I find that interesting, and it's time-consuming, and it makes me excited."

In the studio, Kelly turns one of the smaller domes over in her hands, so that I can see the piece from all sides. The circles that she previously organised were floating above a background of bright colour. "There are so many little nuggets in the work that I try to hide," she says. She points to a hidden circular dot from the side, and goes on: "When the viewer looks at it, I want them to say, 'why did she even put this here if you cannot see it unless you walk around?'" Created with such minuscule details, Kelly takes her preoccupation with small things to another level, so much so that the details are easily missed. The show is incumbent on the full immersion of the viewer.

Rowling herself does a great deal of convincing the reader that what they are reading can happen or is happening as they read. This is often done by rationalising fantastic stories within realistic scenarios: for example, a wizarding school seems more plausible if it is likened to mundane life at a British boarding school. Thus, connecting with the landscape helps the audience accept all the fantastic details of the new world they are exploring. Kelly employs this technique with the works she created for this show by allowing the marks (in this case dots) of her environments to move outside of the frames into the surrounding walls of the gallery space. We imagine the paintings are coming to life as parts of them are metaphorically spilling out into the environment. The result is an immersive experience for all the viewers, feeling, hopefully, overwhelmed with the world they just stepped into.

The D'Aguilar Art Foundation is proud to present this new body of work by Jordanna Kelly. It aims to be an exhibition that will arrest, mesmerise, and call viewers to lose themselves in the fantasy of her installation. For this show, in particular, Kelly aims for escapism for both the audience for herself: "The processes of creation are therapeutic for me – I mean, it is stressful, but also a release." Also, like curling up in bed with a thick book, the consumption of Kelly's work is the best form of therapeutic release there is.

OVERWHELMED is on view at the D'Aguilar Art Foundation (DAF) until February 1, 2019. The DAF is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays and by appointment.