



(e)merge artist Katie Kehoe "Cleaning the Catch" for Soapbox, 10/14/2011

By Eames Armstrong on September 27, 2012



Katie Kehoe, Cleaning the Catch, Soapbox 10/14/2011

(e)merge artist Katie Kehoe performed in Soapbox last year. Read my response to "Cleaning the Catch" below. For (e)merge, Katie Kehoe is performing *Mary Ellen Likes Free Magazines*. Pool deck, 12pm, various times through the fair.

"Mary Ellen is a transient character, originally from Canada and has taken to flipping through free magazines to get a sense of the places she travels to. At the (e)merge Art Fair, she flips through free magazines collected in DC, reacting to the content while performing for a live and online audience."

Katie Kehoe "Cleaning the Catch" at Hillyer Art Space, Washington DC

10/14/2011

In the dark gallery, the audience watched a projected video of waves coming in to shore. On the ground to the right of the projection screen sat a small television monitor displaying diaristic white text on a black ground. The artist entered the gallery in rubber boots, a calf-length red skirt, carrying a bucket and fishing rod. She joined us watching the ocean. She passed out beers, Baltimore favorite Natty Boh, and after several quiet minutes, she began speaking very

casually about fishing. Her experience fishing as a little girl, first she felt sorry for the worms and then for the fish, so she stopped. Until recently, one January day, she began fishing again, for one year and 24 days. Everywhere she went she brought the fishing pole with her. She told us about the difficulty, at times, of ordinary interaction, at times she felt more vulnerable walking around in the city carrying a fishing pole. And she spoke about the joy that it brought her, the interactions that it prompted that would have never occurred. She spoke about the project as a piece separate from the evening's performance.

As we watched the ocean and drank our familiar cheap beers, she vividly and reflectively described the past performance like we were friends or family.

From the bucket she produced objects and passed them out in different directions to the audience. Each object was something she had caught while fishing in Baltimore. First was an arrowhead. Growing up in Canada, her father collected arrowheads and she was so fascinated by them, enamored of them, and because she was fishing she found, to her disbelief, this arrowhead right in the city. She goes on to describe a precious earth crystal she found before the arrowhead made its way to me. The room is totally dark besides the projection, which now is a video of just a hand from the wrist up, which seems to create tinkling bell noises as it moves. The arrowhead is passed to me, it seems large, I bring it closer to my face to look at it, and it is a roughly arrow-shaped chunk of concrete.

She passed on more objects, and a fortune cookie paper which reads "If a turtle doesn't have a shell, is it naked or homeless?" She described each object with utter wonder and gratitude that it was her fishing that helped discover them.

Even as she gave us a black piece of asphalt and told us that it must be an asteroid that she found, can you believe it, on the streets of Baltimore, there was an undeniable sense of her complete honesty. Not lying or acting, but an act of fantasy. Setting for herself this incredible task of always carrying with her this fishing pole was like a down-home version of the mythical durational practices of artists like Linda Montano and Marina Abramovic. Kehoe used the fishing pole as a frame through which to live her life. The fantastic image she created for us of this figure walking around fishing in the city is balanced completely by the reality of the nearly 13-month project. While *Cleaning the Catch* was a piece reflecting entirely on the former project, Kehoe talked about the work anecdotally, and not necessarily as an artist would speak of an art piece. Because performance is found at the far border of acting, it offers the opportunity for reality that theater loses in spectacle. In sharing these personal stories Kehoe combines art and everyday life by keeping completely rooted in the genuine.

At one point in her talk Kehoe summed up the whole piece in a phrase, "embracing the absurd to engage in the everyday."