

Towards

Ted Gahl and Betty Kingseed

September 8 – October 13 2022

Opening: Thursday, September 8, 6–9pm

Towards is pleased to present *Ted Gahl & Betty Kingseed*, a two person exhibition which pairs recent works by Ted Gahl alongside works created in the 1970's and 80's by Betty Kingseed, a talented painter and family friend whom little is known about today.

A text by Ted Gahl appears below.

"I've been looking at Betty Kingseed's work for pretty much as long as I can remember. A specific 20 x 16 inch painting with an ornate frame has hung in both houses I grew up in. It is a very loose depiction of two figures, most likely a mother and a child, after they have gathered fruits and vegetables. The palm tree forms they stand alongside are the only other two recognizable objects, as the foreground and background become a blended, abstracted field of interlocking color and shape. This painting, made by a self-taught woman in 1970, in relative seclusion in Southern Connecticut, strikes me.

Her small landscape painting, made the year of her death, sits by a window in the room I grew up in, and also pulls heavily from abstraction. A cloud-filled sky reminiscent of Marsden Hartley sits atop a foliage-filled scene below. Large blocks of color depicting masses of land and mountains butt up against trees that become vaguer, eventually turning into peach colored bushes rooted in a yellow ground. The painting shows the fun of making an abstraction work as a landscape, and vice versa.

Her two flower paintings are very sparse. One is horizontal, one is vertical. I love the dark black brush strokes depicting a table and vase in the yellow horizontal work. Halfway around the vase, the dark fades to green. Possibly a conscious choice, or also possible the black just ran out. The vase is filled with a range of flowers in different colors. Two strips of blue lay across the table, maybe representing dead clippings, or maybe just an attempt at painterly flair.

The other flower work is vertical, depicting delphiniums in a centered vase. Green dominates this painting like yellow dominates the other. Strange compositional things happen on each side of the vase, as a bow-like form emerges, a compilation of branches, flowers, and darker lines. Her signature, a casual "EK", adorns the right corner of every work, with one noting the date being 1970.

I've decided to contribute a range of works to show alongside Betty's work. I think the work that is in the closest dialogue is *Tulk's Denton Drifter (2)*, an abstraction that borders on figurative, loosely based on the cowboys depicted in Alfred Tulk's paintings, a Connecticut artist who was another family friend. I think the palette, although a bit less saturated, is also representing nature through color.

The Shaker Stove paintings came out of seeing concurrent exhibitions pairing Shaker furniture and objects alongside Ellsworth Kelly prints. The two shows were warm and earnest, yet elegant, and the stove's silhouettes became burned into my memory. They also reminded me of my post-industrial surroundings, especially where my studio is located.

Gallery Hours
Thurs–Sat, 12–6pm
or by appointment

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Beyond the aesthetic appeal, I like that they represent heat and pressure, and to some extent, danger. Their strange shape almost comes off as noble. A docile brontosaurus or Loch-Ness monster comes to mind. These exaggerated stoves are objects that have an aura to me.

Kingseed's work can of course subjectively be viewed as above par hobby art. But the other part of this work that fascinates me, is the fact that I can't find anything about Betty's life. All I know, is that she was a friend of my grandmother's. She was described as a family friend on the periphery, a woman who lived alone, and who talked with a lisp. The only trace of her actually existing is online, via a record of her serving as the head of the North Haven, Connecticut library from 1974-1978. I spoke with the North Haven Library, and all they could provide was that she was born in Ohio in 1918, never married, and died in Connecticut in 1985 at the age of 67. Other than that, the only two people who knew her, my grandmother Lucile and my Aunt Barbara, have both passed away in the last 6 years. It's like a permanently closed door.

The fact that her art-making went mostly unappreciated is evident in the fact that we have five, and nobody in my family seems to know anything about her, other than her name and one apartment address. She wanted her paintings to be out in the world, and kept by people, and appreciated. Which, they have been.

I picture her making paintings in this social media timeframe, where everyone can now immediately publish their own work. Maybe they would have been well received, turning her hobby into a small industry, with fans sending her direct messages.

The fact that I can't find further information on her, puzzles me. It shows me how out of touch I am in regards to an older generation. While your own family history seems rich, with countless photos and home movies, its like the other people in the photos never existed. With the only two people that could have helped me with this gone, all I have are the paintings to continue to represent her, as a stand in for a life."

- Ted Gahl.
August 23, 2022

About the Artists

Ted Gahl
b. 1983
Lives and works in Northwest, Connecticut and Brooklyn, New York

Elizabeth "Betty" Kingseed
b.1918
d.1985
Head of the North Haven, Connecticut library 1974-1978

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