

Jill Krutick was interviewed by Peter Hopkins, Co-founder SHIM Art Network / Curator / Artist, about her *Coral Beliefs* exhibition at the Pyramid Hill Sculpture Garden & Museum

Peter: Tell me about the big painting that will be shown in the main gallery of the museum ...

Jill: This is the largest artwork I've created. The mixed media piece is called "Coral Beliefs." The work is almost 85-feet in length, and is made up of 25 panels, each 30 inches high and 40 inches wide.<sup>1</sup> This work expresses what coral reefs mean to me. Each panel represents a different "belief" about coral reefs -- *FURY*, *ELATION*, and *CONNECTIVITY* – for example. The artwork is not just an eco-statement about the urgent need to preserve the fragile coral, but also a philosophical expression about how coral reefs thrive and how that influences everything I do and believe. Corals are interdependent living creatures, gaining strength from one another. Individually they perish, but together they radiate. As an artist, I believe that artists don't thrive in isolation but bloom with collaboration, networking, and mentoring.

Peter: How does the engagement with the physical object relate to the concept of coral reef?

Jill: Designed especially for the museum gallery's dimensions, this work was made in "around" -- where the first piece connects with the last piece. The work is intended to simulate the experience of scuba diving and being surrounded by a coral reef. Made as a collage painting of all sorts of materials, it is meant to be a realistic view of what you might potentially find in the ocean. From plastics to paper to string to everything in between – it is intended to capture the physicality of what a coral reef might have – for better or for worse.

Peter: As you move around the room you're seeing a shift in the color palette.

Jill: Yes. The observable color palette captures the spectrum of light. Healthy coral reefs are colorful and often reflect all the colors in the rainbow. In contrast, sick or dead coral is colorless and looks like bones under the water – very depressing. It is particularly distressing to revisit favorite coral locations to find them devoid of life.

In this piece, the colors shift relative to where you are in front of the painting, suggesting that the movement of the viewer is part of the work. The point is to engage perspective both close to and far away from the piece in hopes that viewers have different viewing experiences from varying vantage points.

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<sup>1</sup> Except for the middle panel, which is 45 inches wide (custom sized to fit the long wall at the museum).

During the multi-month painting process, a 3D working model together with a regimen of daily photographs and computer layouts helped inform the development of this work. Every night I would study the photos and montages both near and far to see what next steps were necessary.

Peter: Right, so if you see it from a distance it is one object and close up you see details that are completely different.

Jill: Precisely. Viewers just entering the room will see a continuous large-scale work featuring shapes and movement. Closeup viewing will reveal the varied textures and nuances that jump or saunter from panel to panel. Though the work is made up of 25 independent pieces, they are woven together to tell a fluid story about the underwater world.

Peter: Interesting. As the show expands around the museum, we see watercolor on paper, unframed, which also suggest that the painting practice has different ways to engage with the concept of water. And in that case the literal medium is watercolor. Tell me a little bit about those.

Jill: Watercolor is a medium that I started exploring over the past couple of years and it really opened me up as an artist. It allowed me to better align the spirit of what I try to accomplish as an artist -- through my materials. Not only am I better able to capture the aqueous effects of water, but also it helps me add more perspective, depth and simplicity to my work. Watercolors force me to step away from the creative process and let the water, air and drying time dictate the end result. Letting go and giving up control of the work yields the most success. Being spontaneous is necessary, which at times is challenging, but also liberating. Over time, I started incorporating the principles of watercolor into my acrylic and other painting projects. Essentially, watercolors became a foundation for my larger pieces, which eventually grew into collage-based mediums and the backbone of my coral reef series. It is these combinations of techniques incorporated into *Coral Beliefs*.

Peter: Tell me about the idea of allowing the paintings to paint themselves with the watercolor. Was that a challenge?

Jill: Initially it was very challenging. But it became very clear early on that the more that you tried to affect different changes the end result became worse and worse. I quickly learned if you did your magic and stepped away that you would get a better end result and could appreciate all the attributes that watercolor really offer.

I like to use each medium to build upon itself and incorporate the best of each. The coral reef collage paintings feel like a really rich area to develop. Recently, I have been exploring how close-up images of a larger piece can be special in their own right. With this idea in mind, I have begun exploring making larger gestures

on canvases. I think there will be a lot of experimentation around this area. Having now found collage as a freeing medium and a way to express my work, I think that's going to be a central part of what I explore going forward.

Peter: Yes, the physical manifestation of the objects on the painting almost makes them sculptural.

Jill: Yes, exactly. Texture has been an area I have explored from the very beginning as an artist. My love for texture has only grown over the years and now I enjoy viewing the canvas as a palette to build sculptures. Even *Coral Beliefs* has some very sculptural elements. Using various acrylic mediums, found objects and plastic, I can build shapes and concepts.

Peter: Do you ever think of the idea of the coral reef as a model for the narrative structure that stitches all your work together? The idea of the water, the blue – green colors, the floating flotsam and jetsam. It seems to me that there is one overriding theme to your water-based work.

Jill: Yes, there is one cohesive theme to my work. Furthermore, not only do I hope to continue to develop this theme, but also it expresses my philosophical spirit as an artist and about my art practice. The interdependence of coral reefs to thrive mirrors my philosophy as an entrepreneur in the world of art. It is about being open. I have begun making my studio/gallery space available to showcase other artists, and I enjoy working on collaborative artist projects, organizing exhibition groups, and shepherding artwork around the world. This philosophy, which has really blossomed over the past couple of years, has made me feel much more fulfilled as an artist.

Peter: Everything is connected to everything else and when it is successful it looks effortless.

Jill: It requires a lot of hard work, but it is satisfying. Even when I was in the world of finance I enjoyed mentoring and had an entrepreneurial spirit. This approach has a direct connection to the world of art. Every artist is effectively a small business owner and the most effective artists balance aesthetics with practical business sense. The ability to bring that belief system to the world of art has made my time as an artist that much more exciting and makes me really passionate about it.

Peter: It is good thing to see a person who was successful in one field of endeavor seeing success in another. It's not common. But people who tend to understand how to do a thing well are able to adapt those things to other fields of inquiry. As an artist the idea of sharing, networking, marketing, and creating connections with other people is – like in business – a way to both succeed and to do well.

Congratulations on the work. It's ambitious and beautiful at the same time. I'm eager to see the reception and see what comes next.

Jill: Thank you! I appreciate all your input and guidance through the process. When you suggested doing an 85-foot piece, I scratched my head a bit, but I was willing to jump in with two feet.

Peter: Well, that's the difference between you and most people. Some people take a chance to expand their views and other people see them as threats. The best artists adapt, take on challenges, and learn from them. It looks like at the moment you did everything you had hoped to set out to do. As you are willing to take chances more opportunities come to you.

Jill: Thank you so much!

Peter: You're welcome.

*Peter Hopkins* is an American artist, gallerist, curator and entrepreneur. After a storied 40-year career as a globally-recognized artist and gallery-owner, in 2015 Hopkins co-founded the SHIM Art Network, the world first integrated artist network. The goal of SHIM Art Network is to connect all artists globally into one streamlined site that can service every art need -- from shared art fair opportunities to universal digital art e-commerce. SHIM currently hosts over 4,000 artists worldwide.